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Title:
An Examination and Application of Rule Theory for Addressing the Theological Question Regarding the Fate of the Unevangelized: A Reformation Proposal

An Examination and Application of Rule Theory for Addressing the Theological Question Regarding the Fate of the Unevangelized: A Reformation Proposal

Kyle Faircloth

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Religion and Theology, School of Humanities, July 2018.

Abstract

This thesis seeks to formulate a Reformation solution to the disputed question in theology concerning the fate of the unevangelized by applying George Lindbeck's rule theory approach through the doctrinal principles of *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* (salvation through Christ alone by faith alone and faith from hearing).

The proposal develops through three stages of argumentation: 1) the mitigation of unresolved concerns in the literature regarding Lindbeck's view of truth; 2) the critical evaluation of contemporary theories on the fate of the unevangelized; 3) the construction of a prospective *fides ex auditu* solution using conceptual materials in early church and Reformation theology.

After the publication of *The Nature of Doctrine* there are a cluster of scholars who take issue with Lindbeck's epistemology as he seems to disregard the 'usual' ways of speaking about truth. Thus, the first section offers an interpretation of Lindbeck that relocates his view in the history of ideas and demonstrates the conventional nature of his epistemic approach.

Using rule theory, the second section analyzes three evangelical and two Roman Catholic proposals on the question of the unevangelized and reveals ways in which each fall short of the noted doctrinal principles. Yet it also asserts that Gavin D'Costa's use of the *preparatio evangelica* tradition and his incorporation of the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell brings rich theological resources to the discussion.

Taking D'Costa's cue, the final part seeks to explain the preparation of an unevangelized person for the gospel and their possible future salvation in a way that makes the prospective *fides ex auditu* approach an intelligible option in Reformation theology. The section employs a systematic evaluation and creative extrapolation of relevant themes and concepts from early church writings and the works of Magisterial Reformers Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and Martin Luther.

Dedication

It is with profound gratitude that I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my wife and children. The completion of this work is a testament to their unfailing love, encouragement, and support; of which I am undeserving and by which I am continually humbled.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go first to God, whose grace through Christ is always sufficient to the need and whose discipline through the Holy Spirit is always effective to its purpose. Over the course of this study the Lord often inspired, directed, and corrected me through the ministrations of others, and to these dear family members, friends, and teachers I am truly grateful.

I wish to thank my parents, Dale and Alinda, whose confidence in me is beyond understanding and who always seem to know when I most need a word of encouragement. They never hesitated to read and praise each chapter, no matter how lengthy, tedious, or obtuse its contents. Moreover, their faithful service in the pastoral ministry for more than thirty years demonstrates that long-suffering in the work of Christ produces endurance, character, and hope in God's love (Rom 5:3-5). I also want to thank my father-in-law, Charles, whose constant and generous support has made this doctoral experience possible. There is little doubt that his involvement was instrumental to the production of this thesis. The personal and genuine involvement of my extended family throughout this process has been invaluable.

I would like to thank several friends who have walked along side me at various times during this journey. Dr Tan Sooi Ling, Dr Michael Crane, Dr Will Brooks, Dr Vincent Ooi, Dr Brad Roderick, Dr Tom Bohnert, and Dr John Latham were gracious and patient conversation partners when my mind became too muddled to continue. Their careful, thoughtful insights helped me push through some difficult impasses along the way. I am grateful to Brad, Tom, and John for going the extra mile by reading, without compulsion, certain sections of this thesis. Their feedback on early drafts has made this work a much better piece of scholarship than it otherwise would have been. I am also grateful to Dr Daniel Strange for his willingness to correspond with me in the midst of his busy schedule, and to write a helpful and informative response to my review of his work.

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Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to my wife, Christine, and our two children, Micah and Kyla Ann. Our children are fifteen and twelve years old, and until now they have never known a day in their lives when their father was not a graduate student. This burden was no less theirs to bear, and yet my wife's faith in me never wavered and my children never begrudged my oft divided mind and time. I look forward with joy to the next chapter of our lives together as a family.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: .... DATE:..........................

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Context

In the early days of the church the chief concern regarding the question of the unevangelized was about the salvation of Old Testament saints who had died before the coming of Christ. There was no doubt that the atonement extended to these individuals, but outside explicit knowledge of the person of Jesus how would they be saved? To answer this question, many of the early church fathers taught that the good news of Christ was also made known to those in hades (the place of the dead), whereby the righteous received the proclamation of the gospel with faith.[1] And many of the fathers understood 'the righteous' to be those who had lived in accordance with the law of Moses, or with that which is naturally good and true in the world.

> For instance, Justin Martyr (100-165) states in his *Dialogue with Trypho*:
>
> [Those Jews] who regulated their lives by the law of Moses would in like manner be saved. For what in the law of Moses is naturally good, and pious, and righteous, and has been prescribed to be done by those who obey it. . . . Since those who did that which is universally, naturally, and eternally good are pleasing to God, they shall be saved through this Christ in the resurrection equally with those righteous men who were before them, namely Noah, and Enoch, and Jacob, and whoever else there be, along with those who have known this Christ.[2]

From this perspective, Justin teaches that all those who lived in accordance with reason (*logos*) did, to a certain degree, partake of the *Logos*, the pre-incarnate Christ.

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[1] For examples, see, Wouter Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus, Sed Extra Mundum Nulla Damnatio*: Reappropriating Christ's Descent into Hell for Theology of Religions," *Louvain Studies* 37 (2013): 107–132; Jared Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead: Early Witnesses from Ignatius of Antioch to Origen," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 3 (2008): 281–309; Hilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009) 43-82.

[2] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," 45, trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, *New Advent*, accessed December 6, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01283.htm.

Full participation obtained only within the progressive special revelation given through the Jews and manifested in the incarnate Christ, but Justin also teaches that the *Logos* spread 'seeds of the truth' (*semina veritatis*) or 'seeds of *logos*' (*logos spermatikos*) among all the nations. For example, speaking of Plato, Stoics, "and the poets, and historians," Justin says, "Each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word, seeing what was related to it."[3] Yet Gerald McDermott notes that Justin did not see these elements of truth as being sufficient in themselves for salvation: "There were righteous pagans who, though uncircumcised and failing to keep the sabbath, were yet 'pleasing to God.' But they did not possess Christian *grace*, which is the presence of the person of the Logos."[4] Hence, 'righteous pagans' still needed to encounter the reality of Christ to obtain salvation.

Another example from the early church is Clement of Alexandria (150-215), who claims that philosophy itself was a covenant given by God to the Greeks:

> We shall not err in alleging that all things necessary and profitable for life came to us from God, and that philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them—being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ.[5]

Similar to Justin's use of the 'seeds of truth,' Clement views this covenant as a temporary act of divine preparation for the coming of Christ: "Before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. . . . Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ."[6] Jacques Dupuis explains:

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[3] For example, see, Justin Martyr, "The Second Apology," 13, trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, *New Advent*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0127.htm.

[4] Gerald R. McDermott, *God's Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions?: Insights from the Bible and the Early Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 95; emphasis original. Citing, Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 13; *Dialogue with Trypho* 34, 19, 92, 46.

[5] Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, 6.8, trans. William Wilson, *New Advent*, accessed October 6, 2015, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02106.htm.

[6] Ibid., 1.1.

> As is the case for the Jewish Law itself, the function of philosophy is a transitional one. Having prepared people for Christ's coming, it must finally make room for him. . . . Philosophy is a partial knowledge; Christ alone is the whole truth.[7]

In this way, Justin and Clement form part of a long tradition that views the universal moral law as the medium by which all people have at least some access to God. That is, through elements of the good, holy, and true that are more or less present in all major religions and philosophies.[8] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen explains:

> According to Justin and other Apologists, access to salvation, at least in some form—perhaps a not-yet-perfect form—was available through the Logos that was "sown" in all human cultures and religions. They entertained the idea that the seminal word or reason in which all humankind partakes gives access to God even for those who have never heard of Christ. But of course, the purpose of Christian mission is to make explicit what was implicit. So Christ represents the fullness and perfection of "seeds of logos."[9]

More recently, the Roman Catholic Church has carried this tradition forward by applying it to the situation of the unevangelized who have died since the coming of Christ. For instance, the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* summarizes the Catholic position, stating:

> Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. . . . Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel.[10]

Prior to Vatican II the notion of 'preparation for the gospel' (*preparatio evangelica*) was applied only to the Old Testament Scriptures, the supernatural revelation given to

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[7] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 67-68.

[8] For a comprehensive treatment of the natural law tradition, see, Norman Doe, ed., *Christianity and Natural Law: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[9] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 57.

[10] DCC (1964), *Lumen Gentium*, 16, accessed August 6, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

and through Israel preparing the way for the coming of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant.[11] Yet the application of *preparatio* in *Lumen Gentium* seems to indicate that what was once viewed as being part of natural revelation – i.e., elements of the good and true; 'seeds of the Word' – are now being given a more elevated function, perhaps even a supernatural one.[12]

Having said this, it is important to recognize that just as with the early church fathers, these elements serve only as a preparation for the gospel and are not themselves the gospel nor do they constitute alternative ways of salvation. Thus the Catholic Church is careful not to give a definitive statement on how salvation is granted to those after Christ:

> With respect to the way in which the salvific grace of God — which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church — comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it "in ways known to himself."[13]

Nevertheless, after Vatican II the church encouraged theologians to continue discussing the issue,[14] and one of the first to take up this task was Karl Rahner.

In brief, Rahner's theory uses the notions of 'implicit faith' and 'anonymous Christian' to propose that because all grace is God's grace and all salvation comes from Christ then, in the case of the unevangelized, faith is implicit and grace leads a person's "consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively."[15] What his answer misses, however, is the Council's affirmation that saving grace

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[11] For instance, see, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 428 (1964, 122).

[12] Gavin D'Costa provides a helpful examination of this issue in, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 99-107.

[13] CDF (2000), "*Dominus Iesus*," 21, accessed July 30, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_do c_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html. This excerpt is commenting on and quoting "*Ad Gentes*," 7.

[14] CDF, "*Dominus Iesus*", 21.

[15] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, trans. Karl Kruger, vol. V (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1966), 131.

comes only through Christ by the Spirit in relation to the church's proclamation of the gospel.[16] An observation also made by Protestant theologian George Lindbeck, who served as an official Lutheran observer during Vatican II. Concerning Rahner's position, he states:

> If this [salvation], we may ask, abundantly occurs quite apart from explicit awareness of God, much less of Jesus, what happens to the cruciality of the gospel, of the *fides ex auditu* [faith by hearing, Rom 10:17], of decisions for or against Christ?[17]

In response, Lindbeck calls for a "Reformation approach which holds that salvation is by explicit faith in Christ alone, *sola fide ex auditu*," and he argues that the only conceivable way an unevangelized person can obtain this faith is during the time of death, "the point at which every human being is ultimately and expressly confronted by the gospel, i.e., by the crucified and risen Lord."[18] With Lindbeck's proposal in mind, this thesis will evaluate the feasibility of offering a prospective *fides ex auditu* option from an evangelical perspective within a Reformation theological framework.

The Problem

The theological question regarding the fate of the unevangelized is a particular discussion in the field of theology of religions. Dupuis defines theology of religions as the study of "the various traditions in the context of the history of salvation and in their relationship to the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church."[19] The

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[16] For examinations of this aspect of Rahner's theory by Catholic theologians, see, J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 76-80, 91; Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 21-23.

[17] George Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians," in *The Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 104.

[18] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu*," 109, 115. Also see, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary Edition. (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009), 45-49.

[19] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 8.

question of the unevangelized then extends this study beyond the general

consideration of religious structures to a specific concern for religious persons. That is

to say, from a soteriological perspective, one seeks to understand the relationship of

non-Christians to Christ and his church.

To evaluate the various positions, scholars typically use the categories of

exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Regarding this standard typology,

Kärkkäinen writes:

> *Exclusivists* hold that salvation is available only in Jesus Christ to the extent
> that those who have never heard the gospel are eternally lost. Exclusivists
> claim that salvation can be found only in the Christian church. In this scheme,
> non-Christian religions play no role in the history of salvation. For *pluralists*,
> other religions are legitimate means of salvation. Pluralism involves both a
> positive and negative element: Negatively, pluralism categorically rejects
> exclusivism (and often also inclusivism); positively, it affirms that people can
> find salvation in various religions and in many ways. . . . The mediating group,
> *inclusivists*, hold that while salvation is ontologically founded on the person of
> Christ, its benefits have been made universally available by the revelation of
> God.[20]

We must note, however, that these descriptions provide only a broad sketch of the

responses as a means for simplifying the overall discussion as not all theories fit

neatly into just one category.[21] This is also why Daniel Strange suggests:

> Rather than seeing these three positions as being tightly defined, it is perhaps
> more helpful to see them as three points of reference on a wide spectrum. Such
> an approach takes into account many positions that appear to fall in between
> the three defined points.[22]

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[20] Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 24-25; emphasis original.

[21] It is for this reason that many are dissatisfied with the standard typology and have attempted to provide new categories. For a comprehensive treatment of these efforts, see, Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; 2008), 18-25. Also, Gavin D'Costa gives a compelling argument that inclusivism and pluralism are actually different versions of exclusivism. See, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, *Faith Meets Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 22-23.

[22] Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 15.

To this extent, although exclusivism represents the traditional point of reference (also called restrictivism,[23] particularism,[24] and ecclesiocentrism[25]), Kärkkäinen says that inclusivism "currently has the largest group of followers and it cuts across confessional and denominational boundaries; many theologians—from Eastern Orthodoxy to Roman Catholic to mainline Protestantism to evangelicalism—see it as the most viable option."[26] Nevertheless, while Kärkkäinen's observation may characterize the ecumenical context, the evangelical situation presents a rather different picture as many theologians strongly contest the inclusivist position.

Dennis Okholm and Timothy Phillips claim that because of inclusivism's challenge to traditional assumptions about other religions, "the debate within the evangelical academy regarding salvation and the unevangelized is intense and fierce, dominating all other discussions."[27] Or as Robert Peterson states in more measured terms, "It is becoming increasingly evident that one issue upon which there is considerable disagreement among evangelicals is the question of the fate of those who have never been exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ."[28] And the apparent source of this polemic is connected to the 'wider hope' views espoused by evangelical theologians Clark Pinnock and John Sanders.[29]

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[23] See, Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 14-15; John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation Into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 37.

[24] See, Harold A. Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 48-51; Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 16-17.

[25] See, Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 185-186; Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 32-33, 36-38.

[26] Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 25.

[27] Okholm and Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 12.

[28] Morgan and Peterson, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 11.

[29] See, Clark Pinnock, "The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions," in *Christian Faith & Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View*, ed. Mark A. Noll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988),

Using a notion that Pinnock calls 'the faith principle,' he and Sanders argue that salvation in Christ is universally accessibly when 'faith' is understood as a person's response to the revelation available to them, even if this knowledge does not include the gospel.[30] For example, Pinnock states, "In my judgement, the faith principle is the basis of universal accessibility. According to the Bible, people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology."[31] Sanders explains:

> Briefly, inclusivists affirm the particularity and finality of salvation only in Christ but deny that knowledge of his work is necessary for salvation. That is to say, they hold that the work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation . . . but not epistemologically necessary.[32]

As regards scriptural support, one important verse for their view is Hebrews 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Pinnock argues:

> Referring as the author does to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, Hebrews indicates that people are saved by faith, not primarily by knowledge. The Jews of Jesus' day knew more conceptually about God than their forefather Abraham, who knew relatively little. . . . What God was looking for in Abram was faith, not a certain quotient of knowledge. . . . The fact that the information possessed by the unevangelized is slight does not disqualify them from entering into a right relationship with God through faith.[33]

152-168; Clark Pinnock, "Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, no. 33 (1990): 359-368; Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*; Clark Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 95-123; John Sanders, *No Other Name*; John Sanders, "Inclusivism," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 21-55. Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland note that while Pinnock and Sanders provoked much debate, they were not the first to introduce the 'wider hope' view to evangelicalism. See, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Kindle location 701-704, n.108.

[30] See, Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 17-47, 157-168; Sanders, *No Other Name*, 131-149, 215-267.

[31] Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 158.

[32] Sanders, *No Other Name*, 215.

[33] Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 159-160.

He also asserts that "the holy pagans of the biblical story" give evidence to the faith principle:

> Like Job and Abimelech, there are those who, due to an inner voice, come to a fork in the road and turn to God in faith. . . . No one can deny the fact that the Bible presents these holy pagans as saved by faith, even though they knew neither Israelite nor Christian revelation.[34]

From this perspective, although Pinnock and Sanders deny the possibility of universal salvation and stop short of claiming that other religions function as alternative salvific structures, their delineation of faith leads them to argue that Scripture supports the possibility of salvation through general revelation.[35] For instance, Sanders says that while some theologians claim that Paul's reference to general revelation in Romans 1-3 means that "all deserve eternal condemnation," he thinks Paul has a very different purpose in mind:

> It seems to me that it would be preferable to view Paul as addressing groups of people, both Jews and Gentiles, in the first three chapters of Romans, and as arguing that all have rejected God but that God continues in his love toward all peoples by sending his Son to make atonement for them. By this reading, the type of revelation each group has received is irrelevant to Paul's message of grace.[36]

In short, faith is the means of salvation and Christ is the sole cause, but Christ is not the sole object of faith.[37]

The critical responses by evangelical scholars tend to revolve around one major issue – the biblical hermeneutics for working out the faith principle. For instance, concerning the use of Old Testament figures to support the faith principle, D. A. Carson states:

> Inclusivists who draw a parallel between modern non-Christians who have never heard of Christ and such Old Testament believers overlook the fact that these believers on the Old Testament side were responding in faith to special

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[34] Ibid. Pinnock develops his scriptural support for the faith principle in six ways; see, 159-168.

[35] See, Ibid., 115-147, 155-156; Sanders, *No Other Name*, 81-128, 233-236, 241-249.

[36] Sanders, *No Other Name*, 69.

[37] See, Ibid., 265.

revelation, and were not simply exercising some sort of general "faith" in an undefined "God."[38]

Similarly, in regard to Pinnock's use of Hebrews 11:6, Ronald Nash states:

> I do not think that this is all there is to saving faith. Surely this faith in the existence of God must be directed to the true God, not some idol or pagan substitute. The New Testament clearly states that humans who would seek God must approach him through the one and only mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:15).[39]

Another example comes from Sanders' chapter on inclusivism in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?*, where he refers to God's interaction with Pharaoh through Aaron and Moses, and argues:

> The God of Israel sought, through the plagues, to get Pharaoh to "know" him (Ex 7:5, 17; 8:10). The Hebrew word for "know" here carries with it the idea of relational and redemptive knowledge. Yahweh, the God of Israel, wanted Pharaoh and the Egyptian people to experience his truth and life-giving grace.[40]

In response, Nash decries "Sanders's badly flawed handling of the Exodus material," and writes:

> Sanders's procedure in all this is an example of a word-study fallacy known as "word-loading." This occurs when someone takes a meaning a word has in one context and seeks to import that same meaning into a quite different setting. . . . In our passages in Exodus, the Hebrew word *kî* (that) follows the verb "to know" in the three instances Sanders cites (Ex 7:5, 17; 8:10). This construction indicates not a personal knowledge but an objective knowledge of fact. The verses in question do not mean that God was seeking to bring Pharaoh into a personal relationship with him, but that after God's displays of power, Pharaoh will finally know that Yahweh is the true Sovereign and Lord.[41]

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[38] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 298.

[39] Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 124.

[40] Sanders, "Inclusivism," Kindle location 230-233.

[41] Ronald H. Nash, "Response to Sanders," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), Kindle location 651, 656-659. For examples of others who take issue with Pinnock's and Sander's use of Scripture, see; Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelised*, 108-117; Okholm and Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, 133-140; Stephen J. Wellum, "Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit?," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove: Apollos, 2008), 161-183; Robert A. Peterson, "Inclusivism and Exclusivism on Key Biblical Texts," in Ibid., 184-200.

To this extent, Millard Erickson seems to sum up the general evangelical reaction to inclusivism when he states, "Theologies of 'wider hope,' 'universal accessible salvation,' and 'salvation through general revelation,' while engaging, are not biblically acceptable."[42] Hence, while it may be true that inclusivist positions hold sway in the ecumenical context, this is not the case in the evangelical setting.

Having said this, even though the common response has been to try and discredit the scriptural defense of inclusivism and to reassert the principle of explicit faith, it is perhaps interesting that these responses do not also include attempts to give a biblical defense for the impossibility of salvation for the unevangelized. That is to say, evangelical theologians seem to realize that one can no more prove from Scripture that none of the unevangelized will be saved any more than one can prove that some will be saved. To try and do so would only result in the same kind of 'flawed handling' of Scripture for which they charge Pinnock and Sanders. So even if many evangelicals do not fully follow inclusivist positions, they have nonetheless moved closer to this point on the spectrum. As McDermott and Harold Netland state:

> Many evangelicals . . . find themselves somewhere between restrictivism and inclusivism, convinced that each goes beyond what the biblical data affirm. Those in this group admit that in principle God might save some who have never explicitly heard the gospel, but they add that we simply do not know whether this occurs or, if so, how many might be saved in this manner.[43]

It appears, then, that in regard to the question of the unevangelized many evangelicals choose to remain agnostic on the issue.[44] "When asked if there will be people in heaven who never had a chance to hear the gospel during their lifetime," says Nash,

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[42] Millard J. Erickson, "The State of the Unevangelized and Its Missionary Implications," in *Missiology: An Introduction*, ed. John Mark Terry, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), Kindle location 2965.

[43] McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, Kindle location 3305-3308.

[44] Pinnock calls this position "reverent agnosticism"; see, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 150. Strange delineates agnostic views further in, *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelised*, 305-331.

"the first thing a wise exclusivist will say is that he does not know."[45] Yet for others,

this response is not merely the 'first thing' one should say but rather the only thing

that one should say. For instance, Robert McQuilkin argues:

> We may not be able to prove from Scripture with absolute certainty that no
> soul since Pentecost has ever been saved by extraordinary means without the
> knowledge of Christ. But neither can we prove from Scripture that a single
> soul has been so saved. . . . It may or may not be morally right for me to think
> there may be another way and to hope there is some other escape. But for me
> to propose it to other believers, to discuss it as a possibility, is certainly
> dangerous, if not immoral.[46]

Nevertheless, immoral or not, there are some who are willing to express a measure of

hope and even venture a tentative explanation for how and why the salvation of an

unevangelized person might be possible. For example, in response to the question of

whether it might not be true that God has saved some individuals who did not know

Christ, J. I. Packer states:

> The answer surely is: yes, it might be true, as it seems to have been true for
> some non-Israelites in Old Testament times: think of Melchizedek, Job,
> Naaman, Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar, the sailors in Jonah's boat, and the
> Ninevites to whom he preached, for starters. In heaven, any such penitents will
> learn that they were saved by Christ's death and their hearts were renewed by
> the Holy Spirit, and they will worship God accordingly. Christians since the
> second century have voiced the hope that there are such people, and we may
> properly voice the same hope today. But — and this is the point to consider —
> we have no warrant from Scripture to expect that God will act thus in any
> single case where the Gospel is not yet known. To cherish this hope, therefore,
> is not to diminish in the slightest our urgent and never-ending missionary
> obligation.[47]

Yet whereas Packer establishes his tentative hope for the unevangelized on the

salvation of 'non-Israelites in Old Testament times,' McDermott and Netland base

their hopeful agnostic position on God's grace through general revelation:

> In our judgment, the wisest response to the issue is to acknowledge the
> possibility that some who never hear the gospel might nonetheless, through

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[45] Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, 164.

[46] J. Robertson McQuilkin, *The Great Omission: A Biblical Basis for World Evangelism* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Pub., 2002), 50-51.

[47] J. I. Packer, "Evangelicals and the Way of Salvation," in *Evangelical Affirmations* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 123.

God's grace, respond to what they know of God through general revelation and turn to him in faith for forgiveness.[48]

For the most part, few evangelicals dare to venture much beyond this kind of agnostic answer. However, outside the Western context we find that evangelicals from other parts of the world remain unsatisfied with the lack of a robust theology of the unevangelized.

In 1992, more than eighty evangelical theologians from twenty-eight countries (mostly non-Western) met in Manila, Philippines to address the subject of "the unique Christ" and other religions.[49] In regard to the question of the unevangelized, they report:

> Old Testament saints, who did not know the name Jesus, nevertheless found salvation. Is it possible that others also might find salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ although they do not consciously know the name of Jesus? We did not achieve a consensus on how to answer this question. *More study is needed*.[50]

The declaration that 'more study is needed' indicates a gap in evangelical theology. Indeed, there is a discrepancy in the attempts to criticize the inclusivist use of Old Testament figures and general revelation while using the same approach to support agnostic positions. Thus, this thesis seeks to contribute to the on-going development of an evangelical theology of the unevangelized.

The Methodology

Although the particular context of the problem is evangelical theology, my chief interlocutor (George Lindbeck) comes from outside this framework. The hope is that this approach will open up new avenues in the discussion so that the conversation can move beyond ambiguous references to Old Testament figures and natural

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[48] McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, Kindle location 3368.

[49] Bong Rin Ro, *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralistic World*, vol. 5 (Seoul: WEF Theological Commission, 1993).

[50] Ibid., 10; emphasis added.

revelation, or to vague notions of non-Christian faith and repentance. The evangelical

community need fresh doctrinal and theological expressions on the issue for

ministering faithfully in the contemporary environment. As Lindbeck asserts:

> Religious traditions are not transformed, abandoned, or replaced because of an upwelling of new or different ways of feeling about the self, world, or God, but because a religious interpretive scheme (embodied, as it always is, in religious practice and belief) develops anomalies in its application in new contexts.[51]

In this way, we might suggest that the interpretive scheme of the traditional

exclusivist way of understanding the relation of the church to non-Christians and

other religions is developing anomalies, and yet the evangelical community are

growing unsatisfied with the contemporary developments. We can say for sure that

the systematic introduction of the inclusivist category into the evangelical tradition

has opened up something of a theological and missiological breach that cannot be

mended through simple appeal to Scripture alone. How then are we to assess and

contribute to the formulation of new theological interpretations on the matter?

Lindbeck insists that this process should begin by viewing doctrines as rules

which guide discussion rather than as fixed propositional statements that remain

immune to changing contexts.[52] In other words, if doctrines are meant to regulate

theology then the question is not which theory is true (i.e., the one and only

objectively right answer), but which theory is best. And "which theory is

theologically best depends on how well it organizes the data of Scripture and tradition

with a view to their use in Christian worship and life."[53] Hence, the emphasis of this

approach is on the organization of the data as guided by the relevant doctrinal rules.

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[51] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 25.
[52] We will discuss this aspect of Lindbeck's theory in more detail in chapters 2-3.
[53] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 92.

To this purpose, Lindbeck provides a taxonomy of doctrines.[54] First, he distinguishes between "practical doctrines" and "doctrines that concern belief."[55] For example, the command to love God and neighbor regulates Christian action (practical) while the teaching on the Trinity regulates Christian belief. Second, he states that doctrines can be either 'conditionally essential' or 'unconditionally essential.' In this case, both the command to love God and others and the Trinitarian confession represent unconditionally essential rules, as there is no context in which these rules will not apply. An example of a conditionally essential rule, then, is "the prohibition against Christian participation in war."[56] For while this rule has been held by certain Christians in certain places at certain times, "under the circumstances prevailing during most of Christian history, pacifism has not generally been regarded as obligatory."[57] Lindbeck goes on to subdivide conditionally essential doctrines twice more – permanent or temporary, reversible and irreversible – but our application of his approach concerns the nature of unconditionally essential doctrines, which he says are always permanent and irreversible.[58] The reason this description is important for our purposes here is because within the systematic historical framework that evangelicals interpret the data of Scripture and tradition (i.e., Reformation theology), the *sola fide ex auditu* exists as an unconditionally essential doctrine.

This does not mean that nothing new can be said about non-Christians and other religions, or that all must agree on a single solution. Rather, it simply allows the rules instantiated by this doctrine – i.e.; *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* – to serve as communal guidelines for assessing and formulating theories. Or as Lindbeck states, this approach "provides a nonreductive framework for discussion

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[54] See, Ibid., 70-75.
[55] Ibid., 71.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.

among those who genuinely disagree."[59] Nevertheless, before I employ rule theory to the question of the unevangelized I must first seek to rehabilitate Lindbeck's approach from the lingering epistemic confusion left in the wake of his book *The Nature of Doctrine*. To this purpose, I survey a number of scholars who are concerned with Lindbeck's conception of truth and identify the common points of contention among his critics. This exercise focuses on salient reviews from scholars such as Alister McGrath, Geoffrey Wainwright, Stephen Williams, Paul DeHart, D. Z. Phillips, Chad Pecknold, and John Milbank. While observing the shared concerns about Lindbeck's view of truth, the survey also acts as a critique of these common objections in an attempt to mitigate the concerns.

Assuming then that I have succeeded in providing a satisfying answer to the epistemic issue, I then attempt to test Lindbeck's rule theory in two ways. First, I use it to evaluate three evangelical proposals representing the three general positions in evangelicalism (exclusivism, agnosticism, and inclusivism), along with two Roman Catholic proposals which seek to maintain the *sola fide ex auditu* principle. Other than Lindbeck, the primary interlocutors for this step are evangelical theologians Daniel Strange, Terrance Tiessen, and John Stott, along with Roman Catholic theologians Joseph DiNoia and Gavin D'Costa.

Regarding the exclusivist position, I chose Strange for two reasons; one academic and one personal.[60] The academic reason is simply that, as Christopher Morgan states, Strange's monograph, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the*

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[59] Ibid., 77.
[60] Other representatives of the exclusivist position are, Carl F. H. Henry, *Giving a Reason for Our Hope* (Boston: Wilde, 1949); *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 360-369; "Is It Fair?," in *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, ed. William Crockett and James Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 245-256; and R. C. Sproul, *Reason to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

Unevangelised, "is arguably the best work by an exclusivist."[61] Thus he is an

appropriate candidate for our evaluation of this position. The personal reason is that

his doctoral supervisor, Gavin D'Costa (under whose direction he produced his

remarkable work) is also my doctoral supervisor, which means that my assessment

represents something of a continuing conversation. Concerning the inclusivist

position I chose not to evaluate Pinnock and Sanders, as they root their inclusivist

views in an open theist view of divine knowledge.[62] As Pinnock explains, open theism

"adds one important feature to free will theism, namely, the inference that, if certain

aspects of the future are unsettled owing to human freedom, it will not be possible for

God (or anyone) to know the future definitely and exhaustively."[63] Stated bluntly, this

view of God does not represent an orthodox evangelical understanding of divine

foreknowledge; which is, according to the Evangelical Theological Society's response

to Pinnock and Sanders, that "the Bible clearly teaches that God has complete,

accurate, and infallible knowledge of all events past, present, and future, including all

future decisions and actions of free moral agents."[64] Therefore Tiessen provides a

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[61] Morgan and Peterson, *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 21. Other works by strange that I will reference are, "General Revelation: Sufficient or Insufficient?," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008); *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014).
[62] See, Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, Didsbury lectures 2000 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 101-125; Clark Pinnock, "Constrained by Love: Divine Self-Restraint According to Open Theism," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 149–160; and John Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 59-100; John Sanders, "An Introduction to Open Theism," *Reformed Review* 60, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 34-50.
[63] Pinnock, "Constrained by Love," 149.
[64] See, Jason A. Nicholls, "Openness and Inerrancy: Can They Be Compatible?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 4 (December 2002): 629-649; and Bruce Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open

more suitable contrast as he seeks to defend an inclusivist position from an understanding of divine foreknowledge that is rooted in the Calvinist tradition; a view he calls "soft determinism," whereby "God works in the minds and hearts of human beings in a way that ensures the outcome but that does not destroy the human act of volition."[65]

As for the agnostic position, I chose to evaluate John Stott because he is a well-known and highly respected figure within evangelicalism. Perhaps the same could be said for J. I. Packer, but Stott has more to say on the question of the unevangelized than does Packer and therefore provides more material with which to assess this position.[66] Finally, the reason I chose to evaluate Roman Catholic theologians DiNoia and D'Costa, is that they are the only scholars to date who offer a prospective *fides ex auditu* option that is also genealogically connected to Lindbeck in the history of ideas.

The last part of the thesis consists of the development of a Reformation prospective *fides ex auditu* option, and the primary sources for this effort are Magisterial Reformers Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin. To be sure, many more theologians could have informed this Reformation approach (including some of the radical reformers),[67] but the purpose here is not to provide a general representation of Reformation theology on the issue but rather to offer a proposal that is based on a close reading of these leading fathers of Reformation faith.[68]

Theism Evangelical?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002): 193-212.

[65] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 20.

[66] Another candidate is Christopher Wright, *The Uniqueness of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Monarch, 2001), 40-51.

[67] For a list of other influential Reformation figures, see, Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 18.

[68] Timothy George refers to Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin as "the leaders of the Protestant movement"; Ibid., 12.

Finally, I must note that for certain sections of this thesis I depend upon English translations of sources which were originally written in Chinese and in Latin. Although I do not read these languages, the English versions of these works are prolific and therefore provide adequate support for the particular arguments.

The Delineation of Key Terms

Many terms will acquire their specific meanings over the course of this research, but it will aid our discussion if I provide initial definitions for a few key terms.

Unevangelized – Strange delineates four possible groups of people to which this term might refer:

> 1. Those since the time of Christ, who have lived and died without receiving the gospel *ex auditu*. . . .
> 2. Those who lived prior to the coming of Christ and so before the formulation known as 'the gospel.' . . .
> 3. Those who are in hearing range of the gospel and are able to hear the gospel in the 'biological' sense of the word 'hearing' but are unable to understand the words that are being spoken. . . .
> 4. Those who have not been presented with a full and adequate presentation of the Gospel and have received only a perverted or incomplete gospel.[69]

For our purposes here, the focus is chiefly on categories 1 and 4, although at times it will expand to include category 2. Thus, 'unevangelized' in this thesis refers either to those who have never heard the gospel message during their lifetime, or who have only a partial or corrupted version of the gospel and no genuine opportunity to respond with faith before death.

Faith – In particular, this thesis is concerned with the notion of *saving faith*. Protestant scholastic theology holds that saving faith is contingent upon the special revelation of God through Christ and involves intellectual apprehension of the gospel

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[69] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation among the Unevangelised*, 33-34.

(knowledge and assent) and the movement of the will (trust). As Reformed theologian

Richard Muller explains, the "three components" of saving faith are:

> (1) *notitia*, knowledge, the actual content of the gospel and the promises of God; (2) *assensus*, assent, by which the intellect acknowledges the truth of *notitia*, apart from any personal trust or saving appropriation of that knowledge; (3) *fiducia*, trust, or *apprehensio fiducialis*, faithful apprehension, which appropriates savingly, by an act of the will, the true knowledge of the promises of God in Christ.[70]

To the extent that our goal is a 'Reformation' proposal, perhaps this definition would

suffice for a rule theory approach. But to the extent that we seek to develop this

proposal using Lindbeck's theoretical framework, we need to expand upon this

definition.

For Lindbeck, a genuine declaration of the Lordship of Christ obtains "only as

it is used in the activities of adoration, proclamation, obedience, promise-hearing, and

promise-keeping which shape individuals and communities into conformity to the

mind of Christ."[71] In other words, a willful act based on intellectual apprehension of

the gospel is only part of what constitutes a faith response. True faith also requires

one to acculturate the life of the church, to become familiar with and competent in the

Christian way of being in the world: "It is only by acquiring some familiarity with the

determinate settings in which religious utterances acquire propositional force that one

can grasp their meaning well enough genuinely to reject (or accept) them."[72] In

consequence, 'proclaiming the gospel' or 'hearing the gospel' involves the acquisition

of a Christian *habitus*, and therefore saving faith demands more than just the

transmission and willful acceptance of intellectual knowledge about Christ.

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[70] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 115-116.
[71] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 54. We will discuss this aspect of Lindbeck's approach in more detail in chapters 1 and 2.
[72] Ibid.

Evangelical – Whether used as a proper noun or adjective, singular or plural, the purpose of this term and its derivatives in the present work is to convey that which is of maximum importance within the tradition. For instance, Roger Olson explains, "*Evangelicalism* is simply synonymous with authentic Christianity as it is founded on and remains faithful to the 'evangel'—the good news of Jesus Christ."[73] Or as Michael Bird asserts, "The most central thing in evangelical theology is *the evangel*."[74] Thus the effort to uphold the *fides ex auditu* principle in the present work is not merely an academic exercise, but is a prayer-filled attempt to meet genuine missiological and pastoral concerns of evangelical faith. 'Faith' occurs only in the context of the explicit proclamation and hearing of the gospel of Christ.

The Summary of Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into three parts. Part 1 consists of chapters 2-3 and is an evaluation of Lindbeck's theory of doctrine and truth. To this purpose, Chapter 2 considers reviews from several scholars who are concerned with Lindbeck's conception of truth and identifies and critiques some of the common points of contention in the literature. This chapter will also seek to locate Lindbeck's epistemology in the history of ideas by comparing it with the views of Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. While appreciatively surveying the various ways Lindbeck coincides with these thinkers, I will argue that none of them can account fully for his configuration of truth and doctrine, thereby setting the stage for Chapter 3.

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[73] Roger E. Olson, *Pocket History of Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 8; emphasis original.

[74] Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), Kindle location 351. For other treatments of the meaning of 'evangelical,' see, John Stackhouse, ed., *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation of Theological Method* ([S.l.]: Regent College Pub.), 40-58; McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, Kindle location 100-780.

Having argued that major aspects of Western thought cannot fully account for Lindbeck's particular epistemology, Chapter 3 changes the focus of the investigation by considering the possibility that more subtle and pervasive influences on his thought come from East Asian philosophy. Noting that Lindbeck lived the first seventeen years of his life in East Asia, I seek to test the hypothesis through a comparison of his theory with elements of Confucianism and with Chinese philosophy in general. It is, then, with this alternative reading of Lindbeck in hand that I proceed to Part 2 of the thesis.

Part 2 (chapters 4-5) is the first step in the application of rule theory to the theological question regarding the fate of the unevangelized. Chapter 4 first establishes the regulative principles defined by the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*, and then utilizes this doctrinal rubric to critically evaluate the theories of evangelical theologians Daniel Strange (exclusivist), Terrance Tiessen (inclusivist), and John Stott (agnostic). The examination demonstrates that while all three affirm the necessary doctrinal rules of discussion, they each organize these principles differently. Moreover, each falls short in their attempt to uphold the *fides ex auditu*.

Chapter 5 considers Lindbeck's assertion that the only conceivable way to affirm the possibility of salvation for the unevangelized and maintain the *fides ex auditu* at the same time, is through a prospective approach. That is, by proposing that all will be confronted by the gospel in death. I once again employ the doctrinal rubric to assess the prospective theories of Lindbeck and of Roman Catholic theologians Joseph DiNoia and Gavin D'Costa. I note two gaps in Lindbeck's approach – the lack of explanation for how an unevangelized person is prepared in advance for an after-death-encounter with the gospel, and the lack of a conceptual theological space and time for explaining how an unevangelized person obtains saving faith in death. Then, drawing from DiNoia's and D'Costa's proposals, I suggest that these issues might be

overcome through a Reformation application of the *preparatio evangelica* tradition and the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell.

Chapters 6-7 make up the third and final part of the thesis and constitute the main contribution to the discussion. Chapter 6 first seeks to establish historical theological support for a 'Reformation' approach to the question of the unevangelized, and then provides a systematic argument for understanding 'preparation for the gospel' as a gracious action by the Holy Spirit through the natural law rather than as enduring things within conscience and culture. I develop this theory through a creative extrapolation of Martin Luther's understanding of the function and purpose of the law and its relation to saving grace.

Chapter 7 regards the need for a conceptual space and time in which an unevangelized person might come to faith after death, and with D'Costa I suggest that this need can be met in the *descensus* doctrine. Drawing from early church treatments of the descent and from the writings of Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin on the subject, I propose the possibility of an objective space and time that is conducive to the salvation of unevangelized individuals who are subjectively in the same state as those who benefited from Christ's descent into hades. I then conclude with a summation of reasons for why the prospective *fides ex auditu* solution presented in this thesis is worthy of consideration.

Part 1

Reassessing George Lindbeck's Notion of Truth

Chapter 2

THE NATURE OF LINDBECK'S THEORY

Introduction

After twenty-five years participating in ecumenical discussion between

Roman Catholics and Lutherans, George Lindbeck wrote his seminal book *The*

Nature of Doctrine to suggest an alternative approach for understanding Christian

doctrine.[1] Though a slim volume it is nonetheless dense with potential implications.

Some say his theory is reductionist,[2] which often coincides with accusations of

fideism,[3] or that he recommends a retreat from society,[4] or that he offers a relativistic

postmodern ideology.[5] Others take issue with his variant use of certain nontheological

thinkers such as Clifford Geertz[6] and Ludwig Wittgenstein,[7] or of his appropriation of

theologians like Karl Barth[8] and Thomas Aquinas.[9] Yet it could be that these and

other concerns derive mostly from inchoate attempts to locate Lindbeck's

configuration of truth in the history of ideas.

Bruce Marshall observes that a common concern among critics is that

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[1] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary ed. (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009).

[2] Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 14-34.

[3] Terrence Tilley, "Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 2 (January 1989): 87-111.

[4] Rowan Williams, "Postmodern Theology and the Judgment of the World," in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 92-112.

[5] Nancey Murphy and J. W. McClendon Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (April 1989): 191-214.

[6] Hugh Nicholson, "The Political Nature of Doctrine: A Critique of Lindbeck in Light of Recent Scholarship," *The Heythrop Journal* 48, no. 6 (2007): 858-877.

[7] M. W. Nicholson, "Abusing Wittgenstein: The Misuse of the Concept of Language Games in Contemporary Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 617-629.

[8] R. F. Thiemann, "Response to George Lindbeck," *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (1986): 377-382.

[9] Colman O'Neill, "The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth," *The Thomist* 49.3 (1985): 417-442.

Lindbeck "is soft on truth . . . failing to account for the universality and objectivity of truth, in particular the truth of Christian doctrine."[10] This worry is understandable considering the way Lindbeck employs common truth terms in rather uncommon ways, and it is for this reason that Marshall insists that many of these criticisms stem more from his "terminological infelicity" than from "substantive disagreement."[11]

In light of these issues, Part 1 of this thesis seeks to open up new pathways in the conversation by changing the epistemological context for locating Lindbeck's theory in the history of ideas. To this purpose, the systematic argument in this chapter begins with a concise explanation of Lindbeck's notion of truth, followed by an evaluation of several common points of contention among scholars who are concerned with his epistemology. Observing these criticisms will demonstrate the difficulty in trying to hold Lindbeck to the 'usual' standards of epistemic speech, and thus provide a clearer picture of the distinct characteristics of his theory.

In light of this analysis, the next section compares Lindbeck's view of truth to the works of Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. While appreciatively surveying the various ways Lindbeck coincides with each of these thinkers, I attempt to demonstrate that none of them can fully account for his configuration of truth and doctrine. The final section, then, considers a long-neglected feature of Lindbeck's work that might finally help locate his notion of truth and offer a stronger interpretive lens for understanding his 'rule theory' of doctrine.

Having said this, the point of this work is not to try and revive postliberalism from recent attempts to bury it,[12] but rather to make Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine operational for theological application. For as Marshall observes, "The rule

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[10] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xii.
[11] Ibid., xvii.
[12] For example, see, Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 53-54.

theory of doctrine has sometimes contributed to worries about Lindbeck's view of truth, but so far as I know it has never been relied upon explicitly to further a particular ecumenical proposal."[13] The goal here, then, is to offer a fresh account of Lindbeck's epistemic method so that we might apply his theory of doctrine to the disputed question in theology regarding the fate of the unevangelized.

A Cursory Overview of Lindbeck's Approach

Based on his many years of involvement in ecumenical discussion, Lindbeck argues that it is often doctrinal differences that stand in the way of Christian ecumenism. Yet he believes this issue is due primarily to participants' misconception of the true nature of doctrine, which then leads to a general misunderstanding of the intrinsic practice for determining faithful and unfaithful doctrinal changes.[14] Thus, to resolve this ecumenical problematic he argues that it is necessary to identify the particular function and purpose of religious doctrine through a "pretheological" approach.[15]

To establish this alternative method Lindbeck delineates the prevailing theological views on doctrine into three general categories. The first category consists of views that focus on the "cognitive aspects of religion," and he says these theories maintain that religious truth claims about objective reality function like scientific propositions.[16] The problem with this view, argues Lindbeck, is that within this paradigm it is impossible for one to account for the variable nature of doctrine because those who think of doctrine in this way believe that "if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false."[17] Hence, he concludes that

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[13] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxiii.
[14] See, Ibid., xxxiii-xxxviii.
[15] Ibid., xxx, xxxvi, 11.
[16] Ibid., 2.
[17] Ibid.

theories in the cognitive-propositional category cannot fully account for the historical development and changing doctrinal positions in the Christian tradition.[18]

He labels the second category "experiential-expressive" theologies, as these views posit a common universal core to all the various religions and their particular expressions and experiences.[19] Yet he claims that these approaches are unhelpful for understanding doctrine, because "insofar as doctrines function as nondiscursive symbols, they are polyvalent in import and therefore subject to changes of meaning or even to a total loss of meaningfulness."[20] For instance, if the affirmation of the resurrection is not held by Christians as "an enduring communal norm of belief and practice" but as one type of a universal experience that can be expressed in other ways, then such a view cannot explain its doctrinal constancy within historical Christianity.[21]

Finally, Lindbeck refers to the third category as a "two-dimensional outlook," because these kinds of approaches attempt to reposition both cognitive and experiential approaches to form a mediating view for explaining the variable and invariable matters of faith.[22] As such, he argues that these theories are better able to reach the ecumenical goal of "doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation," and it is then for this reason that he attempts to apply this kind of 'two-dimensional outlook' to the formulation of his own theory.[23] To this purpose, he contends that the way to account for the invariable and variable nature of doctrine is to locate its meaning and function within the "organic character of the faith,"[24] and he proposes the application

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[18] Ibid., 64.
[19] Ibid., 2.
[20] Ibid., 3.
[21] Ibid., 66.
[22] Ibid., 2.
[23] Ibid., 2-4.
[24] George Lindbeck, "Reform and Infallibility," *Cross Currents* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1961): 350.

of a "'regulative' or 'rule' theory" methodology within a "'cultural-linguistic' approach."[25]

The Nature of Truth and Doctrine

Regarding truth and doctrine, Lindbeck correlates his cultural-linguistic theory with a sense of "true" he calls "categorial truth."[26] Whereas cognitive-propositional views expect a specific religious statement to correspond directly to ontological reality, a categorial view sees this statement existing as just one piece within an entire interconnected system.[27] This notion means that a religious statement can only correspond to a system, and only a system as a whole is capable of corresponding to independent reality.[28] For instance, Lindbeck breaks down this understanding of truth further by explaining two ways in which religious truth obtains. First is the "intrasystematic truth" of a statement, referring to its internal coherence as regards the situational context of a religious system.[29] For Lindbeck, this kind of truth goes beyond mere propositional statements to include performative features as well:

> Utterances are intrasystematically true when they cohere with the total relevant context, which, in the case of a religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is not only other utterances but also the correlative forms of life.[30]

Second is "ontological truth," which may obtain when a performative statement is intrasystematically true within a religion that has the categories necessary for correspondence with the most important thing in the universe.[31] Lindbeck reasons that for "epistemological realists," a statement which is intrasystematically true need not be ontologically true, but for one to be ontologically true it must also be

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[25] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 4.
[26] Ibid., 36-38.
[27] Ibid., 33-34.
[28] Ibid., 50-51.
[29] Ibid., 50.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

intrasystematically true.[32] Yet whereas cognitive-propositional theories view a propositional truth claim as having direct correspondence with ontological truth, the cultural-linguistic perspective recognizes "that a religious system is more like a natural language than a formally organized set of explicit statements, and that the right use of this language . . . cannot be detached from a particular way of behaving."[33] In other words, only as a cognitive-propositional statement is put into action within the appropriate contexts of a coherent system does it then obtain intrasystematic truth with the possibility of also being ontologically true. So how do doctrines fit into this interpretation?

Lindbeck views doctrines as "communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action."[34] The "Christian example" of this cultural-linguistic definition is: "Church doctrines are communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question."[35] In this way, Lindbeck equates 'doctrines' with 'rules' and so limits the nature of doctrine to the level of cognitive-propositional truth claims. But having already discarded "'classical' propositional views of doctrine," he seeks to distinguish his approach by asserting that the propositional content of a doctrinal statement deals only with issues of religious language and, in themselves, not with ultimate reality.[36] In other words, on their own doctrines do not correspond to ontological truth and only serve as guidelines for Christian belief and action. Thus, doctrines are "second-order rather than first-order propositions and affirm nothing about extra-linguistic or extra-human reality."[37]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 4.
[35] Ibid., 60.
[36] Ibid., 66.
[37] Ibid.

Lindbeck's Critics and the Search for Consonance

As regards Lindbeck's discussion of cognitive approaches, the objection that he is too soft on truth usually stems from his assertion that doctrines are second-order propositions 'and affirm nothing about extra-linguistic or extra-human reality.' Most critics concede that the objective value of cognitive-propositional statements is limited, but to the extent that it is there at all they maintain that the truth claim itself is still *about God*. Nevertheless, it is possible that many of these arguments are based on a misunderstanding of the full extent of what Lindbeck means by 'proposition' and 'correspondence.'

For instance, some critics argue that Lindbeck's development of the cognitive-propositional category lacks intellectual rigor and does not present an honest appraisal of its proponents. Geoffrey Wainwright contends that "Lindbeck's descriptions of the cognitive-propositionalist position are too simple for it even in its classical or traditional forms, let alone in its sophisticated post-critical versions."[38] Likewise, Alister McGrath claims that Lindbeck's treatment of the cognitive-propositional position "fails to take account of the evident ability of proponents of this approach to reformulate, amplify or supplement a doctrine with changing historical circumstances."[39] Nevertheless, while these objections assume that Lindbeck is attempting to refute the cognitive-propositional approach altogether, consideration of his full discussion on the subject might also lead one to assume that he is attempting to reform the traditional understanding of the role of cognition in regard to doctrine and correspondence to ultimate reality.

For example, contrary to McGrath's assertion above, Lindbeck does indeed acknowledge and affirm the efforts of more recent cognitive-propositional

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[38] Geoffrey Wainwright, "Ecumenical Dimensions of Lindbeck's 'Nature of Doctrine,'" *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (2008): 122.
[39] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 16.

approaches, saying, "Some modern forms of propositionalism . . . allow for the possibility that doctrines have both unchanging and changing aspects."[40] He further points out that like these modern propositional theories, the rule theory also differentiates between "what a doctrine affirms ontologically and the diverse conceptualities or formulations in which the affirmation can be expressed."[41] Thus Lindbeck not only accounts for the ability of certain modern cognitive-propositional approaches to deal with doctrinal variations, he also agrees with their distinction between these variations and what a doctrine affirms ontologically – he simply disagrees with the way in which these theories explain ontological correspondence.[42] As Stephen Williams points out, "There is at least a consistent intention [by Lindbeck] to distinguish between propositionalism as a theory of doctrine (of which many critical things can be said) and a claim that Christian doctrine involves first-order propositions."[43]

Nonetheless, other critics argue that any discussion of propositional truth must maintain a cognitive understanding of correspondence. For instance, Jay Richards' insists that "most who speak of coherence theories of truth or of the necessity of coherence for correspondence usually mean a coherence between relevant beliefs, statements, or propositions."[44] In other words, because Lindbeck does not mean what 'most' people 'usually mean' by coherence Richards finds his view of truth to be "perplexing" and "baffling."[45] In a similar way, McGrath complains that "Lindbeck

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[40] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 66. Also see, 90-91.
[41] Ibid., 66.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Stephen Williams, "Lindbeck's Regulative Christology," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 181. Also observed by Kenneth Surin, "Many Religions and the One True Faith': An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter Three," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 192.
[44] J. W. Richards, "Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's 'The Nature of Doctrine,'" *Religious studies* (1997): 38; emphasis added.
[45] Ibid., 43.

seems to hold that there is no need to believe that they [doctrines] have anything to do with God, or even with reality in general."[46] And Paul DeHart states, "For Lindbeck the categorial scheme of Christianity is more an adjunct to pragmatic performance, and he does not offer a 'strong' doctrine of revelation to anchor the particular conceptual scheme in God's reality."[47] Yet as stated earlier, maybe the reason he 'seems to hold' the view that there is no need to assert God's existence is not due to sloppy epistemology, but to the unusual way in which he delineates 'proposition.'

'Proposition' in the First Instance

When Lindbeck considers doctrines qua doctrines, what he means by proposition in this first instance is simply that the immediate object of doctrinal speech is religious language, not extra-linguistic reality.[48] This is why McGrath argues that Lindbeck reduces theology to nothing more than "talk about talk about God."[49] While this statement may be true to a certain extent, it will be shown later how collapsing Lindbeck's theory of doctrine in this way misrepresents the full scope of what he eventually means by proposition. Lindbeck's point here is that in the search for truth cognitive-propositional aspects are inevitable and necessary, but they are just one part of the whole process.[50] Yet regarding this initial construal, D. Z. Phillips and John Milbank have similar concerns.

Phillips says that Lindbeck is "prepared to jettison talk of an independent reality" when he separates propositions from ontological truth and inserts the notion of intrasystematic truth between them.[51] He assumes that because Lindbeck sees

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[46] Alister E. McGrath, *The Science Of God: An Introduction To Scientific Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 103.
[47] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 88.
[48] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 55.
[49] McGrath, *The Science of God*, 104.
[50] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 21, 52-53.
[51] D. Z. Phillips, "Lindbeck's Audience," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 138.

doctrines as second-order propositions, this then means that he is also "attacking the notion that theological statements have to do with an objective reality or with truth claims."[52] Therefore Phillips argues that Lindbeck utilizes a notion of independent reality that "is entirely unmediated" when he refers to it as the "Most Important" and the "Ultimately Real."[53] Yet while Phillips may be right to assert that there is no "logical space which transcends the language-games and forms of life in which concepts have their life,"[54] a closer reading shows that Lindbeck uses these terms heuristically in his discussion of Christianity and other religions.[55] Lindbeck's point is not that religious statements have nothing to do with ultimate reality, but that "a religious utterance, . . . acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence."[56] Thus he is not saying that cognitive statements do not correspond to ultimate reality, but that they only correspond to ultimate reality when part of a specific interconnected religious system. We should also note that if Lindbeck is indeed proposing an unmediated notion of ultimate reality to which all religions correspond, then he would fall into the experiential-expressive trap rather than the cognitivist one as Phillips suggests.

Nevertheless, Milbank agrees with Phillips and claims that "more importance must be given to propositions, and so to ontology, than Lindbeck appears to allow."[57] He asserts that Lindbeck must recognize that the "absolute" is only defined internally by Christian practice, and argues that such definitions occur through a setting which is

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[52] Ibid., 139.
[53] Ibid., 142. See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 51.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 51.
[56] Ibid.
[57] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 384.

"always already imagined, albeit in a 'mythical' form."[58] What we find, however, is that on a descriptive level Lindbeck declares that religions are understood "as idioms for dealing with whatever is most important," which is mediated "in their stories, myths, and doctrines."[59] Hence the 'absolute' in this context is not understood as something that is outside the religious tradition but, "on the contrary, different religions seem in many cases to produce fundamentally divergent depth experiences of what it is to be human."[60] So contrary to Phillips' and Milbank's assertions, Lindbeck does indeed affirm that it is the internal practice of a religion that defines notions of ultimate reality, and as it applies to Christianity, "it is the religion instantiated in Scripture which defines being, truth, goodness, and beauty."[61] Again, Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach in no way reflects the common-core-experience notion of the experiential-expressive theories.

Yet here, contradicting his first criticism, Milbank further contends that for Lindbeck meaning is "defined in advance."[62] This second criticism again relies on Phillips' idea that "if anything 'refers' for Lindbeck, it is the entire Christian performance," and he says that Lindbeck seeks to define performance in advance "by the exemplary narratives of Jesus," and thus "develop a kind of 'metanarrative realism'" that "becomes dangerously ahistorical."[63] This argument is similar to McGrath's assertion that "Lindbeck appears to treat the Christian language as something 'given', adopting an a-historical approach,"[64] and it is this concern, perhaps more than any other, that has the most warrant when it comes to the internal logic of Lindbeck's theory.

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[58] Ibid., 385; references Phillips, "Lindbeck's Audience," 133-54.
[59] Ibid., 26.
[60] Ibid., 27.
[61] Ibid., 104.
[62] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388.
[63] Ibid.
[64] McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 31.

Lindbeck argues that historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation miss the canonical message by ignoring that Scripture, with all its literary diversity, is telling one overarching story.[65] In place of these extratextual methods he contends that Scripture should be read and interpreted through an "intratextual" canonical framework.[66] Essentially, this means recovering the pattern of interpretation that focuses on Jesus as the key figure for tying together the whole scriptural story.[67] In agreement with his fellow Yale scholars Hans Frei and Brevard Childs, Lindbeck argues that the factually true dimension of Scripture is not principally in its historical accuracy, but in its "history-like" or "realistic narrative" rendering of divine and human interaction.[68] DeHart argues that this approach provides no ground for claiming that Christianity is the only categorially true religion,[69] and Williams ponders, "Would it be meaningful to ask whether there is a being who exists (as he appears to do in the narrative) independently of other beings, who communicated with Israel, was disposed to save, not condemn, the world through Jesus Christ?"[70]

It is probably safe to say that Lindbeck's answer to Williams' question is 'yes,' but not for the same reason these critics argue it should be. According to Lindbeck, when considering the Christian religion the "investigator" may take it as a given that the community believe in "the Jesus Christ of the biblical narratives as the way to the one God of whom the Bible speaks."[71] There is no need for one to seek

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[65] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 103-04; George Lindbeck, "The Gospel's Uniqueness: Election and Untranslatability," *Modern Theology* 13, no. 4 (October 1997): 431-432.

[66] Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (Oct 1986): 361-376; and "The Bible as Realistic Narrative," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 17 (Winter 1980): 85, and *The Nature of Doctrine*, 104-6.

[67] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 103-104; Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," 370.

[68] Ibid., 108; Lindbeck, "The Bible as Realistic Narrative," 85. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 14.

[69] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses*, 88.

[70] Williams, "Lindbeck's Regulative Christology," 182.

[71] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 93.

some kind of universal proof outside the practice of this communally authoritative writ, confession, and practice. In consequence, "the rendering of God's character is not in every instance logically dependent on the facticity of the story."[72] His point here appears to be similar to the one he makes about cognitive aspects of truth; that is, historical concerns are *a part of* biblical hermeneutics, but the whole process and its success is not based on this element alone. So while on literary or grammatico-historical grounds one might challenge his application of a 'history-like' view of the Bible, this notion does not itself affect his notion of truth. Therefore, his theory is not exactly ahistorical, but neither is it historically dependent as he holds that the Bible is a "transhistorical metanarrative stretching from the beginning of time to its end."[73]

Nevertheless, Milbank thinks that Lindbeck insulates the Bible in a "narrative-become-paradigm" so that "Christians are seen as living within certain fixed narratives which function as *schemas*, which can organize endlessly different cultural contents."[74] Rowan Williams voices a similar concern when he says, "I am both interested and perturbed by the *territorial* cast of the imaginary used here—of a 'framework' within whose boundaries things—persons?—are to be 'inserted.'"[75] The supposed implication here is that, from a Christian perspective, neither what the church nor society have to say really matters because their reality is already determined for them. Thus Milbank argues that because Lindbeck understands doctrines as nothing more than second-order activity, this also means that he views them as "a mere husk to be easily discarded."[76] He therefore accuses Lindbeck of making the metanarrative only about the story of Jesus and ignoring the "continuing

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[72] Ibid.,108.
[73] Lindbeck, "The Gospel's Uniqueness," 432.
[74] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 388-89.
[75] Williams, "Postmodern Theology," 93.
[76] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.

story of the Church."[77] Yet, once again, a closer reading shows that Lindbeck does not wish to exclude the context or the imagination of the reader, and is concerned only that the narratives "shape the imagination and perceptions of the attentive reader."[78] In other words, he claims not that the story of Jesus *is* the metanarrative, but that the story of Jesus *shapes the understanding* of the metanarrative which includes the role of the church in the world.[79] Hence, the story of Jesus does "not empty Old Testament or postbiblical personages and events of their own reality."[80] Furthermore, to say that Lindbeck sees doctrine as 'a mere husk to be easily discarded' muddles his full explication of what doctrine is and forgets his goal of "reconciliation without capitulation."[81]

When taken all together, one can see that Lindbeck simply evaluates each part of the whole epistemic process in turn, so that depending on the reader's proclivities it might 'seem' that he does not give enough credence to one aspect or another. Moreover, while it is true that he does not affirm ontological correspondence for cognitive-propositional statements, he is not yet finished defining what he means by proposition and correspondence.

'Proposition' in the Second Instance

Lindbeck says that a religious utterance can "acquire propositional force" when performed in appropriate religious ways.[82] On this point, his meaning of proposition takes on broader dimensions as the utterance *demonstrates* correspondence with the religious system through performance. Furthermore, coherent performance is not defined completely in advance but is lived out through

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[77] Ibid., 387, 389.
[78] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 102.
[79] See, Ibid., 102-104.
[80] Ibid., 103.
[81] Ibid., 2-4.
[82] Ibid., 52.

activities such as "prayer, praise, preaching, and exhortation."[83] For Lindbeck, the natural activities of the Christian life – its performance – is a first-order proposition.[84] As Richards observes, while "most" people speak of coherence in terms of cognitive propositional statements, "Lindbeck, on the other hand, intends more by intrasystematic truth than *this* type of coherence. He makes *contextual* and *performative* aspects essential requirements to the *ontological* truth of statements."[85] More precisely, he requires contextual and performative aspects for intrasystematic truth, and requires intrasystematic truth for correspondence to ontological truth. Critics often neglect this second function of proposition in Lindbeck's theory, and although they recognize his inclusion of performance they rarely see the propositional connection. Yet grasping this connection is essential to understanding his theory. Perhaps a summation will help bring together the two instances of proposition before we attempt to locate Lindbeck's epistemology in the history of ideas.

According to Lindbeck, a doctrine in itself is a cognitive-propositional statement about religious beliefs and practices, and in this way the definition of doctrine is fused to the meaning of 'rules' which delimits how the term 'proposition' here functions. In this instance, the most a doctrine might do is function symbolically as a first-order proposition, but alone it can never actually be a first-order proposition; i.e., they "affirm nothing about extra-linguistic or extra-human reality."[86] A doctrine in itself is a second-order proposition which, although integral to the life of the church, is only one aspect of the performance necessary to constitute a first-order proposition.[87] To this end, when Lindbeck speaks further of performance it is not doctrine that he presses into service (i.e., the cognitive aspect), but rather he seeks to

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[83] Ibid., 55.
[84] Ibid., 54.
[85] Richards, "Truth and Meaning," 38; emphasis original.
[86] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 66.
[87] Ibid., 55.

broaden the understanding of proposition beyond this intellectual component. His intent is not to leave the cognitive element (doctrine) behind, but to highlight the minimal though essential role it plays within the entire process.[88] So the meaning of proposition expands as it obtains ontological correspondence through proper performance. That is, religious propositions "acquire enough referential specificity to have first-order or ontological truth or falsity only in determinate settings, and this rarely happens on the pages of theological treatises or in the course of doctrinal discussions."[89] So it is important to understand that a proposition (not doctrine *per se*) "acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence."[90] When this correspondence occurs, one must not forget that a first-order proposition is not itself ontological truth (we will discuss how one determines correspondence in a moment).[91]

Milbank claims that Lindbeck must recognize that even if doctrines are second-order reflections on first-order use, they "nonetheless do contain an inescapably 'surplus' propositional element which contributes, in a distinct moment, to the overall imagination of reference.'"[92] But is not this 'surplus propositional element' the very point Lindbeck seeks to make? In other words, one finds that instead of being a "crypto-cognitivist" he is rather more like a crypto-propositionalist.[93] Therefore, his epistemology may be less cognitive than these critics

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[88] Ibid., 53.
[89] Ibid., 54
[90] Ibid., 51
[91] Ibid., 55.
[92] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 387.
[93] William Placher, "Paul Ricoeur and Postliberal Theology: A Conflict of Interpretations," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 1 (1987): 47. Also see, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 53.

like, but it is apparently more ontological than they realize. Yet there still remains the issue of trying to locate Lindbeck's 'unusual' notion of truth in the history of ideas.

Locating Lindbeck's Epistemology

Lindbeck draws his theory of doctrine from his conception of truth so that locating his epistemology within the history of ideas should make it easier to understand his theory. Thus, this section will investigate the possibilities by beginning the search with some of those whom Lindbeck credits with having had a positive influence on his thinking. Of these, some primary nontheological thinkers are Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Winch, and Clifford Geertz and two of the main theological thinkers are Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas.[94] Yet because Barth and Thomas are separated in both time and thought we will consider them separately, whereas because Wittgenstein, Winch, and Geertz are closely related in the linguistic and hermeneutical turn of the twentieth century we will look to Wittgenstein as representing the main assumptions about knowledge from this period.[95] That said, the purpose of the following comparison is not to delimit the one way to interpret Lindbeck, but to find an interpretive framework that will provide the best comprehensive explanation of the overall character of his theory.

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[94] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xviii-xxi, xxx, xxxi, xxxiv, 6, 10, 28, 116, 121; and "Confession and Community: An Israel-Like View of the Church," *Christian Century* 107, no. 16 (My 1990): 493.

[95] See, Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16; Alexander Bird, "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions and its Significance: An Essay Review of the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 00 (2012): 18-20; Bruce Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians: A Survey of Ludwig Wittgenstein's Impact on Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50/2 (June 2007): 357-358.

The Case for Karl Barth

"The hands may be the hands of Wittgenstein and Geertz" writes David Tracy, "but the voice is the voice of Karl Barth."[96] He implies that even though Lindbeck integrates aspects of other theories into his own, he nonetheless organizes them around Barth's theological structure. To be sure, Tracy makes a valid claim because many scholars already assume a Barthian influence on Lindbeck's work and on the postliberal project in general.[97] For instance, Gary Dorrien argues that postliberal theology is at its best when it holds to Barthian themes,[98] and Richard Crane argues that several postliberals, including Lindbeck, "have pointed out that the ways in which their understanding of the truth and referential status of Christian language about God are profoundly indebted to the theology of Karl Barth."[99] Thus we will consider this supposed Barthian influence upon Lindbeck.

The Influence of Barth's Theological Method

One reason many assume that Barth influenced Lindbeck's theory is because Lindbeck himself admits that his "ad hoc and unsystematic" use of nontheological thinkers is in response "to Karl Barth's recommendations for the employment of non-scriptural concepts in theology."[100] Thus he looks to twentieth-century linguistic theory and cultural anthropology to argue for the priority of descriptive theories of

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[96] David Tracy, "Lindbeck's New Program for Theology," *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 465.

[97] For instance, see, Gary Dorrien, "A Third Way in Theology? The Origins of Postliberalsim," *Christian Century* 118, no. 20 (July 4, 2001): 16.

[98] Gary Dorrien, "Truth Claims: The Future of Postliberal Theology," *Christian Century* 118, no. 21 (July 18, 2001): 29.

[99] Richard Crane, "Postliberals, Truth, Ad Hoc Apologetics, and (Something Like) General Revelation," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (Spr 2003): 29.

[100] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxx.

interpretation over prescriptive ones.[101] Thus one could indeed argue that Lindbeck's

preference for descriptive methods actually begins with Barth, who claims:

> There is no independent standpoint from which we can survey and either
> approve or disapprove the ways of God. . . . We can only keep God's actual
> ways before us. We can only try to understand both the fact and the extent that
> they are actual ways.[102]

Barth contends that there is no way to step outside the reality of God to make

independent judgments about God, one can only observe the 'actual ways' God freely

chooses to reveal his reality.

It appears that Lindbeck echoes this notion in his response to the experiential-

expressive idea of a prelinguistic experience of salvation, saying, "The humanly real .

. . is not constructed from below upward or from the inner to the outer, but from the

outer to the inner, and from above downward."[103] He maintains that a person "begins

to become a new creature through hearing and interiorizing the language that speaks

of Christ," which is found only in the explicit form of Christianity.[104] And these

statements are reminiscent of Barth, who says, "Nothing could be further from our

minds than to attribute to the human creature as such a capacity to know God and the

one Word of God [outside the Bible and the church]."[105] Nevertheless, Barth also

asserts that even in the context of the Bible and the church, saving faith still cannot

depend on any kind of human ability to know God.[106] As Hendrik Kraemer explains,

for Barth "the event of revelation does not have two aspects: God the agent, and man,

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[101] Ibid. Also see, George Lindbeck, "Atonement and the Hermeneutics of Intratextual Social Embodiment," in *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 222-240.

[102] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: 1.2 The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley, G. T. Thomson, and Harold Knight, vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 46.

[103] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 48.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: IV.3.1 The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 113.

[106] Ibid.

the recipient. Both the act of revelation (*a parte Dei*) and its reception (*a parte hominis*) are God's."[107] With this view in mind, Crane asserts that Lindbeck also takes this theological position in his own work:

> One of Lindbeck's objectives, following in the trajectory of Karl Barth's theology, is to articulate a forceful critique of theological projects that compromise the sovereign freedom of God by interpreting faith and the knowledge of God as the realization of an innate human capacity.[108]

To be sure, if Crane's argument is correct, then it provides strong support for a Barthian core to Lindbeck's notion of truth.

A final reason Lindbeck appears indebted to Barth's epistemology is with his conditions for the interpretation of Scripture. First, Lindbeck credits Barth with helping to form his hermeneutic of engaging "in close reading of the entire canon in its typological and christological narrative unity."[109] Moreover, he supports his argument for an intratextual narrative approach to biblical interpretation by claiming that this was also the approach Barth (and the Reformers) sought to employ.[110] Second, Lindbeck says that the biblical canon is the lexical framework for Christianity, and that the only way to determine if a statement is true or false is to observe it in the "ordinary religious language when it is used to mold lives through prayer, praise, preaching, and exhortation."[111] Likewise, for Barth: "The Church and Holy Scripture and preaching and the sacrament are therefore again the only possible criteria in any practical investigation."[112]

So with Barth's influence already assumed, Lindbeck's recognition of Barth for his *ad hoc* apologetics, and his agreement with Barth that Christian knowledge of

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[107] Hendrik Kraemer, *Religion and the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co, 1956), 186.
[108] Crane, "Postliberals, Truth, Ad Hoc Apologetics," 47.
[109] Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," 362.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 55.
[112] Barth, *Church Dogmatics: 1.2 The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 49.

God is discerned only through the Bible and the church, the initial case for locating

Lindbeck's epistemology with Barth looks strong. But before drawing any

conclusions, we must consider a few more points.

A Reflection on the Case for Karl Barth

Although the information presented above seems to indicate that Barth might

be the epistemological key to understanding Lindbeck's theory of truth, a closer look

shows that the similarities are mostly superficial. It is true that Lindbeck claims that

his utilization of nontheological works is due partially to "Barth's recommendation

for the employment of non-scriptural concepts in theology."[113] But anyone familiar

with Barth's theological project will immediately think this an odd statement. As

noted above, Barth puts divine truth on a completely different plane from the human

ability to know God. Divine grace alone accounts for knowledge of God and the only

way to measure apprehension is by observing God's actual ways through the

canonical scriptures in the life of the church.[114] Yet while Hunsinger thinks that

Lindbeck's hermeneutics of intratextual social embodiment coincides with Barth's

personalist notion of truth,[115] Lindbeck himself asserts that Barth falls short "of the

flexibility combined with determinateness, the plurality combined with unity, of a

full-fledged hermeneutics of social/ecclesial embodiment."[116] So how then did

Lindbeck get the idea that Barth encouraged the use of non-scriptural concepts in

theology, and how does this idea fit with his claim that Barth influenced his

intratextual approach to interpretation?

We find a clue in the last chapter in *The Nature of Doctrine*, when after he

credits Barth for his notion of intratextual narrative interpretation of the Bible

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[113] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxx.
[114] Barth, *Church Dogmatics: 1.2 The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 49.
[115] Hunsinger, "Truth as Self-Involving," 45.
[116] Lindbeck, "Atonement and the Hermeneutics," n20, 296.

Lindbeck also admits that this understanding of Barth comes "second hand" as he "learned to think about Barth *in this way above all* from conversations with Hans Frei."[117] This is critical information for our investigation, because Lindbeck makes a fine point here as to how he integrates Barth's method into his own approach. According to Lindbeck, if not for Frei he likely would have had little use for Barth: "In the absence of something like Frei's explanations, the discussion reads to me like a good job of baptizing bad epistemology."[118] Indeed, this statement alone indicates that Lindbeck's application was not of Barth's notion of truth, but of a certain interpretation of Barth's method. Moreover, Lindbeck comments on Barth's bad epistemology,' stating:

> It may well be that his doctrine of revelation, especially his talk of the rationality and self-evidence of the event of the knowledge of God, is the most damaging instance of this.[119]

Therefore, it appears that Barth's position on how truth is conceived is not what influences Lindbeck's theory, but rather it is Barth's emphasis on the "retrieval of the Reformation version of the way of reading the Bible" – which Frei helped Lindbeck see – that is the actual Barthian influence on his theory.[120]

What Frei helped Lindbeck understand was that because Barth needed an epistemology for communicating this hermeneutical emphasis within his intellectual environment, he "cobbled together a set of notions about knowledge of revelation and about theology as science."[121] Thus, Lindbeck says that those turned off by Barth's epistemology (as he is) often stop reading and "never discover the strange new world of the Bible as Barth describes it."[122] It is, then, Barth's act of cobbling together, or *ad*

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[117] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121, 124, emphasis added.
[118] Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," 368.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

hoc use of non-scriptural concepts, that Lindbeck takes to heart and not his theory of truth. Furthermore, we find that Barth's 'recommendation' for this kind of theological approach comes to Lindbeck indirectly; that is, through a particular descriptive reading of Barth's theological method.

Lindbeck's theory of truth requires a certain degree of human capacity to respond in order to justify correspondence to ontological truth. And this aspect of his theory diverges so far from Barth that Hunsinger says it "may actually reflect certain classical disagreements in the Christian tradition about how to view the relationship between nature and grace."[123] So the question remains, if not Barth's then whose epistemology does Lindbeck seek to 'baptize' into the biblical intratextual world?

The Case for Thomas Aquinas

Hunsinger points out that Lindbeck quotes Thomas Aquinas more often than he quotes Barth, and he suggests that "when it comes to stipulating the conditions for cognitive truth, the words are the words of Lindbeck, but the voice is much more nearly that of Aquinas than of Barth."[124] Lindbeck himself states, "My utilization of the contemporary developments has been heavily influenced by the reading and teaching of St. Thomas that I have done since my undergraduate days four decades ago."[125] Thus his familiarity with the writings of Thomas gives strength to the possibility that his notion of truth follows a Thomistic trajectory.

Marshall is one who advocates this option, claiming that Thomas "has figured consistently in Lindbeck's writing and teaching throughout his career and has deeply shaped his own theology."[126] He also claims that this connection is most evident in

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[123] Hunsinger, "Truth as Self-Involving," 49.
[124] Ibid., 54.
[125] George Lindbeck, "Response to Bruce Marshall," *The Thomist* 53 (July 1989): 405.
[126] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xviii.

the conditions Lindbeck gives for what counts as justification for truth claims, and

that while some cognitivists claim that his approach is not the usual way most people

speak of truth,

> His account of truth is not at all novel in substance, however fresh the
> perspective from which it is articulated. Thomas Aquinas also maintains that
> utterances of Christian belief are ontologically true only if they cohere with
> specific linguistic and practical paradigms internal to the religion itself.[127]

Marshall argues that the real issue is not what Lindbeck means by ontological truth,

but how his conditions for justifying correspondence compare to Thomas' criteria.[128]

For instance, one might consider the two ways that Thomas argues the formal

aspect of faith can be viewed. He says that one way to view the formal aspects of faith

is to consider the "First Truth: and from this point of view there is no distinction of

articles."[129] In other words, only in God do truth and the knowledge of truth dwell as

one. Yet the other way to understand faith is from the human point of view, and here

"there are various distinct articles of faith."[130] In essence, there is the object of faith

and the various delineations of faith itself. Marshall contends:

> Thomas's account of the object of faith bears directly on questions regarding
> the justification of Christian belief. In fact it suggests a view of epistemic
> justification in the religious domain which is not inconsistent with Lindbeck's
> appeal to the criterion of linguistic coherence within a religion.[131]

He argues that for Thomas, part of what it means to justify a claim to having certain

knowledge about God involves language, because part of what it means to believe in

God depends on the acceptance of certain propositional statements about God.

Furthermore, the conditions for determining these propositional statements are

specific to the object of faith: "Christian faith only affirms propositions about God

and creatures when these propositions are in accord with faith's formal object, namely

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[127] Ibid., 356.
[128] Ibid., 355.
[129] *ST* 2-2.2.2.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Marshall, "Aquinas as Postliberal," 375.

the language of Scripture and the creeds understood as the self-communication of God."[132] One can also see this idea in Lindbeck's conditions for formulating Christian beliefs, as he claims that the Bible is the "framework" or even the "lexical core" of Christianity,[133] and that interpretations are "constrained by a single set of guidelines, the trinitarian and christological creeds."[134] Thus, on these points the case for a Thomisitc epistemology is perhaps worthy of further consideration.

A Correspondence Between Correspondence Theories?

As already discussed, the interpretive process for Lindbeck is holistic and requires a particular apprehension gained through particular settings and applied in appropriate ways and contexts. Cognitive affirmation of the object of faith through Scripture and the creeds is good, but complete affirmation comes from right application discerned through practice. In short, a statement becomes capable of correspondence to ontological truth only as it is actively applied in relevant contexts.[135] A consequence of this delineation is that Christians live within the only categorical setting which provides the language necessary for obtaining Christian faith. But how does this notion compare to Thomas?

Thomas teaches that the will moves the intellect to assent to the object of faith, but that in order for the will to assent the intellect must first be aware of the object of faith as mediated through the conditions that determine faith: "The act of any power or habit depends on the relationship of that power or habit to its object."[136] That is, Christian faith begins with intellectual awareness of the object of faith mediated through a particular context and completed by a movement of the will towards the

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[132] Ibid., 376.
[133] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 66-67.
[134] Lindbeck, "Atonement and the Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," 160.
[135] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 54.
[136] *ST* 2-2.2.2; 2-2.2.3.

object of faith, both to assent to the First Truth and to live a life in accordance with the object of faith.[137] Thomas states:

> If the object of faith be considered in so far as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is 'to believe in God.' For the First Truth is referred to the will, through having the aspect of an end.[138]

And for one whose end is the First Truth, Thomas says:

> So does a virtuous man, by the habit of virtue, judge aright of things concerning that virtue; and in this way, by the light of faith which God bestows on him, a man assents to matters of faith and not to those which are against faith.[139]

In similar fashion, Lindbeck says that a declaration of faith acquires "enough referential specificity to have first-order or ontological truth or falsity only in determinate settings."[140] Consequently:

> Nonbelievers are not yet confronted by the question of salvation because it is only by acquiring some familiarity with the determinate settings in which religious utterances acquire propositional force that one can grasp their meaning well enough genuinely to reject (or accept) them.[141]

Lindbeck maintains that true faith is unambiguous, and he declares, "According to this view, saving faith cannot be wholly anonymous, wholly implicit, but must be in some measure explicit."[142] Similarly, Thomas says, "After grace had been revealed, both learned and simple folk are bound to explicit faith in the mysteries of Christ."[143] Moreover, explicit faith comes by explicit means and when these conditions are unavailable no claim to faith is justifiable:

> Unbelievers cannot be said 'to believe in a God' as we understand it in relation to the act of faith. For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God.[144]

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[137] Ibid., 2-2.2.1.
[138] Ibid., 2-2.2.2.
[139] Ibid., 2-2.2.3.
[140] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 54.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid., 43.
[143] *ST* 2-2.2.7.
[144] Ibid., 2-2.2.2.

Thus, we might say that Thomas and Lindbeck agree that one is justified in claiming that a belief corresponds to God's reality in so far as it coheres to certain determinate conditions which include, but are not limited to, cognitive aspects of faith.

For example, Thomas says 'to think' may be defined in three ways. The first is in the ability to understand information or to grasp the reason or logic of an idea; and the second is when this intellectual ability "is accompanied by some kind of inquiry, and which precedes the intellect's arrival at the stage of perfection that comes with the certitude of sight."[145] To this extent, knowledge is never quite certain and perfect understanding remains just out of reach. The third meaning of 'to think' is merely the act of cognition itself, thus Thomas says that it is the second definition which best expresses the meaning of "to believe," because faith is assent even when "knowledge does not attain the perfection of clear sight."[146] Lindbeck agrees: "Our beliefs may correspond to reality, but we are justified in holding that they do so, not by directly seeing the correspondence, but by some other means."[147] Thus it seems that interpreting Lindbeck's epistemology through Thomas' teaching on how one justifies Christian truth claims may help resolve some of the misunderstandings noted in the previous section. But can we say that Thomas is the source of Lindbeck's view of truth?

A Reflection on the Case for Thomas Aquinas

Lindbeck is grateful to Marshall for employing Thomas to better explain his theory, and he confesses, "If I had referred more to the Thomistic ideas he [Marshall] elucidates when I was writing *Nature of Doctrine,* it would have been a better book."[148] Also, where Lindbeck seems to sit uncomfortably with Barth who places

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[145] Ibid., 2-2.2.1.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Lindbeck, "Response to Bruce Marshall," 404.
[148] Ibid., 403.

revelation and response solely in an act of God towards people, he appears more comfortable with Thomas' relational view of faith. Yet there are reasons to believe that even though Lindbeck finds support for various elements of his theory in Thomas, the full extent of his notion of truth and the nature of doctrine cannot be wholly supported by interpretations of Thomas.

Lindbeck's Heuristic Appropriation of Thomas

One reason that a Thomistic interpretation does not support Lindbeck's notion of truth is the way in which he words his response to Marshall. He states, "By showing how St. Thomas can be understood in a way consistent with *Nature of Doctrine,* Bruce Marshall has explained the view of truth which I had in mind better than I explained it myself."[149] Lindbeck points out that Marshall's essay demonstrates how Thomas can be understood *in light of his own theory*, and in this way Marshall does a better job than he did himself of explaining the view of truth *which he had in mind*. While he recognizes that there are aspects of Thomas that help show the reasonableness of his own view, it seems he does not intend to base his theory on Thomas' notion of truth. And this understanding is evident in his lengthiest application of Thomas when he refers to the distinction between the human mode of signifying (*modus significandi*) and the signified (*significatum*).[150]

Lindbeck highlights these concepts to argue that a mere human utterance cannot be its own standard of proof of correspondence to its referent. Language about God is neither univocal nor equivocal but analogous, and "theologians may use analogies to exclude erroneous interpretations, but they are only able to specify how these predications cannot correspond, not how they do correspond to reality."[151] He

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[149] Ibid., 406.
[150] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 52-53.
[151] Ibid.

gives an example saying that one can declare, "God is good," by accepting the ways in which the Scriptures demonstrate God's goodness even though the reality of God's goodness "is utterly beyond comprehension."[152] He says the proposition signifies ways people might align their lives towards God "as if he were good in the ways indicated," but that the utterance itself does not specify the comprehensive meaning or application.[153] Lindbeck calls this view a "modest" propositionalism because it represents the limits of cognitive knowledge in a way that "is no longer incompatible" with his approach.[154]

Without venturing too far into the discussion on interpretations of Thomas, several observations may be made. First, Lindbeck begins by saying that while his theory does not exclude "some classical theists," like Thomas, it also does not necessitate their approaches.[155] So rather than make the point that his theory generates from a Thomistic epistemology, he instead seeks to show how certain concepts from Thomas might be appropriated into his own theory. Second, he says that one way to fit Thomas into the cultural-linguistic approach is through an "agnostic reading" of Thomas' notion of analogical knowledge.[156] This statement might not be a problem except that this rather narrow interpretation of Thomas is not a standard account among scholars,[157] and as Colman O'Neill says, "Were this what St. Thomas really thought there would be no need for the inverted commas used by Prof. Lindbeck when he refers to it as agnostic."[158]

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[152] Ibid., 53.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] See, Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 186, 201.
[158] Colman O'Neill, "The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth," *The Thomist* 49.3 (1985): 433.

Third, although Thomas goes further than Barth by including relevant and active human participation within the conditions for efficacious faith, it is not clear if his conception of truth actually stretches as far as Lindbeck's description of first-order propositions. For instance, Lindbeck applies the cultural-linguistic approach to the resurrection stories using the concepts of *modus significandi* and *significatum*, and says that the *significatum* "provides the warrant for behaving in ways recommended by the resurrection stories even when one grants the impossibility of specifying the mode in which those stories signify."[159] He then admits that the implication of this delineation "goes beyond anything Aquinas says."[160] Fourth, even though Lindbeck claims that Marshall's essay makes him think that "Aquinas was a constant, even if background, presence while I wrote *Nature of Doctrine*," this does little to account for the full measure of his unusual approach.[161] Especially when Lindbeck also claims that his incorporation of Thomas is a part of his *ad hoc* apologetics as a way to recommend the theological viability of his own nontheological approach: "Such arguments in defense of its theses can, I think, be found in sources as diverse as Aquinas, the Reformers, and Karl Barth, but these have simply been mentioned, not deployed."[162]

Finally, when attempting to locate Lindbeck's notion of truth in either Barth or Thomas it is easy to forget the most important element of the investigation – Lindbeck is proposing a 'pretheological' approach to understanding religion and doctrine. If nothing else, this element alone precludes a Thomistic epistemological core to his theory. Ultimately, Lindbeck appears to learn from Thomas the same kind of lesson he learns from Barth – that of baptizing or absorbing the world into the

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[159] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 53.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Lindbeck, "Response to Bruce Marshall," 405.
[162] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121.

world of the Bible. Only where Barth used notions of knowledge and science from his intellectual environment, Thomas "tried to do something similar with Aristotelianism."[163]

Again, Lindbeck is not seeking to develop a theory independent of Christianity, but to present a theory that he thinks can meet a current need of the church and then immerse it into the Christian life. As O'Neill points out, "Lindbeck does not intend to withdraw from the theological enterprise; he wishes to carry over into it a method already established outside it."[164] But if Lindbeck's epistemology is not at first theological, then where in the history of ideas does it connect?

The Case for Ludwig Wittgenstein

The comparative study with Barth and Thomas showed that while Lindbeck references these theologians to explain his theory, he does construct his project upon their epistemic foundations. The question now is whether Lindbeck's epistemic source is Ludwig Wittgenstein. For as Bruce Ashford says, "It has been no secret that the postliberal movement is influenced by Wittgenstein."[165] And because Lindbeck is at the forefront of this movement Michael Nicholson claims that he has "certainly set a trend for the subsequent theological appropriation of Wittgenstein's philosophy."[166] To begin the evaluation, this section will look to Brad Kallenberg's argument regarding the three ways in which Lindbeck coincides with Wittgenstein's later writings.[167] For although Kallenberg works under the common misunderstanding that

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[163] Ibid., 103.
[164] O'Neill, "The Rule Theory," 419.
[165] Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians," 368.
[166] Nicholson, "Abusing Wittgenstein," 617.
[167] Brad Kallenberg, "Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method after Lindbeck," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no. 02 (May 1997): 196-197.

Lindbeck precludes "positive affirmations about God," the points he offers are still worthy of consideration.[168]

The Influence of Wittgenstein's Later Writings

The first common point is with Lindbeck's insistence that acquiring understanding of certain beliefs and practices requires involvement in the particular cultural-linguistic system. "In other words," says Kallenberg, "to understand a set of foreign religious beliefs one must become an 'insider' to that form of life and those language-games in which these beliefs are at home."[169] The terms 'form of life' and 'language-games' are borrowed from Wittgenstein, and Lindbeck incorporates them into his work, saying, "Just as a language (or 'language-game,' to use Wittgenstein's phrase) is correlated with a form of life, . . . so it is also in the case of a religious tradition."[170] As Wittgenstein explains, "The word 'language-*game*' is used here to emphasize the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life."[171] Thus a propositional statement on its own says something about the language itself but nothing about the independent existence of its ostensive reference. This argument is similar to Lindbeck's claim that doctrines are second-order propositions and signify nothing outside the particular linguistic system in which they are uttered.[172] In similar fashion, Wittgenstein says that the statement "'X exists' . . . is not a sentence which treats of X, but a sentence about our use of language, that is, about the use of the word 'X.'"[173]

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168 Ibid., 191-192.
169 Kallenberg, "Unstuck from Yale," 196.
170 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 19.
171 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. Joachim Schulte and P. M. S. Hacker, trans. Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe and P. M. S. Hacker, 4th ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 15e.
172 Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 66.
173 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 32e.

The second point of agreement Kallenberg mentions is "in following Wittgenstein's rejection of the 'Language vs. World' model, Lindbeck appreciates the collapse of the sentence-fact distinction."[174] This point dovetails with the previous one because Lindbeck denies that doctrines obtain direct correspondence to reality, and claims instead that they are simply one part of reality which "is in large part socially constructed and consequently alters in the course of time."[175] Thus he argues that human reality forms through the dynamic relationships among people within their social and communal environments, which also seems to reflect Wittgenstein's thinking. As Fergus Kerr notes, "Again and again Wittgenstein reminds the reader that all meaning, even the very gesture of pointing something out, must have conceptual links with the whole system of the human way of doing things together."[176] To this extent, Lindbeck also reminds the reader that the right use of a religious system's language "cannot be detached from a particular way of behaving," thus all investigation must observe words, thoughts, and actions in motion as they work together naturally within a form of life.[177] Or as Wittgenstein says:

> Just as making a move in chess doesn't consist only in pushing a piece from here to there on the board – nor yet in the thoughts and feelings that accompany the move: but in the circumstances that we call 'playing a game of chess.'[178]

A propositional statement alone means little because "every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life? – In use it *lives*."[179]

Kallenberg's third observation is that "religious language, and specifically doctrines, can undergo change without becoming 'heretical' or 'untrue' to the

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[174] Kallenberg, "Unstuck from Yale," 196.
[175] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 68.
[176] Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (London: SPCK, 1997), 76.
[177] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[178] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 20e.
[179] Ibid., 135e; emphasis original.

language-game."[180] This observation is important because if Lindbeck corresponds to Wittgenstein here, then the case for a Wittgensteinian core to his theory of truth will prove the most likely of the three possibilities. The progression of the comparison so far shows that Lindbeck's idea that knowledge is mediated through distinct and specific ways might coincide with Barth, Thomas, or Wittgenstein. Yet moving out from here to also include the performance of certain practices or actions within specific contexts can only coincide with Thomas and Wittgenstein. But where Lindbeck strains credulity in his delineation of Thomas' notion of analogy to explain the limits of language, Wittgenstein appears able to go the distance.

The Rules of Socially Constructed Reality

Lindbeck muses that it would be helpful "to find an alternative approach that made the intertwining of variability and invariability in matters of faith easier to understand."[181] He then locates this alternative route within the idea that reality (from a human perspective) is for the most part socially constructed and changes through time.[182] Doctrines are a part of the socially constructed reality entailing that they too adapt to the changing environment.[183] Doctrinal change occurs because the context in which the community is located changes and some of the norms of beliefs and practices begin to fit awkwardly within a shifting form of life as "a religious interpretive scheme . . . develops anomalies in its application in new contexts."[184] It follows then that if doctrines are like rules of grammar, then they can guide the community in navigating the structure of Christian language to identify the anomalies and adapt the language to fit new situations. In this way, difficulties are not dealt with

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[180] Kallenberg, "Unstuck from Yale," 197.
[181] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 3.
[182] Ibid., 68.
[183] Ibid., 25.
[184] Ibid.

by coming up with new language to meet the need, but by reassessing and reformulating the existing speech.[185] Or as Wittgenstein says, "The problems are solved, not by coming up with new discoveries, but by assembling what we have long been familiar with."[186]

Regarding the idea of rules, Wittgenstein says one can say that a person is "following a rule" only when that person demonstrates the ability to act according to the rule.[187] Formal rules are like loosely drawn boundary lines on which people agree for a special purpose – such as playing a game. Yet no game is completely bounded by formal rules – e.g. no regulation exists on how hard one may hit a tennis ball – and the concept itself, "game," defies boundaries altogether; for "what still counts as a game, and what no longer does? Can you say where the boundaries are? No."[188] Nevertheless, particular games are identified by particular rules and mastery of these rules comes only through playing the game. This is why Wittgenstein argues that "'following a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule."[189]

In this way, Lindbeck's rule theory of doctrine rather looks Wittgensteinian when he claims that doctrines should be viewed as guidelines for specifying the right use of language, and that doctrines "provide semantic reference" for working through new formulations.[190] This is also why some suggest that Lindbeck is attempting to apply Wittgenstein's idea that theology is like grammar,[191] because Wittgenstein also recommends attending to what is and is not appropriate to say about God by looking

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[185] Ibid., 67.
[186] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 52e.
[187] Ibid., 86-86e.
[188] Ibid., 37e.
[189] Ibid., 87e; emphasis original.
[190] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*., 67.
[191] For instance, Phillips, "Lindbeck's Audience," 144; L. C. Barrett, "Theology as Grammar: Regulative Principles or Paradigms and Practices," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (1988): 155-172. Also see, Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 123e.

to the grammar of theological speech for dealing with new situations.[192] And according to Wittgenstein, the people best equipped to make these kinds of judgments are those who are proficient in the various language-games: "Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can learn it. Not, however, by taking a course of study in it, but through '*experience*.'"[193] Likewise, Lindbeck states, "In short, intelligibility comes from skill, not theory, and credibility comes from good performance, not adherence to independently formulated criteria."[194] Thus, in light of these similarities maybe using a Wittgensteinian framework to interpret Lindbeck is actually the key to resolving many of the concerns about his theory of truth.

A Reflection on the Case for Ludwig Wittgenstein

The case for a Wittgensteinian core to Lindbeck's notion of truth looks more promising than do the other two for at least three reasons: (1) it is a nontheological theory and thus the best candidate for Lindbeck's pretheological approach; (2) there is a close similarity between their approaches to language and their use of the terms 'language-game,' 'rules,' and 'form of life'; and (3) Lindbeck himself references Wittgenstein's explanation of the limits and nature of language to help communicate the variable nature of doctrine through rule theory. But do these reasons mean Wittgenstein's epistemology is the core of Lindbeck's notion of truth, or do they simply indicate that he appropriates Wittgenstein into his own theory more than he does the others? A closer look may show the latter to be the case.

Lindbeck's Terminological Infelicity

First, we must attend to the way Lindbeck explains his use of Wittgenstein's work:

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[192] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 145-149.
[193] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 239e; emphasis original.
[194] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 117.

> Wittgenstein's influence has been strong in some theological circles. While this does not appear to have yet inspired consideration of the problems of doctrinal constancy and change and of agreement and disagreement with which this book is concerned, it has served as a major stimulus to my thinking.[195]

Lindbeck admits that Wittgenstein helped him in his effort to explain his own theory of doctrine, and this influence is evident in the overlapping conceptual language in his presentation of rule theory. But again, the issue is in how Wittgenstein influenced Lindbeck because after claiming that Wittgenstein was a "major stimulus" to his thinking, he then qualifies this statement, saying, "Even if in ways that those more knowledgeable in Wittgenstein might not approve."[196] Now familiar with the ways in which Barth and Thomas influence Lindbeck, this sentence gives a hint that he may approach Wittgenstein in a similar way. Thus, our investigation must consider ways those 'more knowledgeable' of Wittgenstein might not approve of Lindbeck's appropriation.

For instance, Lee Barrett contends that what Lindbeck means by 'rules' in regard to doctrine is not what Wittgenstein means by the term.[197] Evaluating Lindbeck he says, "At times it seems that doctrinal rules have meaning in themselves apart from any particular practice."[198] Strictly speaking, Barrett is correct as Lindbeck argues that regulating the language of faith is not merely part of the doctrinal role, but rather it is "*the only job* that doctrines do in their role as church teachings."[199] As demonstrated earlier, Lindbeck equates doctrines with second-order truth claims so that when he claims that doctrines are rules he thereby cements the understanding of 'rules' within this definition. In other words, Lindbeck contends that rules (doctrines) are literally communally authoritative regulations which, to some extent, exist independently of

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[195] Ibid., 10.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Barrett, "Theology as Grammar," 155-172.
[198] Ibid., 155-156.
[199] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 5; emphasis added.

specific applications and can be adapted to fit changing conditions. As Barrett complains, "All of these remarks suggest that it is possible, at least conceptually, to separate the formal rules from their specific instantiations in practice."[200] The implication is that what Lindbeck means by rules is different from what Wittgenstein means by the term.

As noted above, Lindbeck might easily agree with Wittgenstein that "'following a rule' is a practice," but for Wittgenstein the rule is not separable from the particular practice.[201] One cannot play chess according to the rules of baseball and claim they are still playing a game of chess, for "chess is the game it is in virtue of all its rules."[202] The form and content cannot be divided. This, however, is not what Lindbeck means by rules because sometimes following a doctrinal rule requires changing the form: "One can grasp the self-identical content as distinct from the form only by seeing that the diverse formulations are equivalent and, usually in a second step, by stating the equivalency rules."[203] It is true that Wittgenstein says that various activities can be linked together under a general concept – e.g., 'game' encompasses the different activities called 'games' – but he clearly does not affirm the existence of anything like 'equivalency rules.' There are "family resemblances" to be sure, but there is absolutely no self-identical content that is common to all.[204] So Lindbeck's explanation of following a rule is quite different from Wittgenstein's.

Another charge of terminological confusion leveled against Lindbeck is with his use of the expressions 'language-game' and 'form of life.' Concerning the determination of what is true and what is false, Wittgenstein says, "What is true or false is what human beings *say*; and it is in their *language* that human beings agree.

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[200] Barrett, "Theology as Grammar," 160.
[201] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 87ᵉ.
[202] Ibid., 86ᵉ.
[203] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 79.
[204] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 36ᵉ.

This is agreement not in opinions, but rather in form of life."[205] This idea may sound

similar to Lindbeck's understanding of second-order propositions, but there is actually

a substantive difference. For example, Lindbeck asserts:

> If the form of life and understanding of the world shaped by an authentic use
> of the Christian stories does in fact correspond to God's being and will, then
> the proper use of *Christus est Dominus* is not only intrasystematically but also
> ontologically true.[206]

Phillips objects:

> If Lindbeck had properly understood the notion of a form of life, he would
> have seen that it is only within such contexts that the question of what it
> means to ask whether a statement is true or false can arise. So if we want to
> ask whether a doctrine is true or false, we have first to ask what it means to
> speak of truth or falsity in this religious context.[207]

It was demonstrated earlier that contrary to Phillips' assertion Lindbeck does not

actually support an unmediated notion of reality, but Phillips is correct to point out

here that Lindbeck does indeed hold the notion that ontological truth (God's being

and will) is an objective reality to which a form of life must correspond. So if

Lindbeck is seeking to follow Wittgenstein, then Phillips is right to object because

Wittgenstein intends something rather different by this concept.

The argument is that Wittgenstein never meant anything quite so grand or all-

encompassing by these phrases as does Lindbeck. Although Wittgenstein provides no

clear definitions, Nicholson looks to Wittgenstein's use of these terms and says,

"Wittgenstein implies that activities such as shopping, building, fighting battles,

calculating, and so on are forms of life," and each form of life may consist of several

combinations of language-games.[208] "Moreover," says Nicholson, "it is not possible,

other than as a conceptual abstraction, to neatly extract a language game from the

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[205] Ibid., 94ᵉ; emphasis original.
[206] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 51.
[207] Phillips, "Lindbeck's Audience," 146.
[208] Nicholson, "Abusing Wittgenstein," 620-621.

form of life in which it is embedded."[209] This objection overlaps with the previous one regarding rules, and it shows that even though Lindbeck employs Wittgenstein's terms he did not exactly represent his concepts. For if Wittgenstein intends "language-game" to serve as a reminder that "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life," which looks like "giving orders, . . . reporting an event, . . . making up a story; and reading one, acting in a play,"[210] etc., then a religion cannot itself be a form of life. As Kerr notes, "It is impossible to apply the expression to any phenomenon on the scale of 'religion' – which must include innumerable language-laced activities."[211] Yet this is exactly what Lindbeck intends: "A religion thought of as comparable to a cultural system, as a set of language games correlated with a form of life, may as a whole correspond or not correspond to what a theist calls God's being and will."[212] A faithful application of Wittgenstein means one cannot say that an entire religious system is 'a form of life,' but that it consists of many different forms of life.

Having said this, the purpose of this section is not to chastise Lindbeck for abusing, misconstruing, or misunderstanding Wittgenstein, but to show that Lindbeck's notion of truth cannot be located with Wittgenstein. As Ashford says, "This is not to say that Lindbeck misunderstood Wittgenstein; it is simply to say that he adapted Wittgenstein for his own purposes."[213] As with Barth and Thomas, aspects of Wittgenstein can help explain aspects of Lindbeck, but his work overall still remains set apart from these scholars. Thus, our search to locate Lindbeck's epistemology within the history of ideas must move beyond the usual arguments.

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[209] Ibid., 621.
[210] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 15^e; emphasis original.
[211] Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 31.
[212] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 37.
[213] Ashford, "Wittgenstein's Theologians," 369.

Chapter 3

RELOCATING THE CONVERSATION

Introduction

While the investigation into some of the more obvious influences on Lindbeck's

theory resulted in a dead end for locating his epistemology, this does not mean hope is lost

but that more imagination is required. For example, Nancey Murphy and James McClendon

highlight Lindbeck's rejection of foundationalism and his communal approach to decision

making and conclude that his theology "is through and through postmodern."[1] Conversely,

Peter Ochs believes that making such assertions about Lindbeck's theology is a mistake

because by doing so critics "misrepresent Lindbeck's 'cultural-linguistic alternative' as a

substantive theological claim rather than as a heuristic that is merely instrumental to his

scriptural reasoning."[2]

Ochs is perhaps on to something with the first part of his statement, but then weakens

his point when he makes 'scriptural reasoning' the theological focus of the cultural-linguistic

approach. Scriptural Reasoning is the interreligious practice of reading scriptural texts of

other faiths – usually of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism – in order to better understand

differences as well as gain fresh insights into one's own tradition.[3] While our research so far

has revealed that Lindbeck's theory is indeed a heuristic, it also shows that his approach is

instrumental to his biblical hermeneutic and not to his scriptural reasoning. To be sure, the

practice of scriptural reasoning is not excluded by his approach but neither does it depend

upon it: "The cultural-linguistic approach can allow a strong case for interreligious dialogue,

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[1] Nancey Murphy and J. W. McClendon Jr., "Distinguishing Modern and Postmodern Theologies," *Modern Theology* 5, no. 3 (April 1989): 207.
[2] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) 36.
[3] For an insightful resource on the subject, see, David Ford and C. C Pecknold, eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

but not for any single type of such dialogue."[4] The point is, intertextuality is Lindbeck's substantive theological claim and the cultural-linguistic theory (inclusive of rule theory) is his epistemic method for making this claim. But because the cultural-linguistic approach is chiefly a pragmatic tool, Ochs believes that Lindbeck is best understood through the lens of American pragmatist Charles Peirce.[5]

In considering these two suggestions regarding postmodernism and pragmatism, a few observations are in order. First, Lindbeck himself is ambivalent towards postmodernism, referring to it as a "parasitic negation" of modernity.[6] And although he says that his theological approach could be called "postmodern" (among others), "postliberal" best describes what he has in mind.[7] The clue here is that Lindbeck's epistemology is something like postmodernism, but not exactly. Second, Lindbeck asserts that "if theologians happen to need an epistemology, . . . and when only a bad one is available, they have the responsibility to baptize it as thoroughly as possible."[8] Thus Ochs is not wrong to insist that Lindbeck's approach is pragmatic, but Peirce – similar to Barth, Thomas, and Wittgenstein – might only serve Lindbeck's approach rather than provide a sufficient comprehensive interpretive framework. Especially when we consider the "anti-metaphysical bias . . . grounded in Ochs' use of Peirce."[9] For the discussion has demonstrated that Lindbeck does not deny the independent metaphysical existence of the world, but rather, as Jeffrey Hensley notes, "Lindbeck's point is that if theology is understood intratextually, then the biblical narratives

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[4] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009), 39; emphasis added.
[5] Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 36.
[6] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxxi. Also see, George Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 50-51.
[7] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 121.
[8] George Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (O 1986): 368.
[9] Gavin D'Costa, "Catholics Reading the Scripture of Other Religions: Some Reflections," in eds. Catarina Belo & Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *Mission in Dialogue: Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald* (Louvain: Peeters, 2012), 33-43.

shape the way Christians view the extrascriptural world."[10] So the two clues with which the

investigation will continue are that Lindbeck's theory is like postmodernism and like

pragmatism, yet does not wholly fit within either epistemic category.

A New Question

Short of implying that Lindbeck conjures his notion of truth from thin air, a way must

be found to account for its existence. Therefore, rather than asking, 'How did these thinkers

influence his theory?', we might ask instead, 'What influenced Lindbeck to pursue these

particular scholars in the first place?' One thing to consider when asking this question is that

the various 'ideas' in the history of ideas do not belong solely to Western thinkers. Ideas

belong to human thinkers and human philosophies branch out from many different times,

places, and cultures. With this in mind, one detail which is noted sometimes by way of

introduction, but has seemingly yet to be seriously considered, is that Lindbeck lived the first

seventeen years of his life in East Asia.[11]

In a 2006 interview he recalls that during these formative years he immersed himself

in Chinese thought and culture through conversations with local friends and through reading

"all the relevant literature I could lay my hands on."[12] Lindbeck claims that these influences,

along with his family's close friendship with a local pastor and his wife, helped implant East

Asian ways of thinking in his mind. He recounts that this couple were "warmly Christian and

yet, in their manners, Confucian to the core."[13] He then confesses, "I am inclined to think that

without these China-implanted modes of thought, I would not have been attracted to the

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[10] Jeffrey Hensley, "Are Postliberals Necessarily Antirealists? Reexamining the Metaphysics of Lindbeck's Postliberal Theology," in *The Nature of Confession*, ed. Timothy R. Phillips and Dennis Okholm (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 76.
[11] One of the more extensive is Jaakko Rusama, but he does not go on to evaluate this connection. See, Jaakko Rusama, "The Home of Hearing: George Lindbeck's Understanding of Community" (University of Helsinki, 2011), 23-24.
[12] George Lindbeck, "Atonement and the Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment," *Pro Ecclesia* V, no. 2 (1996): 28.
[13] Ibid.

thinkers from whose ideas I have cobbled together the outlook for which I seem to be chiefly known."[14]

Most of Lindbeck's research deals with "Jews, Roman Catholics and non-Lutheran Protestants,"[15] but concerning his experience with Chinese people and culture, he says, "Their tacit influence on my thinking, however, lies deepest and it is only gradually that I have become aware of how pervasive it has been."[16] Could this be why Lindbeck cannot be made to fit the 'usual' patterns of speaking about truth? Could the context for effectively evaluating his work actually be a feature which never explicitly appears anywhere in it?

What is Like Postmodernism and Like Pragmatism but is Not Either?

In a comparative study between the Chinese conception of *Dao* (meaning something like 'way,' 'road,' 'path,' or 'teaching') and the Western conception of 'Truth,' Keqian Xu sees a fusion on the horizon as Western postmodern ideas move ever closer to ancient Chinese philosophic concepts.[17] In other words, while there are still important differences, there are some ways in which postmodern ideas of truth are like Chinese notions of "appropriate activity."[18] Thus, if Lindbeck's theory is built upon Chinese epistemological categories, Xu's observation may help explain why his epistemology is like postmodernism.

As regards the second notion, that Lindbeck's theory is like pragmatism, Chad Hansen says of ancient Chinese philosophy: "Given the structure of doctrines in the philosophical texts of the period, a pragmatic interpretation of classical Chinese is a more explanatorily coherent theory than a semantic (truth-based) alternative"[19] That is to say,

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[14] Ibid.
[15] George Lindbeck, "Confession and Community: An Israel-Like View of the Church," *Christian Century* 107, no. 16 (My 1990): 492.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Keqian Xu, "Chinese 'Dao' and Western 'Truth': A Comparative and Dynamic Perspective," *Asian Social Science* 6, no. 12 (2010): 42-49.
[18] Ibid., 45, 47-48.
[19] Chad Hansen, "Chinese Language, Chinese Philosophy, and 'Truth'," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 44, no. 3 (1985): 493.

where Western philosophy is concerned with the placement of words and the grammatical structure of sentences for determining truth, Chinese philosophy is not. Hansen argues that the main emphasis of Chinese writings is the concern for shaping life around what is best for society, thus they focus more on pragmatic issues than on metaphysical concerns.[20] This is also why translating certain Chinese characters (such as *Dao*) simply as 'truth,' is liable to cause Western thinkers to misunderstand these Chinese philosophical notions. For as Chenyang Li states, truth viewed from this perspective means that "a person merely rich in factual knowledge and semantic truth is nevertheless ignorant."[21]

From this brief survey, the two clues regarding postmodernism and pragmatism indicate that Lindbeck might adhere to East Asian modes of thought for developing his approach. If so, this will go a long way in explaining why many Western scholars have found it difficult to comprehend the full scope of his theory and may also provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding Lindbeck's notion of truth.

Introducing a New Context to the Discussion

To test the possibility that East Asian modes of thought substantially influence Lindbeck's theory, the following section will look at three social concepts found in Confucianism to see how they compare to Lindbeck.[22] The intent of this comparison is not to claim that Lindbeck's epistemology is specifically Confucian, but to suggest that the epistemic orientation of Chinese philosophy in general might provide a better background for understanding the overall epistemic nature of his theory. The survey of Confucianism, then, serves as a way to introduce this unique background to the discussion. Thus, issues sometimes associated with Confucianism – such as that it oppresses women[23] or is

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[20] Ibid., 493-495.
[21] Chenyang Li, *The Tao Encounters the West: Explorations in Comparative Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 62.
[22] Confucianism is a philosophical system based largely on the teachings of Confucius, the sixth to fifth-century B.C. Chinese philosopher.
[23] Li, *The Tao Encounters the West*, 89-114.

incompatible with democracy,[24] – are not immediately relevant to the proposal being made here. For the purpose of this comparison is not to argue for a particular tradition or practice, but to identify a particular epistemological framework.

Because this section will introduce a whole new context to the discussion, it will help to keep three things in mind. First, remember Lindbeck's notion that a Christian truth claim corresponds to the ultimate reality of God's being and will "only as it is used in the activities of adoration, proclamation, obedience, promise-hearing, and promise-keeping which shape individuals and communities into conformity to the mind of Christ."[25] Second, keep in mind that even as he places great importance on the performance of these activities, the primary intent of his theory of doctrine is to explain "how new doctrines can develop in the course of time, and how old ones can be forgotten or become peripheral . . . [also,] how old doctrines can be reinterpreted to fit new circumstances."[26] Third, the discussion so far shows that Lindbeck believes that correspondence to ultimate reality is possible through what he calls categorial truth, but it is not yet clear how one determines this correspondence.

The Principles of *Ren, Li,* and *Yi*

One important Confucian concept is the guiding social ideal called *ren* (also written *jen*).[27] This concept is something like "humaneness" or "benevolence," and it "expresses the Confucian ideal of cultivating humanity, developing human faculties, sublimating one's personality and upholding human rights."[28] It is a kind of transcendent yet immanent quality that one must cultivate, and although many refer to *ren* conventionally as a principle, virtue,

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[24] Ibid., 163-189.

[25] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 54.

[26] Ibid., 64.

[27] See, Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 1 *The Period of the Philosophers*, trans. Derk Bodde, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 69.

[28] Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai, *The Story of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1961), 24.

ideal, or even a doctrine, it is nothing less than the essence of social harmony.[29] A major

component for achieving this Confucian goal is through the principle of *li* – ritual and

propriety. As Karyn Lai explains, "From the practical point of view, it is through observing

and practising *li*-behaviours that one learns about *ren*."[30] Here we might recall Lindbeck's

notion of performance and correspondence, for one cannot observe these requirements in

isolation because *li* are entirely relational and are the only way to realize *ren*: "Each

individual's project of self-cultivation," says Yew Leong Wong, "is conducted within the

social context: it is through establishing oneself as a member of the society that one cultivates

oneself."[31]

Looking further at *ren* and *li*, Shun Kwong-Loi notes that there is some debate among

scholars concerning Confucius' conception of how the two principles relate. He labels one

interpretation "definitionalist," because adherents claim that strict observance of existing *li*

rules is the only way to achieve *ren*.[32] Within this understanding no change or revision can be

made to *li* practices, and exact performance of these rules is "the sole criterion for

distinguishing between the possession and lack of *jen*."[33] The other view he calls the

"instrumentalist" interpretation.[34] This reading of Confucius claims that "each of the two is

distinct from and intelligible independently of the other. . . . However, as a matter of fact, the

two are related by causal relations which make one a means to the other."[35] In other words,

the definitionalist says that the only way to identify the presence of *ren* is through exact

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[29] See, Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 170-178.

[30] Karyn Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 29.

[31] Wong Yew Leong, "*Li* and Change" (presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, 1998), http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Asia/AsiaWong.htm (accessed November 4, 2012).Ibid.

[32] Shun Kwong-Loi, "*Jen* and *Li* in the Analects," *Philosophy East & West*, 43, no. 3 (July 93), 460.

[33] Ibid., 462.

[34] Ibid., 460.

[35] Ibid., 461.

adherence to *li* practices, whereas the instrumentalist says that *li* practices have more to do with an attitude or disposition than with particular practices. A delineation that appears to be similar to Lindbeck's explanation of cognitive-propositional and experiential-expressive views.

Shun goes on to propose an alternative reading that recognizes the role *li* play in shaping the *ren* ideal, and also "allows for the possibility of departing from or revising an existing rule of *li* if there is good reason for doing so."[36] A suggestion that once again seems similar to Lindbeck's desire to propose a theory which acknowledges the changing and unchanging nature of doctrine. Nevertheless, for Confucianism, Shun gives an example of what this approach might look like by referencing a teaching of Confucius:

> Ritual calls for caps of hemp, though nowadays silk is used, because it is more economical. I go along with others in this.
> Ritual calls for one to bow at the foot of the stairs [before the emperor]. Nowadays people bow at the top of the stairs, but this is presumptuous. Although it means differing from others, I perform the bow at the foot of the stairs.[37]

In this statement, Confucius affirms the importance of existing *li* practices for achieving *ren* but allows for the possibility that alterations of these practices might be made when the context changes. As Wong says, "The essentially functional character of *li* suggests that *li* practices are evaluated in terms of their efficacy in realising the Confucian objectives."[38] Thus *ren*, in some sense, transcends *li* so that a community can evaluate and possibly revise existing practices in order to maintain the ability of *li* to express (correspond to) *ren*. In this case, the first part of the Confucian quote shows that people had the desire to follow the rule regarding ceremonial caps, but for economic reasons it became necessary to wear silk caps instead of the prescribed hemp. In this way, says Shun, one "can justify departure from a *li* rule only when the efficacy of the *li* rule in serving its purpose remains unaffected."[39] In the

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[36] Ibid., 474.
[37] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 9.3, 60.
[38] Wong, "*Li* and Change."
[39] Shun, "*Jen* and *Li* in the Analects," 464.

second part, Confucius states that there is no reason, except for arrogance, to alter the rule of

bowing to a ruler before ascending the steps to the upper hall. In the first instance he follows

the consensus for the revision of *li*, in this second instance he does not because the reason for

the change is 'presumptuous.' As Lindbeck might say, majority agreement is sufficient but

not necessary for determining the *consensus fidelium*.[40] In any case, here we find a

description of practices and beliefs that is comparable to Lindbeck's explanation of doctrinal

change and constancy.

Yeo Khiok-khng recognizes that because the written character, "*li*," is usually

translated into English as "ritual" or "rite," Christians, "especially Western Protestants," are

prone to think of it in a negative light.[41] But within a Confucian understanding, "the

connotations often associated with the terms, such as 'wooden,' 'fixed,' 'uncompromising,'

'mechanical,' 'imposing,' with the overtones of 'lifeless,' 'formality,' or 'going through the

motions'—are all off the mark when it comes to the meaning of *li*."[42] *Li* are performed

because, when properly applied, they are constitutive of *ren*, which is social harmony. One

cannot achieve *ren* through mere cognitive knowledge of existing *li* practices, but if with

genuine regard one performs *li* then these acts become the medium for achieving *ren*.[43]

Another crucial ingredient for achieving *ren* is a specific disposition called *yi* (as we

discuss this principle, keep in mind Lindbeck's explanation for how to discern

correspondence). Lai says that the concept of *yi* has to do with "'appropriateness' or 'right,' .

. . that is, there is emphasis on doing the 'right' thing in a particular context, rather than

merely following a rule or norm."[44] Moreover, a person who is experienced in *li* is able to

determine what is proper in particular circumstances, as well as in the broader activity of

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[40] Lindbeck, "Atonement," 148; also see footnote 6.
[41] Yeo Khiok-khng, "*Li* and Law in the Analects and Galatians: A Chinese Understanding of Ritual and Propriety," *Asia Journal of Theology* 19, no. 2 (October 2005): 316.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Wong, "*Li* and Change."
[44] Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 31.

making revisions and alterations to existing practices. As Shun states, "It seems that *yi* has to do with the appropriateness or rightness of one's behavior, which is not just a matter of following *li*," rather *yi* requires a careful yet adaptable relation between *ren* and *li*.[45] Shun demonstrates this point with two corresponding observations:

> (1) That observance of *li* is a means to cultivating and expressing *jen*; (2) that revision of or departure from an actually existing *li* rule can be justified by economic or some other consideration, as long as this does not affect its efficacy in performing the function described in (1); and (3) that the general observance of *li* is, at least in part, constitutive of *jen*; (4) a generally conservative attitude toward the existing *li* practices.[46]

To be sure, this delineation is as close to a systematic method for evaluating 'truth' that one will find in Confucianism, and Shun sums up this idea, saying:

> Since the concept itself is made available to members of the community by the existing linguistic practice, any revision has to proceed against the background of a general acceptance of the existing practice, thereby ruling out the possibility of a more comprehensive revision. This accounts for a generally conservative attitude toward the linguistic practice actually in existence.[47]

To this extent, perhaps we can identify some substantial correlations between Lindbeck's view of truth and these Confucian principles. I recognize that this brief survey oversimplifies these principles, but the hope is that the discussion has nonetheless provided us with enough information to serve our purpose here. Thus, the following comparative study is not meant to be a comprehensive or definitive evaluation of Lindbeck's work in light of Confucian ideals, but rather to serve as a tentative test for what might prove to be a fruitful way forward in the discussion.

A Comparison of Lindbeck with Confucianism

Along with the point stated above about the tentative nature of this proposal, I must also note that I do not read Chinese texts and so must rely on English translations and commentaries for the delineation of Confucianism and Chinese philosophy. Nevertheless, the

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[45] Shun, "*Jen* and *Li* in the Analects," 474.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid. 470.

English scholarly resources on the subject are prolific and it is because of this material that I am able to put forward this original contribution in the study of Lindbeck.

That said, one might develop a comparative study of Lindbeck's work with readings of Confucianism in a number of ways, because if the hypothesis is that his theory is rooted in East Asian thought then, theoretically, one might start anywhere in his work and find significant connections. Thus, with no particular guidance for where to begin and yet needing to begin somewhere, this section will springboard from the brief analogy Lindbeck uses to illustrate his theory of truth by first comparing his view with aspects of Confucian thought in particular and then with Chinese philosophy in general.

The Lordship of Christ and the Crusader

Recall Lindbeck's differentiation between intrasystematically true and ontologically true statements.[48] An intrasystematically true statement need not be ontologically true, but an ontologically true statement must be intrasystematically true.[49] With this explanation he provides the following illustration:

> The crusader's battle cry "*Christus est Dominus*," for example, is false when used to authorize cleaving the skull of the infidel (even though the same words in other contexts may be a true utterance). When thus employed, it contradicts the Christian understanding of Lordship as embodying, for example, suffering servanthood.[50]

This illustration causes some critics to understand Lindbeck to mean that a person can negate the truth of a statement by acting in a way that is false to its proper utterance. For example, William Placher asserts:

> Even assuming that one could argue back from the virtue of the tellers to the truth of their tale, any such argument on behalf of Christian narratives either would fall victim to a strong form of relativism, . . . or else would have to claim that the Christian community makes people demonstrably more virtuous than other communities do.[51]

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[48] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[49] Ibid., 50-51.
[50] Ibid., 50.
[51] William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville: WJK, 1989), 165.

Likewise, Jay Richards argues that Lindbeck's notion of truth makes "it difficult for someone to be a hypocrite (at least for long)."[52] For if the idea is that someone can actually falsify a claim through improper use, then improper application cannot be considered hypocritical: "Having violated this claim, one could then *deny* its truth, since one's actions make it false."[53]

Nevertheless, Peter Thuesen argues that more important than these concerns, is the fact "that Christians do not always agree on what counts as coherent—practically or linguistically."[54] In other words, if truth obtains only through the appropriate application of a statement, then whose understanding of 'appropriate' is to be authoritative? Addressing these concerns in concert with the Confucian ideas discussed above might bring some clarity to this situation. And to this end, a congruity of ideas may be found in at least two ways.

Determining Correspondence

The first way that Lindbeck parallels Confucian philosophy is in how correspondence to an 'ideal' or 'truth' obtains. H. G. Creel notes that Confucius taught his disciples that "it is not enough to be sincere merely in thought and in speech. True sincerity calls for action."[55] One must be sincere in one's thinking and doing, which means expressing one's thinking and doing in the appropriate ways.[56] His point is that Confucius' main concern was that members seek to *be* true, not to prove the actions of *li* somehow verify the independent truths of *ren*. The truth of the presence of *ren*, and the truth of the ability of *li* to achieve *ren*, is realized through the process of living them out. As Ralph Covell explains, in Chinese thought "truth cannot be proved logically, only grasped experientially. . . . The emphasis is on the whole,

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[52] J. W. Richards, "Truth and Meaning in George Lindbeck's 'The Nature of Doctrine,'" *Religious studies* (1997): 43.
[53] Ibid., 44.
[54] Peter J. Thuesen, "George Lindbeck on Truth," *Lutheran Quarterly* 10 (1996): 52.
[55] H. G. Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way* (New York: Harper and Bothers, 1960), 90.
[56] Ibid., 84.

not the parts; on the fullness of reality more than on reason."[57] This might be somewhat of an

overstatement, as 'logic' and 'reason' are certainly involved, but it is indeed the case that

these elements are situated as one part of a multifaceted process. In other words, the truth of a

propositional statement is not proved merely by its logical correspondence to other cognitive

statements, it must also be genuinely lived out and allowed to engage the fullness of reality.

For "the value of learning," Li Fu Chen explains, "lies in its application and not in the

quantity of 'knowledge' acquired."[58] As regards Lindbeck's illustration, the statement "Christ

is Lord" may certainly be cognitively true (i.e., logically consistent with other cognitive

statements of the community), but this fact alone amounts to very little in the discussion of

ultimate meaning.[59]

Some of Lindbeck's critics assume that if they can locate the one thing that holds

together his theory of truth, they will be able to prove its logical falsity. Placher believes this

weak point is Lindbeck's emphasis on virtue,[60] while Richards thinks the "perplexing"

component is his dependence on performance.[61] Yet a passage from the *Analects* shows that

if East Asian modes of thought influences Lindbeck's theory, then identifying the one thing

that holds it together may not be so simple.

> The Master said, You might have sufficient knowledge to gain a position, but if you
> do not have the humaneness [*ren*] needed to hold on to it, then although you gain it,
> you will surely lose it. You might have sufficient knowledge to gain a position and
> the humaneness needed to hold on to it, but if you do not administer it with dignity
> [virtue], the common people will not respect you. You might have sufficient
> knowledge to gain a position, the humaneness needed to hold it, and may administer it
> with dignity, but if your actions do not accord with ritual [*li*], the results will be less
> than good.[62]

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[57] Ralph R. Covell, *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*
(Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 12.
[58] Fu Chen Li, *The Confucian Way: A New and Systematic Study of the "Four Books,"* trans.
Shih Shun Liu (China: The Commercial Press, 1972), 44.
[59] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 53.
[60] Placher, *Unapologetic Theology*, 165-66.
[61] Richards, "Truth and Meaning," 43-44.
[62] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 15.33.

This passage demonstrates that responsibility for reaching Confucian objectives does not belong with any one criterion. It is not just virtue any more than it is just performance or just knowledge. The conditions for attaining *ren* occur only when each principle functions appropriately, and only by working together as a whole is the ideal reached.[63] If one must speak in terms of correspondence, then correspondence is *realized* in a community that appreciates effective practices (*li*) for cultivating *ren*, and whose members live them out appropriately (*yi*).[64]

Lindbeck also insists that a propositional statement alone, no matter how 'logical,' is insufficient for attaining the full meaning and intent or 'truth' of a statement. For example, referring to Paul and Luther he says:

> What they were concerned to assert is that the only way to assert the truth is to do something about it, i.e., to commit oneself to a way of life, and this concern, it would seem, is wholly congruent with the suggestion that it is only through the performatory use of religious utterances that they acquire propositional force.[65]

Nevertheless, acquiring propositional force does not automatically make the utterance true.[66] The crusader's performatory use of a religious utterance definitely achieved propositional force, but it was a false proposition (i.e., wrongly applied). Thus Lindbeck argues that the particular performance by the crusader is false (inappropriate) and unable to achieve coherence with the true meaning of 'Christ is Lord.' An assertion that is reminiscent of the Confucian teaching on the rectification of names.

Chenyang Li explains that the rectification of names is one of the most important doctrines of Confucius, and it is concerned "not so much with proper names as with names as general terms, that is, kind names and descriptions."[67] For example, a king is not a king

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[63] See, Wong, "*Li* and Change."
[64] See, Creel, *Confucius and the Chinese Way*, 84-85.
[65] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 52.
[66] See, Ibid., 55.
[67] Li, *The Tao*, 63, 64.

merely because of his title, but because he embodies the socio-ethical expectations of how a king ought to behave. As Chung-Ying Cheng explains:

> This doctrine does not just require definitional consistency, but implies a recognition of principles; that is, recognition of standards of action that can be used to judge what is true, good, and right, on the one hand, and what is false, bad, and wrong, on the other. . . . But because moral knowledge of right and wrong in a normal situation carries a command for doing right, to rectify names, therefore, is related to the program for carrying out the command for doing the appropriate thing in accordance with the proper situation. This is a reason why rectifying names has practical significance for human conduct and is not merely a matter of the correct use of language.[68]

Again, judging what is true or false is not determined only by moral knowledge, but is determined as this knowledge is carried out "*for doing the appropriate thing in accordance with the proper situation.*"[69]

Comparatively, Lindbeck is not simply concerned with whether or not the crusader's declaration is semantically true, but with whether or not the performative utterance correlates with the Christian understanding of the Lordship of Christ.[70] He seems to imply that because the crusader wears the name 'Christian,' his actions ought to accord with what it means to function as a disciple of Christ; "embodying, for example, suffering servanthood."[71] Chenyang Li says, "For Confucius, names . . . imply a person's proper role in a nexus of social relationships and also imply social responsibilities."[72] Lindbeck similarly argues that a Christian understanding of Lordship is mediated by "a total pattern of speaking, thinking, feeling, and acting,"[73] and when a person lives and thinks in these communally accepted ways, it is assumed they possess the capacity to truly declare that Christ is Lord.[74] This capacity does not make the declaration true, but truth and meaning are completed or realized

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[68] Chung-Ying Cheng, *New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 224.
[69] Ibid.; emphasis added.
[70] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Li, *The Tao*, 66.
[73] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[74] See, Ibid., 54.

through the proper relation of knowledge, practice, and virtue.[75] So being Christian – having the name 'Christian' – also implies being Christianly – behaving like a Christian.

It is also for this reason that Lindbeck judges the crusader's expression of the Christian name to be false, bad, and wrong; although if rectified, "the same words in other contexts may be a true utterance" because "utterances are intrasystematically true *when they cohere with the total relevant context*, which, in the case of a religion when viewed in cultural-linguistic terms, is *not only other utterances but also the correlative forms of life*."[76] In short, internal correspondence among propositional statements is not enough to achieve correspondence to ultimate reality. One must incorporate the appropriate activities with a genuine regard towards their adequacy and proper performance for efficacy. With this understanding in mind, the second way Lindbeck's theory coincides with East Asian ways of thinking is in how one determines faithful doctrinal reformulations.

Determining Faithfulness

Lindbeck seeks to show that an innate balance exists between faithful observance of communal practices – which are the medium for achieving Christian objectives – and faithfully maintaining their efficacy for achieving these objectives in the midst of change.[77] Stated simply, he does not attempt to convince readers to adopt a specific philosophy for determining faithful doctrinal reformulations, and even less does he seek to provide a systematic method for doing so.[78] What he attempts to get readers to recognize is that despite the absence of an abiding conscious intent or method for determining such things, Christian doctrine nevertheless behaves within a pattern "of constancy and change, unity and diversity."[79] This describes the doctrinal setting and empirical environment for evaluating

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[75] Ibid., 50.
[76] Ibid.; emphasis added.
[77] See, Ibid., 65.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 64.

and developing adequate theories about the nature of doctrine.[80] A theory, in other words, should not propose how Christians might go about ascertaining faithful reformulations, but should seek to describe how specific doctrines have functioned in the history of the church. The root of Lindbeck's approach is to observe first and reflect second.[81]

Thuesen asserts that even if one can agree that the crusader's actions were false, the same cannot be said for deciding what constitutes a true statement because "Christians do not always agree on what counts as coherent—practically or linguistically."[82] He provides a "practical" example of a pastor who "quotes the biblical proposition 'God is love' (1 John 4:8)," and then interprets it in a way that contradicts another pastor who quotes the same proposition.[83] Thuesen challenges: "Which pastor, to use Lindbeck's terminology, is making an intrasystematically true proposition?"[84] One important point of clarification in response is to remember that for Lindbeck, the proposition "God is love" from 1 John 4:8, as bare text, is not yet a 'biblical' proposition. This propositional statement is imbedded within the entire canonical ecclesial world in which it acquires meaning and significance. So only from this perspective can one then ask which utterance, or more specifically which preaching, is an intrasystematically true proposition. "The significant things," Lindbeck declares, "are the distinctive patterns of story, belief, ritual, and behavior that give 'love' and 'God' their specific and sometimes contradictory meanings."[85] With this in mind, turning back to Thuesen's questions, who is qualified to decide which preaching is the true one?

In the *Analects*, one who is well suited to make such judgments is called a *junzi*, an exemplary person. This is one who possesses creative propriety: "The Master said, The gentleman [*junzi*] makes rightness the substance [*yi*], practices it through ritual [*li*], displays it

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[80] Ibid., xxxiii.
[81] Ibid., xxxv.
[82] Thuesen, "George Lindbeck on Truth," 52.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 53.
[85] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 28.

with humility, brings it to completion with trustworthiness."[86] Yet, while this person is

practiced in *li*, determining the appropriate interpretation among the possibilities is not a

simple matter of choosing the one closest to existing interpretations.[87] As Thuesen pointed

out, the difficulties with this approach make resolution nearly impossible. But neither is a

junzi concerned primarily with determining which is the 'true' one – at least not in any kind

of a linguistic-scientific way. For the *junzi* seeks harmony rather than agreement.[88] Wong

describes this person, saying:

> Such a person would be well-versed in the specific *li* practices that govern her roles
> and the situations she is in. The properly motivated member of the society observes
> the cues available to determine dispositions and attitudes of her counterparts in the
> same situation, and thereby determine the best course of action in such situations.[89]

Thus, good and proper judgment does not occur through mere knowledge of cognitive

propositions which function as pre-established formulations for dealing with any and all

situations. Rather, the properly motivated person, the *junzi*, is one who has acquired a high

level of indigeneity within the community. They apprehend social cues by being attentive to

people's words and facial expressions, and they can *sense* appropriate action.[90] They are at

home in their environment, responding naturally to each situation with little conscious

thought for what is 'right.'

     Though the *junzi* seeks harmony, this does not mean that there is no disagreement. A

Confucian understanding of harmony "means that the *junzi* may disagree with others, and yet

he would still treat others with respect and regard for the obtaining of the greater good. He

may therefore thrive on this disagreement by making his disagreement a source of fruitful

and creative relationship."[91] A *junzi* could be any person from any social level, but essentially

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[86] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 15.18.
[87] Wong, "*Li* and Change."
[88] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 13.23.
[89] Wong, "*Li* and Change."
[90] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, 12.20.
[91] Chung-Ying Cheng, "On Harmony as Transformation: Paradigms from the *Yijing*," in *Philosophy of the Yi: Unity and Dialectics*, ed. Chung-Ying Cheng and On-Cho Ng, (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 17.

"the *junzi*, as the exemplary person, is one who through disciplined practice sets in motion a sympathetic vibration for others to follow. That path will be the way of *yi*, appropriateness, rightness, or morality."[92]

So how does this teaching compare to Lindbeck? In regard to judging which view is best, he states, "Those who are able to judge in these matters, . . . are those who have effectively interiorized a religion. . . . They know by connaturality, as Aquinas might say, whether specific usages are in conformity to the spirit, the interior rule of faith."[93] Ascertaining a faithful practice or formulation is less about cognitive reflection and more about interiorized religion. Lindbeck claims that "everyone knows this intuitively," but having to admit less intellectual control causes "the fear of relativistic anomie."[94] Yet "competent practitioners" will be members of the mainstream community, and "while they may have no formal theological training,

> they are likely to be saturated with the language of Scripture and/or liturgy. One might, perhaps, call them flexibly devout: they have so interiorized the grammar of their religion that they are reliable judges, not directly of the doctrinal formulations (for these may be too technical for them to understand), but of the acceptability or unacceptability of the consequences of these formulations in ordinary religious life and language.[95]

A major component of Lindbeck's explanation is the consideration of consequences. In seeking harmony the question of true or false has more to do with what is best for achieving Christian objectives. Lindbeck insists that this way of looking at things, "instead of undermining the authority of doctrines, may be better adapted to enhancing their regulative efficacy than are modernized and relativizing propositional interpretations."[96]

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[92] David Jones, "Teaching/Learning Through Confucius: Navigating Our Way Through The Analects" (Education About Asia), vol. 5 no. 2, Fall 2000, http://www.asian-studies.org/eaa/jones.htm, (accessed December 5, 2012).

[93] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 65.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 86.

[96] Ibid., 93.

This idea is similar to Shun's second observation about the relation between *ren* and *li*: "That revision of or departure from an actually existing *li* rule can be justified by economic or some other consideration, as long as this does not affect its *efficacy* in performing the function described in (1) [i.e., cultivating and expressing *ren*]."[97] As this understanding relates to Christianity, Lindbeck says that the competent person will ably discern that "whatever coheres with the Gospel recitals of Jesus' Spirit-guided enactment of his identity as God's Messiah is a possible interpretation, a possible scriptural word from God, and whatever does not cohere is to be rejected."[98] This idea is surely less decisive than cognitive-propositional approaches, but it leaves room for doctrinal reformulation in an ever changing environment rather than trying to delimit the only 'right' or 'true' expression for all time.[99] This is important because "when other criteria are not decisive, the interpretation which seems most likely in these particular circumstances to serve the upbuilding of the community of faith in its God-willed witness to the world is the one to be preferred."[100]

Lindbeck's view of the situation may not look like the usual way most Christians speak about doctrine, but maybe this depends on one's location in the discussion. From another perspective doctrine is one part of the whole in which self-cultivation occurs through harmonious participation. As Wong says, this need not mean that doctrines will either fall into meaninglessness or rigidity, because

> it is an adequate understanding of what the Confucian objectives entail and the structure of the situations one find[s] oneself in that inform one's evaluation of existing *li* practices. However, changes in *li* practices take place against a conservative attitude towards inherited social conventions, and it is this conservative attitude that provide[s] stability and continuity despite the changes.[101]

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[97] Shun, "*Jen* and *Li* in the Analects," 471; emphasis added.
[98] See, Lindbeck, "Atonement," 154.
[99] See, Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission," 43.
[100] Lindbeck, "Atonement," 155.
[101] Wong, "*Li* and Change."

Thus, if one were seeking an alternative approach for explaining the variable and invariable matters of Christian beliefs and practices, then consideration of a Confucian understanding of the subject would certainly bring new and unusual dimensions to the discussion.

The Distinctive Characteristics of Chinese Philosophy and Lindbeck's Epistemological Approach

Lindbeck states, "If theologians happen to need an epistemology . . . they have the responsibility to baptize it as thoroughly as possible."[102] The assumption here is that Lindbeck himself happened to need an epistemology and the cultural-linguistic theory is the baptized form. Yet, as noted earlier, the proposal for locating his unique epistemic approach cannot simply depend on one particular philosophical theory. Otherwise the comparison with Confucianism merely shifts the problem of identifying Lindbeck's *ad hoc* approach from a Western context to an East Asian one. In other words, if his theory reflects certain elements of Confucianism, then it likely reflects aspects of philosophical Daoism or Chan Buddhism as well. So the primary purpose of the comparison with Confucianism has been to provide an example of the kind of form that an East Asian epistemological approach takes. And it is this particular form which helps us better appreciate the thing itself; that is, the epistemological nature of East Asian philosophy. Thus let us consider Lindbeck in relation to East Asian philosophy in general.

Beginning with an ancient Chinese text called the *Yijing* (The Book of Changes), Lai identifies several themes which she says "are manifest more broadly across the range of Chinese philosophical doctrines, and they are constitutive of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese philosophy."[103] Among these themes are at least three ways Lindbeck's approach correlates with the general nature of East Asian philosophy.

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[102] Lindbeck, "Barth and Textuality," 368.
[103] Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 11.

A notable feature of Lindbeck's approach is that he begins the process by assuming that change is inevitable. His thesis does not seek to answer whether or not doctrinal change does or should occur, rather he simply assumes the reality and thus seeks to describe the nature of doctrine.[104] For example, in his modification "of common ways of thinking about religions," he asserts, "Religious change or innovation must be understood, not as proceeding from new experiences, but as resulting from the interactions of a cultural-linguistic system with changing situations."[105] Comparatively, Lai says, "The *Yijing* embodies an attitude that is expectant of change and that seeks ways to prepare for it and deal with it."[106] Regarding Chinese philosophy in general, she explains:

> The early thinkers were acutely aware of constant changes in society. . . . In the debates among the different doctrinal groups, there was some consensus that the norms and ideals for the rectification of society had to adapt to the different needs brought about by new situations.[107]

Because Lindbeck sees the notion of change as having *a priori* status, he also insists that investigative theories – such as theories on how doctrinal change occurs – ought to be descriptive.[108] That is, a theory should first seek to observe the situation within the entire relevant context before the investigator reflects on the issue. This notion leads Lindbeck to claim that "theology is understood as the scholarly activity of second-order reflection on the data of religion"[109]; hence, the cognitive dimension of knowledge for Lindbeck is not as much about "what to assert" as about "how to think."[110]

> Similarly, the priority of observation is an important feature of Chinese philosophy:

> The *Yijing* emphasises observation as a critical element in reflective thinking, and perhaps procedurally prior to it. The predictions and prescriptions in the text are founded on observation of connections, movements and transformations in the world. From these observations, one perceives patterns, regularities and correlations.[111]

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[104] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxxiii.
[105] Ibid., 25.
[106] Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 14.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxxvii.
[109] Ibid., xxxv.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 12.

Because constant movement implies the inevitability of change, one should both expect new situations and be aware of the ways in which people dealt with change in the past. For "knowing in the Chinese tradition," Lai explains, "is 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing that.'"[112] The reason awareness and practice of traditional principles are important is not so that people can hold rigidly to the old ways, but so they can hold faithfully to the original meanings in the midst of an ever-changing world. So "what is relevant in particular circumstances is at times open to interpretation."[113] Or as Lindbeck says, "Everything is in flux. . . . The meaning of rites and utterances depends on contexts. To replicate the old forms in new situations frequently betrays the original meaning, the original spirit."[114]

Finally, while our comparison could go on to draw other significant correlations – such as social embodiment, holistic perspectives, and correlative thinking – there is nevertheless one unique feature which might ultimately serve as the keystone for connecting the epistemological arch between Lindbeck and Chinese philosophy. So far, the comparison shows that (1) the inevitability of change serves as a given assumption for both approaches, and (2) the reality of change means that interpretation remains open so that doctrines can adapt and help formulate appropriate action in new situations. The essential ingredient, then, is (3) the employment of a well-rounded hermeneutic. That is, the interpretive method is not only "keen to rely on the ideas of antiquity," it also "ruminates on and interprets the insights of various thinkers, and applies them to situations at hand."[115] Considering the difficulties Lindbeck's *ad hoc* approach has caused many Western scholars, an extended explanation from Lai on this point is crucial:

> This method of drawing insightful views from any number of different doctrines and integrating them into a viable theory continues to be a central feature of Chinese philosophy down to the present. The syncretic approach is markedly different from analysis, which involves understanding the assumptions that lie behind particular

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[112] Ibid., 227.
[113] Ibid., 14.
[114] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 65.
[115] Lai, *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*, 14.

theories, and the justification of basic concepts and ideas. While analysis seeks to distinguish and isolate basic components of an argument, *the syncretic approach integrates ideas from doctrines that are discrete and perhaps even oppositional*.[116]

As we have seen, not only does Lindbeck use common truth terms in uncommon ways, he also intertwines various concepts from theories usually assumed to be incompatible.

Indeed, Lindbeck's syncretic approach causes Kenneth Surin to assume that "Lindbeck wants to reconcile his 'categorial' account of religious truth with an ingenious hybrid truth-theory which combines the correspondence, coherence and pragmatic theories of truth."[117] Thus he recognizes Lindbeck's unsystematic use of individual ideas and divergent theories to express his own theory. But perhaps Surin, like others, misidentifies the particular role that epistemology plays in Lindbeck's theory. For it could be that Lindbeck's syncretic approach is not only an attempt to justify some 'ingenious' theory of truth, but that the actual approach itself, his very act of cobbling together various truth-theories, is itself his baptized epistemology. In this way, I would suggest that his *ad hoc* approach for explaining the cultural-linguistic position is not merely an attempt to reconcile his truth theory, but that it is his truth theory in action.

Conclusion

Lindbeck recognizes that the persuasiveness of the cultural-linguistic approach "does not depend on moving step by step in a demonstrative sequence, but on the illuminating power of the whole. It may be that if light dawns, it will be over the whole landscape simultaneously."[118] But the difficulty lies in trying to bring together the seemingly disparate pieces of his epistemological setting to provide a comprehensive view of the cultural-linguistic landscape. Thus 'the whole' is often the very thing which causes the most confusion. Nonetheless, I have suggested that perhaps the main reason Lindbeck's theory of

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[116] Ibid., 16; emphasis added.
[117] Kenneth Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith': An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter Three," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 192.
[118] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxxvi.

truth seems unusual is not because of some originality on his part, but because the organic nature of his epistemological setting is foreign to his critics' eyes.

The first chapter set the stage by showing the difficulty in trying to hold Lindbeck to the usual standards of epistemic speech. Therefore, I sought to locate his epistemology in the history of ideas by evaluating the works of Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. While the survey revealed significant correlations, I proposed that none of these representative thinkers could ultimately account for his configuration of truth and doctrine. Chapter 2, then, offers an original contribution to the discussion by calling attention to the fact that Lindbeck lived the first seventeen years of his life in East Asia, and I have tentatively suggested that an East Asian epistemic affords a more suitable hermeneutical framework for understanding his theory.

Admittedly, the explicit evidence connecting Lindbeck to East Asian thought is mostly conceptual, but perhaps the proposal is worthy of consideration nonetheless. For as Hansen puts it: "An interpretation is a theoretical model for a corpus whose aim is to make the corpus intelligible. The question is which interpretation is best—most plausible, most explanatorily powerful and elegant."[119] Thus if readers are convinced that the interpretation of Lindbeck presented here is best, then it will likely happen through perceiving an implicit quality in Lindbeck's work that resonates with East Asian modes of thought more than with Western ones. Again, the goal is not to delimit the one way to interpret Lindbeck, but to find an interpretive framework that provides the most comprehensive explanation of the overall character of his theory. To this extent, where a search of Western thought failed to locate Lindbeck's epistemic method, East Asian thought appears to offer a more promising environment for bearing fruit.

If then interpreters of Lindbeck will reorient their approach accordingly, perhaps rule theory can finally be relied upon for working through a particular theological dilemma – such

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[119] Hansen, "Chinese Language," 493.

as the question regarding the fate of the unevangelized. Indeed, Part 2 of this thesis marks the beginning of our efforts to apply a rule theory approach to the contemporary discussion of the unevangelized. In theory, if doctrines are treated as rules for theological discussion, then this approach should help us remain faithful to particular doctrinal directives while also reformulating doctrinal expressions for working through this disputed question in theology. For the point in saying that doctrines are like rules is not to say that their purpose is to specify all that can be said about something, "but rather to indicate the formal possibilities and thereby to enhance the chances of meaningful discussion and debate."[120]

Having said this, and before proceeding, it is important to know that the East Asian philosophical element of our study will play a less obvious role in the coming chapters. In other words, I seek to approach the problem of the unevangelized from a Lindbeckian perspective and not necessarily from a Confucian one. The purpose of Part 1 has been to clear the intellectual rubble away from Lindbeck's epistemic method so that we might now employ his theory of doctrine to the theological issue at hand. However, this does not mean the East Asian aspect will disappear altogether, for to the extent that Lindbeck's theory is influenced by East Asian philosophy, and to the extent that we have sought to interpret him through Confucian ideals, this particular interpretive lens will continue to inform our efforts.

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[120] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 72.

Part 2

An Application of Rule Theory:
A Doctrinal Evaluation of Proposals on the Fate of the Unevangelized

Chapter 4

ASSESSING EVANGELICAL THEORIES
ON THE UNEVANGELIZED

Introduction

Informed by a Trinitarian and Christological reading of the biblical canon, the Christian church forms both a confessing and confessional community. Essential to communal identity is the New Testament teaching that Jesus fulfills everything written about the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that he is the only way of salvation for all people (Acts 4:12). In virtue of this scriptural teaching, Christians affirm that a person attains salvation through the act of believing and confessing the Lordship of Christ when they hear the preaching of the gospel with faith (Rom 10:9-17). Yet the question remains, what about the salvation of those to whom the gospel is never proclaimed; those who are never evangelized and so are never led to the 'yes' or 'no' of faith in Christ? Though answers to this question have been and will continue to be diverse, we might find that the doctrinal rules instantiated by the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* principles provide an effective means for examining the various theological proposals.

In brief, from a Protestant perspective the *solus Christus* principle stipulates that "the Offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone."[1] The *sola fide* principle specifies that while salvation is through Christ alone, "this cannot be received except through faith."[2] And essential to saving faith is the *fides ex auditu* principle which signifies

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[1] *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, XXXI "Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross."

[2] Paul Timothy McCain, W. H. T Dau, and F Bente, eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006), 91.

that "by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever"[3] and outside the

preaching of the gospel "neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or

believe on Him, and have Him for our Lord."[4] In any case, essential to a rule theory

approach is the notion that doctrines regulate what can and cannot be said in Christian

theological discourse, and thus guide (without specifying exclusively) doctrinal

reformulations.[5]

With this in mind, the present chapter will assess the theories of evangelical

theologians Daniel Strange, Terrance Tiessen, and John Stott using the doctrinal

typology of *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*. This exercise will serve as a

case study for how rule theory effects theological discussion, and also afford an

abbreviated survey of the common evangelical positions on the issue of the

unevangelized.

The Subversive Fulfillment Approach of Daniel Strange

Working from a Reformed/Calvinist position, Daniel Strange begins the

development of his theology of religions in contrast to inclusivist positions in

evangelical theology.[6] In his initial work he asserts that because the question of the

unevangelized is a soteriological matter, theories must not neglect relevant doctrinal

issues "including the nature and extent of saving faith, the nature of revelation and the

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[3] Jean Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 9 (1.6.2).

[4] McCain, Dau, and Bente, *Concordia*, 403.

[5] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 5, 78-82.

[6] "Inclusivism" is the standard label in the theology of religions for positions which affirm that salvation is found only in Jesus yet are open to the idea of implicit faith and, traditionally, the possibility that other religions contain salvific elements. See, Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 4-12; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Uniqueness of Jesus* (London: Monarch, 2001), 37-85; or Veli-Matti. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24-25.

doctrines of grace."[7] Thus, theologians who hold inclusivist positions "might well revise their stance *if* it were proved that to hold to a certain belief on the unevangelised compromised, for example, the *solus Christus*."[8] In this case, Strange has in mind the inclusivist model of Clark Pinnock.[9]

As regards the question of the unevangelized, Pinnock argues that those who respond to the Spirit's offer of grace through general revelation and conscience can in this way receive Christ's salvation.[10] Yet Strange argues that if the Spirit is working among the unevangelized to help them "implicitly" receive salvific grace, "the question remains how the salvation of the unevangelised believer is related directly to the work of Christ and not merely to the work of the Spirit in creation."[11] He concludes that Pinnock's view is untenable as an evangelical position, because it neither holds to the core precepts of the evangelical tradition nor represents an orthodox understanding of the Trinity.[12] So how might one determine a legitimate evangelical position? Strange goes on to develop what Timothy George calls an "extra bonus" by providing "the most definitive typology to date of evangelical responses to the fate of the unevangelized."[13]

Drawing from systematic theology, Strange makes the doctrine of atonement the cornerstone of his typology and, in the first instance, divides theories between

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[7] Daniel Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology*, Paternoster Theological Monographs (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 26.

[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] See, Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

[10] See, Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 149-180.

[11] Ibid., 221.

[12] Ibid., 263-265.

[13] Timothy George, review of *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, by Daniel Strange, *Themelios* 31 (2006): 110.

particular and universal views of God's salvific will.[14] Based on these two groups, he then identifies six distinct particular atonement positions and three universal atonement positions.[15] As for his own stance on the issue, he claims the problem is not with the unevangelized *per se*, but with the question itself:

> The problem with the question of the unevangelised is that it is wrongly construed as being about "those who have never heard *through no fault of their own*," or those who are "invincibly *ignorant*." However the biblical worldview tells us that no-one is spiritually guiltless and that while there are degrees of light and of responsibility, everyone has spurned the light they have, whether this be the light of general revelation or special revelation.[16]

He further claims that because "the 'Reformed' evangelical paradigm" precludes universal atonement, "there is no 'problem' of the unevangelised."[17] Yet if there are those who have only received general revelation, what then is this 'light' and 'responsibility' outside of special revelation?

The Purpose of General Revelation

In a chapter contribution entitled "General Revelation: Sufficient or Insufficient?," Strange upholds the existence of general revelation but denies the possibility that salvation might obtain through this mode alone.[18] Furthermore, "general revelation is insufficient to save but sufficient to condemn and 'render without excuse.'"[19] As regards salvation, general revelation needs special revelation before it can be understood and appropriated rightly, and the ordinary means of special revelation is through hearing the proclamation of the gospel.[20] Nevertheless,

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[14] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 36-38, 304-306. The belief in universal atonement, that Christ died for all, is different from the belief in universalism, that all will be saved.

[15] Ibid., 307-331.

[16] Ibid., 282; emphasis original.

[17] Ibid., 266.

[18] Daniel Strange, "General Revelation: Sufficient or Insufficient?," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 40-77.

[19] Ibid., 42.

[20] Ibid., 54, 67.

although general and special revelation are distinct Strange also argues that they are not meant to be separated. Referring to Psalm 19 he states:

> Here we witness a wonderful unity to God's revelation in creation and Torah, but a unity in which there is not only a definite qualitative difference between the two modes of revelation, but also *an inseparability* and "order," which presupposes that it is only in context of special revelation and salvation that God's general revelation of himself in creation can be truly understood.[21]

Thus, for Strange, because special revelation is necessary for salvation and because there are people in the world who only receive general revelation, perhaps these people are "those who have fallen outside of God's preceptive (but not decretive) will?"[22] In other words, the very fact that special revelation never reaches certain groups of people is tangible evidence that the purpose of general revelation is not God's salvation, but his judgment of sin. "There is a corporate responsibility here," says Strange, "the most universal 'unity' being our guilt in Adam."[23] At this point, however, he recognizes the argument is somewhat askew as he attempts to maintain an inseparable relation between the two modes of revelation, while also claiming God deliberately withholds special revelation from certain people thereby causing a separation. Strange nuances his argument by appealing to the tradition of *prisca theologia* (ancient theology)[24] and the writings of twentieth century Reformed missiologist J. H. Bavinck[25] to argue for a third understanding of revelation which constitutes a kind of admixture of general and special revelation.[26]

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[21] Ibid., 56; emphasis added.

[22] Ibid., 71.

[23] Ibid., 72.

[24] Strange depends primarily on Gerald McDermott's study of Jonathan Edwards's use of *prisca theologia*. See, McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[25] See J. H. Bavinck, "General Revelation and the Non-Christian Religions," *Free University Quarterly* 4 (1955): 43-55; idem, *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. John Bolt, James D. Bratt, and P. J. Visser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 95-109.

[26] Strange, "General Revelation," 72-77.

The *prisca theologia* is the notion that the pure knowledge of God has been passed down through the ages and traces of this 'original' revelation exist within some or all human knowledge. Yet Strange states, "Because of human suppression and substitution, and without the regenerating work of God, this once true knowledge of God becomes atrophied through a divine providential law of entropy and rather than becoming a means to salvation, it becomes a further basis for judgment."[27] While he is unable to develop his proposal fully at this point, he provides a more robust account in his book *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*.[28] Here Strange seeks to apply an historiographical approach for understanding the origin of religions, foregrounded by the "seemingly retired" anthropological theory called "original monotheism."[29]

A "Single-Source" Theory for Explaining Revelation

In *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, Strange attempts to locate the "*historical* origin of the phenomena of 'religions'" within a biblical world chronology.[30] To this purpose, he establishes his theological anthropology upon a literal "historical" interpretation of Genesis – in opposition to "purely 'theological' and 'literary' interpretations"[31] – giving particular attention to the stories of creation, Noah, and the tower of Babel in chapters 1-11.[32] Though he is in this case more concerned with the question of other religions than with the question of the unevangelized,[33] Strange nonetheless expands his notion of original revelation and its purpose for those who never hear the preaching of the gospel. He argues that just as

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[27] Ibid., 74.
[28] Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2014); published in the USA under the title *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015). This thesis refers to the UK edition.
[29] Ibid., 98.
[30] Ibid., 98; emphasis original.
[31] Ibid., 101.
[32] Ibid., 53-94, 100-103, 121-154.
[33] Ibid., 34-35.

the physical existence of all human beings traces back to a single couple, divine revelation and human knowledge also flow out from this singular period in time. He states:

> Given a monogenetic understanding of human origins, what is being posited here is a "single-source" theory of revelation and knowledge, when the whole of humanity was in proximity of redemptive-historical events and which therefore defies a simplistic categorization as either natural "general" revelation or supernatural "special revelation." As well as the more usual, "media" and "means" of "general revelation," a number of Reformed scholars include specific and "supernatural" knowledge preserved as "tradition" and "memory." I wish to label this revelation as "remnantal."[34]

Strange turns again to the *prisca theologia* and also incorporates the anthropological concept of "original monotheism"[35] to argue that the source of *prisca theologia* originates with Adam and Eve.[36] Furthermore, his single-source theory of revelation does not consist only of a pre-fall awareness of the existence of one God who created all things, but includes the *imago Dei* as a kind of transcendent first principle (people are made to worship) and a postlapsarian proclamation of Christ in Genesis 3:15 – i.e., the *protoevangelium* (first gospel).[37] Within this framework he supports the idea that there is no one who has only ever received general revelation (from nature and conscience alone), because all people retain a remnant of the *prisca theologia* and are also influenced by it at times through contact in history. Nonetheless, this 'knowledge' is rendered inadequate for salvation because of constant human and demonic suppression and distortion.[38]

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[34] Ibid., 104. Strange cites Peter Harrison in reference to the "single-source" theory of revelation, '*Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 131.

[35] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 98. Original monotheism is a theory that synchronizes world history with the chronology of biblical history to claim that the first religion of all human beings was the monotheistic faith of the Bible. For a contemporary assessment, see Winfried Corduan, *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013).

[36] See, Ibid., 53-120.

[37] Ibid., 53-94.

[38] Ibid., 95-120, 232-236.

So according to Strange, general revelation is not only the transcendent reality of the *imago Dei* and the physical presence of creation, but also includes an admixture of corrupted elements of special revelation (the gospel) which flow through human knowledge and tradition with an occasional influx of the *prisca theologia* during moments of historical proximity.[39] Hence, an unevangelized person "simultaneously on the one hand *knows* the living God of the Bible (i.e. knows in 'personal relationship', not just 'knows about'), leaving her responsible and 'without excuse', and yet on the other hand *does not know* God."[40] Salvation occurs, then, only as one receives special revelation "because with it comes the regenerating work of the Spirit in special grace."[41] From this perspective, Strange concludes that the gospel subverts the content of other religions and also fulfills the metaphysical human need to worship God.[42]

A Critical Review of Strange's Theory

As noted earlier, Strange attempts to make his case from a Reformed theological perspective, and specifically from "within the tradition represented by the Magisterial Reformers especially John Calvin and his followers."[43] Thus we might anticipate his claim that general revelation alone does not save but is enough to "condemn and 'render without excuse.'"[44] But whereas theologians usually base this assertion on an understanding that general revelation consists of little more than God's communication of himself through the natural order,[45] Strange distinguishes his

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[39] Ibid., 103-104.
[40] Ibid., 93.
[41] Ibid., 222.
[42] Ibid., 268-273.
[43] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 8.
[44] Strange, "General Revelation," 41; cf. idem, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 282; *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 93, 324.
[45] For example, see *The Canons of Dordt*, "The First Main Points of Doctrine," Article 4, and "The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine," Article 15.

approach by claiming that all general revelation contains remnants of special revelation.[46] By connecting the Reformed appropriation of the *prisca theologia* to the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15, he provides a framework to support his claim that God does not condemn the unevangelized for merely rejecting him through natural revelation, but for suppressing elements of the gospel as well.

With this in mind, because Strange makes Genesis 3:15 the epistemic axiom of his understanding of revelation, we will focus on this particular point and seek to evaluate his theory scripturally, historically, and theologically from within his own stated terms of confessional faith.[47] Yet our doctrinal typology for this assessment is that salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone and that faith comes from hearing (*solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*).

Strange's Appropriation of the *Protoevangelium*

Strange references Genesis 1-3 and highlights the *protoevangelium* (3:15) to argue that 'pure knowledge' of God and his plan of redemption in Christ was given at the time of Adam and Eve. Furthermore, from that point in time divine revelation has flowed through human history in two "diametrically opposed" streams.[48] One stream contains the *prisca theologia* where common grace and special grace (saving grace) remain intact, and the other stream contains only remnants of the *prisca theologia* and common grace, which, through "a divine providential law of entropy,"[49] is devoid of

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[46] In *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, Strange develops a multifaceted and multidisciplined theology of religions which deserves a fuller treatment than this article will provide. The following assessment will only consider his notion of revelation and salvation concerning the question of the unevangelised.
[47] Strange lists these confessional terms in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 8-9; Gavin D'Costa, Paul F Knitter, and Daniel Strange, *Only One Way? Three Christian Responses to the Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World* (London: SCM, 2011), 92-93; and *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 41-42.
[48] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock,* 82.
[49] Strange, "General Revelation," 74.

the Spirit's regenerative work.[50] He asserts, "In the sovereign providence of God, he has preserved and sustained redemptive knowledge of himself within some streams of humanity and not within others."[51]

First, scripturally speaking, we might question whether Genesis 3:15 is technically the first proclamation of the gospel whereby God announces his messianic intent in such a way that distinguishes *this moment* as the gospel's epistemic source. For a canonical reading of Scripture shows that when Paul regards the source of human sin, death, and condemnation he points to Adam (Rom 5:12-21),[52] but when he regards the first proclamation of the gospel and the basic elements for understanding faith in Christ, he points to Abraham (Rom 4:1-25; Gal 3:7-9, 15-29).

This is not to say that God waited until the covenant with Abraham to initiate his redemptive work, or that Strange has no theological basis for interpreting Genesis 3:15 as the *protoevangelium*.[53] Rather, the point is that the promise given through Abraham is the hermeneutical lens for working out this interpretation. So although he seeks to explain Genesis 3:15 as the time "when the whole of humanity was in proximity of redemptive-historical events,"[54] Strange nonetheless must rely exegetically upon Genesis 12 to support this argument. For the liminal moment from which *we discern* God's redemptive intent is historically and textually correlated to its substantiation in Abraham. To be sure, Strange asserts that "Abraham and his

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[50] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock,* 89-90.

[51] Strange, "General Revelation," 71.

[52] It is interesting, and perhaps relevant, to note that Paul was the first biblical author to make this connection.

[53] It is common parlance in Reformed theology to speak of the messianic intent of Genesis 3:15. For example, see, Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims On the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 152n3, 972; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 19-20; and James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 82-91.

[54] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock,* 104.

descendants are a part of this 'seed' theology (cf. Gen 3:15),"[55] but it is perhaps more accurate to speak of Abraham and his descendants as the progenitor of this seed theology. For an intratextual reading of Scripture places the epistemic source of the *protoevangelium* within the historical period beginning with Genesis 12, when, as Paul declares, the gospel was preached "beforehand to Abraham" (Gal 3:8). This is why Christopher Wright asserts that "from the great promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 we know this God to be totally, covenantally and eternally committed to the mission of blessing the nations through the agency of the people of Abraham."[56] Thus, strictly speaking, the epistemological source of the gospel is Genesis 12:3.

Nevertheless, as indicated above, there remains a viable way to achieve an intratextual interpretation of Genesis 3:15 as the *protoevangelium*. However, it depends on a syntactical issue which Strange does not address sufficiently, and which may weaken his theory in the process. As John Collins notes, when considering the meaning of the woman's offspring in verse 15, "the first thing to decide is whether the text speaks of a specific offspring or of her offspring in general."[57] He explains that the Hebrew word itself does not connote either a singular or plural meaning, and scholars disagree as to which translation is correct. And while there may be good reasons for holding a singular interpretation,[58] Strange provides no background discussion for why he chooses this reading over a plural one, nor does he explain the

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[55] Ibid., 187.
[56] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 63.
[57] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, And Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006), 156.
[58] Ibid., 178-179; Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynB* 48 (1997): 139-148; R. A. Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, (December 1965): 425-427; Jason Derouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56 (2013): 219-247.

ways in which this choice effects the scriptural method for defining the *protoevangelium*.[59] For example, Collins states, "If we see Genesis 3:15 as referring to a specific offspring, we can speak this way of 'unfolding,' and we do not have to appeal to a *sensus plenior*."[60]

In other words, even if this verse is meant to be messianic, it is still the case that neither the reader nor those who were in physical proximity to this event can be expected to discern *this meaning* apart from the occurrence and apprehension of the "unfolding" revelatory events which all together inform this explanation of offspring.[61] While Strange recognizes a "gradual progression in the specificity of revelation as redemptive history progresses," he nonetheless collapses God's "authentic and genuine knowledge of himself and his salvation in his chosen people" into the textual and historical moment of Genesis 3:15.[62] But if this particular text in Scripture demands further illumination before readers can grasp its redemptive content then, scripturally speaking, there is no reason to assume this particular moment in history comprises the epistemic origin of the gospel apart from further revelation in time. As John Sailhamer points out, "There remains in this verse a puzzling yet important ambiguity: Who is the 'seed' of the woman? It seems obvious that the purpose of verse 15 has not been to answer that question, but rather to raise it. The remainder of the book is, in fact, the author's answer."[63]

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[59] He mentions this issue in *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 168-169 and in *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 81, but only briefly with no discussion of the particular debate.

[60] Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary*, 158. The *sensus plenior* refers to a "fuller" or "deeper" sense of the meaning of a text which goes beyond authorial intent.

[61] Ibid., 158-159; Collins notes Romans 16:20 and Revelation 12:17 as possibly alluding to Genesis 3:15, but also explains how this reading is by no means definitive.

[62] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 222-223.

[63] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 108.

There is therefore no definitive intratextual support for claiming that those who lived in historical proximity to God's verbal response to human sin in Genesis 3 would have understood these words as an offer of messianic redemption to which they must respond in faith. Hence, one can discern the messianic intent of this verse, if any, historically and textually only after Abraham.

Second, historically speaking, explicit evidence for interpreting Genesis 3:15 as the *protoevangelium* does not appear until Irenaeus in the second century AD (*Haer.* 40.3).[64] He makes this connection by asserting that the hermeneutical means for discerning Christ in the Old Testament is the incarnation of Christ himself. Irenaeus explains that "the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by means and types and parables," and yet it is only after their fulfillment in "the advent of Christ" that Christians are able to perceive this treasure (*Haer.* 4.26.1). Concerning Irenaeus' hermeneutic, John Behr explains:

> With regard to Christ being disseminated in Scripture, and, in reverse, being foreseen by the patriarchs and the prophets, it is particularly important to note that the mechanism turns upon the Cross: it is by the Cross that the types and prophecies are brought to light, given their proper exegesis. . . . This manner of reading the Scripture was revealed only after the Passion.[65]

Irenaeus teaches that Christ unlocked his self-communication in Scripture for the apostles, and we receive this hermeneutic through the apostolic proclamation of Christ. He claims that it is impossible to see the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15 prior to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (*Haer.* 4.26.1). Thus, scripturally and historically speaking, Abraham is the epistemic source for discerning the person of Christ (Gal 3:7-9), and Christ is the epistemic source for discerning all that is written of him in the corpus of Scripture (Luke 24:27, 32, 44). Walter Moberly

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[64] Justin Martyr may also allude to this verse in *Dial.* 102. The earliest "messianic" interpretation of Genesis 3:15 may be the Septuagint, according to Collins, "A Syntactical Note," 139-148.

[65] John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, The formation of Christian Theology 1 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 132.

concludes, "Israel's scriptures not only prepare the way for Christ, … there is also a retrospective movement from Jesus back to Israel's scriptures whereby they are recognized to be what they would not otherwise be recognized to be."[66] Therefore if one can perceive the gospel in Genesis 3:15 only after Christ, and indeed this potential interpretation did not obtain until the second century AD, then once again there is little reason to assume the original hearers comprehended and responded to a messianic purpose with just these words alone.

Third, considering Strange's commitment to a 'classical' Reformed theology, it is perhaps significant, theologically speaking, that John Calvin chooses the plural translation of 'offspring' in Genesis 3:15, and thus appeals to the *sensus plenior* for a Christological reading. He makes this connection in several steps. First, he interprets the plain meaning of the text to be "that there should always be the hostile strife between the human race and serpents" and that humanity will remain "superior" to serpents.[67] Then, in a second step, he makes a "transition" to an anagogical interpretation whereby God "assails Satan under the name of the serpent," so that people may first "learn to beware of Satan as of the most deadly enemy; then, that they may contend against him with the assured confidence of victory."[68] Thus, as regards the meaning of the verse itself, Calvin interprets "the seed to mean the posterity of the woman generally."[69] Yet because it is true that many people do indeed fall under the power of Satan, he connects this verse to Christ in a final step through a Pauline explanation of Abraham, saying, "So Paul, from the seed of Abraham, leads us to Christ."[70] In the end, Calvin understands the *seeds* of the woman to signify the

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[66] R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70.
[67] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis*, trans. John King, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:167-168.
[68] Ibid., 169.
[69] Ibid., 170.
[70] Ibid., 171.

church, which will gain victory over Satan through the *seed* of Abraham; who is Christ the Head.[71] So we find that Calvin also identifies the *protoevangelium* beginning with Abraham and discerned only after Christ.

While Strange need not agree with Calvin's interpretation of Genesis 3:15, he would do well to work through Calvin's position as he seeks to develop his own Reformed view. For if both Paul and Calvin place the *protoevangelium* with Abraham through a post-advent reading of Scripture, then this fact alone must have substantial implications for his single-source theory of revelation.

A Doctrinal Assessment

Strange makes a good point when he highlights Psalm 19 to assert that this passage "is a microcosm of the symbiotic relationship between general and special revelation," and that "God's purpose in general revelation has never been for it to function independently of his 'worded' special revelation."[72] Yet in light of the doctrinal setting effected by the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* principles, there is a critical weakness in the way he develops this point.

Strange devotes a large part of his evaluation of Pinnock towards building a case that epistemological awareness of the ontological work of Christ is necessary for saving faith.[73] And through this process he upholds the *solus Christus* concluding that even an implicit response to the work of the Spirit in the world does not account for how this response occurs in Christ. For "surely if one is to 'die with Christ' and 'rise with Christ,' one must know what he has done, let alone know the fact that he exists?"[74] But in his later writings, in an effort to connect this Christological epistemic element in his own theory, he inadvertently resolves this particular issue for Pinnock

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Strange, "General Revelation," 66.
[73] Ibid., 139-290.
[74] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 221.

as well. Strange argues for the existence of "embryonic revelatory knowledge of the gospel from Genesis 3:15 onwards," a knowledge which in itself had sufficient epistemic reference for saving faith.[75] He also claims that humanity possesses a remnant of this knowledge "preserved as 'tradition' and 'memory'" that they "epistemologically suppress."[76] Yet with this argument Strange's support for the notion of implicit 'false faith' also indirectly supports Pinnock's theory of implicit saving faith. Although Strange claims "that in positing this 'remnantal' revelation I am not saying it has any 'salvific' potential," his introduction of the concept nonetheless opens the door wide for speculation on its salvific possibilities.[77]

For instance, if general and special revelation cannot operate apart from each other, and if general revelation includes a remnant of special revelation for which people are guilty through their implicit suppression, then it is just as possible they can be forgiven through their implicit acceptance of this ubiquitous knowledge. The problem for Strange is that in claiming there is a vestige of special revelation among the unevangelized, the logical structure of his argument requires that he allow for the Spirit's work of special grace as well; otherwise there remains an internal dissonance in his theory.[78] Strange holds that one cannot separate the ontological work of special grace from the epistemological presence of special revelation.[79] Thus, irrespective of its condition – whether in "embryonic" or "remnantal" form – the presence of this revelation includes the regenerative work of the Spirit.[80] So the only way he can balance his theory is to either allow the possibility that the unevangelized can have

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[75] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not As Our Rock,* 82-87, 194.
[76] Ibid., 103-104.
[77] Ibid., 108.
[78] Gavin D'Costa also recognizes this issue in Strange's theory of religions. See, D'Costa, "Gavin D'Costa Responds to Paul Knitter and Daniel Strange," in D'Costa, Knitter, and Strange, *Only One Way?*, 149-150.
[79] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock,* 221-22; idem, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 139-290.
[80] Ibid., 222.

implicit faith in the same way they have implicit false faith – i.e., through the flow of universal knowledge about God and Christ rooted historically in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 – or explain how the unevangelized can have explicit false faith in the same way the evangelized can have explicit saving faith – i.e., *fides ex auditu* – thus making his notion of remnantal revelation irrelevant. Yet considering his particular Reformed theological framework, the first option cannot support an evangelical understanding of *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* (the crux of his criticism of Pinnock), leaving only the second option, which would require substantive changes to his theory.

To this purpose, Strange may want to set aside the scientific notion of a monogenetic view of human origins, the anthropological theory of original monotheism, and the deistic version of *prisca theologia* to make better use of his stated doctrinal and confessional material.[81] For if the scriptural, historical, and theological resources indicate that the *protoevangelium* was introduced with Abraham so that everyone was not, has not been, and still are not in proximity to redemptive-historical events, then how might one explain false faith without separating the ontological and epistemological elements of faith? For this he may find creedal support from the Baptist confessions listed in his theological material, which state, "Nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner except his own voluntary refusal to accept Jesus Christ as teacher, Saviour and Lord."[82] Thus he might speculate on how unevangelized people who die before hearing the gospel will receive the opportunity to accept or refuse Christ explicitly. Or, if the Reformed doctrines of total depravity and particular atonement imply that there is no "problem"

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[81] Ibid., 108-110; see also Steven Studebaker, *Jonathan Edwards' Social Augustinian Trinitarianism in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Gorgias Studies in Philosophy and Theology (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 222-223.

[82] *1925 Baptist Faith and Message*, 6, emphasis added; also see, *The New Hampshire Confession of Faith*, 6.

of the unevangelized,[83] then perhaps he could approach this subject indirectly by addressing related questions within Reformed theology perceived to be genuine problems. As George points out in his review of Strange, "There are a cluster of issues even Reformed theologians need to think through more clearly than has yet been done. What about the salvation of those who die in infancy, or those who remain mentally incompetent?"[84]

> For instance, the Westminster Confession states:

> Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who works when, and where, and how he pleases: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word (10.3).

Thus, to affirm this confession he might seek to explain how this particular group of unevangelized people will eventually receive the outward calling of the word for saving faith – that is, the "fully orbed character of *notitia*, *fiducia* and *assensus*" ministered *ex auditu*.[85] And by dealing with this issue he may also discover ways to approach the broader theological question of the unevangelized.

As his theory stands, however, his assertion that all humanity was in proximity to the gospel of faith and salvation in Genesis 3:15, and his subsequent notion of remnantal revelation whereby all people have epistemic guilt through implicit false faith, compromises the doctrinal relation between the *sola fide* and *fides ex auditu* principles. That is to say, if faith obtains only through explicit hearing of the word of Christ, then the necessary epistemic conditions for belief are the same conditions necessary for unbelief. Which means that just as the notion of remnantal revelation cannot support the possibility of saving faith among the unevangelized, neither can it support the possibility of false faith. Yet if Strange will allow his scriptural and

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[83] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 266.
[84] George, "Review of The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised," 110.
[85] 'Knowledge,' 'assent,' and 'trust' in Christ; see, Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not As Our Rock*, 222n22; also, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 30.

confessional material to have primary influence over the speculative nature of his theory, then perhaps he will be in a better position to offer a creative articulation of revelation for addressing the issue of the unevangelized.[86]

Terrance Tiessen's Universal Revelation Accessibilist Approach

Terrance Tiessen formulates his theory of the unevangelized from a Reformed theological position, but rather than conform to the "gospel exclusivism" of Calvin he emphasizes the "accessibilism" of Ulrich Zwingli who maintains that divine election alone determines salvation.[87] From this perspective, Tiessen argues that all the various scriptural texts which exclusivists use to claim that people must hear the gospel for saving faith do not actually apply to the question of the unevangelized:

> When the gospel exclusivist principle is applied throughout history, it has the strange effect of portraying God's saving program as narrowing each time he reveals himself more explicitly. Thus the covenant made with Abraham, which spoke of God's plan to bless all nations, would have suddenly excluded from God's saving work any who were ignorant of the covenantal revelation that had just been made.[88]

To resolve this issue, he proposes that while God holds every person accountable for their response to divine revelation, his judgment is contingent upon the amount of revelation each person has received.[89] He reasons that any form of revelation is itself God's self-revelation to the world, thus the salvific distinction lies not between general and special revelation, but between revelation and the Holy Spirit's work of illumination.[90] In other words:

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[86] Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock*, 35.

[87] Terrance Tiessen, "The Salvation of the Unevangelized in the Light of God's Covenants," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 3 (July 2012): 231. Also see, Terrance Tiessen, "Who Can Be Saved?: Critical Dialogue Over a Recent Review," *Trinity Journal* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 291.

[88] Terrance Tiessen, a review of "Faith Comes By Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, no. 2 (Ap 2010): 183-184.

[89] For example, see theses 4-7 and 14, Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 23-25.

[90] Ibid., 155-157.

> Without the Spirit's illumination, no form of revelation results in a person's salvation. On the other hand, this also opens up for us the distinct possibility that general revelation *plus* illumination may lead to salvation just as is true when special revelation is illuminated.[91]

Nevertheless, Tiessen thinks it unlikely that anyone receives general revelation alone, and says that a "realistic assessment" must consider the possibility of remnants and inflow of special revelation as well.[92]

Instead of suggesting that this remnantal revelation exists for the sole purpose of solidifying God's judgment, he suggests that the Holy Spirit reveals these special truths to every individual at some point in their life, and that they then respond either with belief or unbelief. So in the case of the unevangelized, the Spirit's illumination serves "*as a form of special revelation*"[93] whereby each person's "response to that revelation is part of their fundamental orientation of faith or unbelief in God."[94] And this 'orientation' is not merely an act of turning towards faith or unbelief, but rather is an act which initiates the epistemic reality of faith or unbelief in the life of the individual. Hence, when a person receives this special illumination of the Spirit, a positive response is what "the Bible calls 'faith.'"[95] Tiessen claims that this kind of faith is a biblical faith because it "is explicitly faith, but it is implicitly faith *in Christ*."[96] He argues:

> It is probably best not to withhold the designation "saved" from those who have been reconciled to God through a graciously enabled faith response to God's self-revelation, even though that revelation may have been less complete than the gospel concerning Jesus.[97]

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[91] Ibid., 157.

[92] Ibid. Also see, Terrance Tiessen, "Can the Unevangelized Be Saved?," *Didaskalia* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 87-88; Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 150-157.

[93] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 157; emphasis original.

[94] Ibid., 23.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., 214; emphasis original.

[97] Ibid., 226.

Hence, all those who receive lesser forms of revelation and yet respond in faith will meet Christ at death and "respond to him in a manner consistent with the response they had been giving to God and his revelation during their lifetime."[98]

For Tiessen, God's unconditional election means that all those whom God has chosen for salvation may or may not exist within the epistemic reach of the gospel, but God gives sufficient faith to each of them through degrees of revelation suitable to their individual circumstances. He concludes:

> God's continuing self-revelation is not limited to the universally accessible means that we call "general revelation." Nor is revelation limited to the universally normative covenant revelation that is now confined to Scripture. God makes himself known to individuals in very particular ways, and every one of these divine encounters calls for a response of faith and obedience.[99]

Stated simply, God provides universally sufficient grace through the Spirit's illumination of the respective 'universally normative' modes of revelation, or of revelation that is 'particular' to certain individuals. Thus, everyone who rejects this universal offer of grace comes under God's righteous judgment while those who obtain efficacious faith receive salvation.[100]

A Critical Review of Tiessen's Theory

Tiessen's proposal for resolving the issue of the unevangelized presents a unique evangelical approach for at least two reasons. First, he attempts to develop an understanding of universal saving grace that puts everyone in an epistemic position of belief or unbelief through the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.[101] Second, he is willing to consider the possibility of an at-death encounter with Christ for those who die before hearing the gospel.[102]

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[98] Ibid., 25.
[99] Ibid., 122.
[100] Ibid., 239-240.
[101] See, Ibid., 487-497.
[102] Ibid., 224; also see, 216-229.

As regards his theological approach, he states, "I put forward a 'five point' Calvinist soteriological proposal, but I concur with Zwingli rather than with Calvin, that God's elective grace is not restricted to the boundaries of the covenant people, in either Testamental period."[103] Thus, in light of his distinctive theological method, and because he affirms the classic Protestant doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, we will evaluate his notion of saving faith according to the regulative principles of a Reformed evangelical position in the Zwinglian tradition.

Tiessen's Explanation of Saving Faith

Tiessen defines faith as a Spirit-enabled response to any type of divine revelation, even in regard to revelation that lacks the content of the gospel.[104] So while he admits that no one receives the full benefits of salvation until they have knowledge of Christ, he argues that God can still save someone through faith outside hearing the gospel.[105] For instance, he says that a person who has no knowledge of the Abrahamic covenant may nonetheless have the "faith of Abraham" because "in Romans 4:11-16, it is clear that the *quality* of Abraham's faith, not its knowledge content, was the key in his justification."[106] Thus, like Abraham, personal salvation for an unevangelized person can obtain through faith in God's "*context-appropriate manifestation*" outside gospel proclamation.[107] Yet how does Tiessen's notion of faith relate to the *fides ex auditu* principle from Romans 10:17? He says that Paul's message in Romans 10 is that Israel is guilty "because they *have heard* the gospel but have not believed it," with the implication that the passage does not pertain to the

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[103] Tiessen, "Who Can Be Saved?," 291. Nonetheless, Tiessen attributes his "paradigm shift" towards "accessibilist (or 'wider hope')" positions to Clark Pinnock and John Sanders. See, Ibid., 41.

[104] Ibid., 142; Tiessen, "The Salvation of the Unevangelized," 237, 240.

[105] Tiessen, "The Salvation of the Unevangelized," 241.

[106] Ibid.; emphasis original.

[107] Ibid.; emphasis original. Also see, Tiessen, "Can the Unevangelized Be Saved?," 89.

unevangelized who have not heard.[108] Nevertheless, he still insists that "the basic

principle of salvation by faith, which comes by hearing the 'word,' applies to *all*

forms of revelation."[109]

In response to this assertion, we need only recall our discussion of the

protoevangelium in the previous section to challenge Tiessen's claim that Abraham

was saved even though he "had never heard the gospel about Jesus."[110] For despite

Tiessen's exegetical approach, a canonical reading shows that rather than being the

"paradigmatic" example of all "those from whom God has elicited a faith response to

lesser revelation,"[111] Abraham is instead the father of all those who hear and receive

the preaching of the gospel with faith (Gal 3:2-14). A reading that Zwingli also

affirms when he states, "Just as Abraham embraced Jesus his blessed seed, and

through him was saved, so also today we are saved through him."[112] The point here is

not that Abraham knew the identity of Jesus, but that he knew the special messianic

promise of God. So when Zwingli says that 'Abraham embraced Jesus' he is not

claiming that Abraham knew the person of Christ, but that he and all the other Old

Testament believers "leaned upon the mercy of God through *the promise of Christ*

just as much as we do now that He has appeared."[113]

To be sure, Tiessen appears to acknowledge this distinction. In order to

preserve the *solus Christus*, he asserts that even though the faith of Abraham (and of

all the Old Testament believers) was not based on knowledge of the person of Jesus, it

was nonetheless "implicitly a faith in Christ."[114] Yet he also claims that "this may also

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[108] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 269; emphasis original.
[109] Ibid., 268; emphasis added.
[110] Ibid., 168.
[111] Ibid., 354; emphasis added.
[112] Ulrich Zwingli, *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), 234.
[113] Ulrich Zwingli, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1922), 30; emphasis added.
[114] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 214. Also see, 169-184.

be the case for some of the unevangelized, whether they are responding to God's revelation in creation or to some other faint trace of special revelation."[115] The problem is, the Old Testament believers were not responding only to natural revelation or to some 'faint trace' of special revelation, but rather they received an explicit and sufficient word from God. As Stephen Wellum asserts:

> When we begin to ask about the nature of Abraham's saving faith, Genesis 15:6 becomes the key text—'Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.' . . . Did he have Jesus Christ as the object of his faith? The best answer to that question is yes and no. No, in that he did not know it was Jesus who was the seed of the woman; but yes, in that his faith was in the promise of God, centered in the promised seed, which eventually, as the plan of God unfolds, leads us directly to Christ.[116]

In other words, their faith was explicitly faith in the special word of promise, the word of Christ.

Tiessen argues that a Jew who knows nothing "of the new covenant community, the church of Jesus Christ" may nevertheless be saved through "an old covenant faith."[117] And if one is ignorant even of the Abrahamic covenant, then "the minimum is clearly defined in Hebrews 11:6, the belief that God exists and that he rewards those who seek him."[118] Yet he appears to move too quickly when he equates the epistemological situation of a Jew with the situation of the unevangelized. As Adam Sparks suggests:

> His proposal [Tiessen's] is broadly right, but should be understood as supporting my position that saving faith has not changed. A believing Jew living at the time of Christ would have faith in the Messiah (anticipated). If such a Jew died before hearing of the advent of the Messiah, then there is no reason to suggest they would be denied saving faith now that greater information (which they have not received) about the Messiah is available. In theory then, it is possible to be saved "by Old covenant anticipation" after the

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[115] Ibid.

[116] Stephen J. Wellum, "Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit?," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 174.

[117] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 25; also, 184-203.

[118] Tiessen, "The Salvation of the Unevangelized," 240.

Christ-event, if that anticipation is according to special covenantal revelation.[119]

The point is that the unevangelized do not have an 'Old covenant anticipation,' and yet it is this messianic content that is essential for obtaining saving faith. For instance, in Romans 10 Paul continues his discussion of Israel and contrasts the righteousness based on the law through works with the righteousness based on faith through Christ (10:5-6). Then in verses 6-8 he extends his argument by connecting "the word of faith which we are preaching" with the "word" proclaimed beforehand by Moses (Deut 30:14). Observing this connection, Calvin points out that Paul does not regard the word of Moses as something different from the message of Christ, because the "word of faith" which Paul preaches is the same word that Moses proclaimed in advance (i.e., the word of Christ).[120] Thus "the words, 'which we preach,' are added," Calvin explains, so "that no one might have the suspicion that Paul differed from Moses; for he testifies, that in the ministration of the gospel there was complete consent between him and Moses."[121]

Again, the point is not that Moses knew the personal identity of Christ, but that he looked forward to the coming Savior who Paul now preaches as having come. For instance, commenting on the Romans 10 passage, D. A. Carson states:

> Once again it is important to stress the content of faith spelled out in these verses. Paul says that the person who confesses with the mouth "Jesus is Lord" and believes in the heart that God raised him from the dead will be saved. . . . We are a long way from an abstract "faith principle" that does not have Jesus as its content.[122]

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[119] Adam Sparks, *One of a Kind: The Relationship Between Old and New Covenants as the Hermeneutical Key for Christian Theology of Religions* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 173.

[120] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 276.

[121] Ibid.

[122] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 312.

To this extent, Tiessen's notion of a gospel-less faith finds little scriptural support. As

Ronald Nash argues:

> The New Testament reports that the Old Testament saints looked forward to a mediator who would die (John 5:46; 8:56; 1 Peter 1:10 – 12) and how the gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:6). . . . How can Old Testament believers who had a significant relationship to special revelation and whose faith was tied to symbols and practices that looked forward to Christ provide warrant for treating unevangelized moderns as believers?[123]

In other words, the saving nature of faith is contingent upon a particular context

involving God's special self-revelation to a specific people. Gabriel Fackre explains:

> A long tradition in Christianity affirms the personal salvation of those with "Abrahamic" faith, based on Paul's deep discussion in Romans 4. Here, therefore, is a recognition of justification by faith before the knowledge of Christ. But this faith has to do with a response to the saving actions of God among a *chosen* people where the word of mercy is uniquely given and heard. This is faith within the stream of salvation history, not a generalized "faith principle."[124]

Nevertheless, Tiessen seeks to define faith within the context of general revelation,

stating, "The faith response to God's revelation of his eternal power and divine nature

through his work of creation would . . . include a worship of the Creator God and a

spirit of thankfulness for what he has made and provided for us."[125] Yet this

delineation of faith exposes a logical contradiction in his theory, which is perhaps

characteristic of other inclusivist theories as well.

The inclusivist description of the faith principle in the context of general

revelation often entails at least some knowledge of God. And the requisite knowledge

is usually theistic in general, monotheistic in particular, and stresses a specific

cosmological worldview (e.g., 'a spirit of thankfulness' to the creator God). For

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[123] Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 127.
[124] Gabriel J. Fackre, "Response to Sanders," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1995), Kindle location 629-632.
[125] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 144-145.

instance, commenting on John Sanders' explanation of the faith principle, Fackre writes:

> This [the faith principle] contradicts the trust-without-knowledge refrain and also limits salvation to religions that teach belief in a personal God, thereby excluding the hundreds of millions who espouse nontheistic Buddhism, Confucianism and so on. How is this consistent, and how is it "inclusivism"?[126]

One example of this point is a central Buddhist doctrine concerning the cause of suffering. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa explains:

> God as *creator* is known in Buddhism under the term '*avijja*'. This means the lack of knowledge, or ignorance. Ignorance is the power of nature which is the cause of all existing things and as such the cause of suffering.[127]

Referencing this doctrine, another Buddhist teacher tells adherents "that we should annihilate and conquer this God at all costs. . . . Kill him, kill him! Why should we do so? Because God has created to suffer, created an evil world, which proves that he is stupid."[128] If this is indeed the theistic lens through which Buddhists interpret 'the power of nature,' then at the very least Tiessen has failed to present a coherent accessibilist position.[129] Especially in light of the fact that he also argues that the ethical dimensions of faith for an unevangelized person requires that "whatever information, religious or moral, a person accepts as ultimately authoritative truth (whether this is understood to be from a personal God or not) must be believed and obeyed."[130] Hence, saving faith for an unevangelized Buddhist would mean rejecting the Creator God as the ignorant cause of suffering and, at the same time, worshiping him as the Creator with "a spirit of thankfulness for what he has made and provided

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[126] Fackre, "Response to Sanders," Kindle location 601-604.
[127] Bhikku Buddhadasa, "Christianity and Buddhism," Sinclaire Thompson Memorial Lecture, Fifth Series. Given in Chiang Mai, 1967, 14.
[128] Wan Petchsongkram, *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree: Some Observations on Communicating the Christian Faith in Thailand* (Thailand, 1975), 50.
[129] See, Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 22-30.
[130] Ibid., 23.

for us."[131] The contradiction here is absurd. Thus, from within his confessional framework we find that Tiessen's scriptural and theological support for the notion of a saving faith outside special revelation is antithetical to the *fides ex auditu* principle.

Considering the historical material for his confessional outline, Tiessen claims to follow Zwingli in regard to his teaching on divine election and the unevangelized. Tiessen writes:

> God's elective grace is not restricted to the boundaries of the covenant people, in either Testamental period. The Spirit's regenerative work sometimes accompanies less explicit forms of divine revelation than the good news concerning Jesus.[132]

To this purpose, Tiessen references a quote from a letter Zwingli sent to King Francis I of France entitled, *An Exposition of the Faith*.[133] In this letter he declares Socrates, Aristides, and Numa (to name a few) as being among "the communion and fellowship of all the saints and sages and believers and the steadfast and the brave and the good who have ever lived since the world began."[134] But rather than use this excerpt to further outline Zwingli's position in support of his own project, it soon becomes clear that Tiessen has no intention of following Zwingli on the matter.

For example, before Zwingli wrote his letter to King Francis I, he met with Martin Luther at the Marburg Colloquy (1529) to discuss their differences of opinion on the nature of the Eucharist – Luther asserting the real presence of Christ's body and blood, Zwingli arguing for a symbolic understanding of the bread and wine.[135] They were unable to resolve their disagreement on this particular issue, but they did agree that faith comes through Christ alone and that God gives faith through the Holy

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[131] Ibid., 144.
[132] Tiessen, "Who Can Be Saved?," 291.
[133] Huldrych Zwingli and Johann Heinrich Bullinger, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 239-282.
[134] Ibid., 275.
[135] See, W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45-49.

Spirit "when we hear the gospel or the word of Christ."[136] So when Zwingli later

named nine "heathen" as citizens of heaven, W. P. Stephens says that Luther saw this

"as evidence that Zwingli was not sincere in the Marburg Colloquy."[137] Indeed,

Luther seems to have the Marburg agreement in mind when he writes:

> Tell me, any one of you who wants to be a Christian, what need is there of baptism, the sacrament, Christ, the Gospel, or the prophets and Holy Scripture, if such godless heathen, Socrates, Aristides, yes, the cruel Numa, who was the first to instigate every kind of idolatry at Rome by the devil's revelation, . . . are saved and sanctified along with the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles in heaven, even though they knew nothing about God, Scripture, the Gospel, Christ, baptism, the sacrament, or the Christian faith? What can such an author, preacher, and teacher believe about the Christian faith except that it is no better than any other faith and that everyone can be saved by his own faith, even an idolater and an Epicurean like Numa and Scipio?[138]

Stephens explains that for Luther, because "Zwingli's heathen" have no knowledge of

Christ, "such faith as they have must be other than Christian, with the implication that

they can be saved by their own faith."[139] An implication that Simon Chan applies to

Tiessen's theory as well, asking, "But would such a view of salvation not make

knowledge of Christ extraneous?"[140] Nevertheless, a closer examination shows that

Tiessen is more vulnerable than Zwingli to the charge that this view nullifies the

uniqueness of Christ.

Tiessen claims that "salvation has always been by grace through faith" but that

faith has not always been by hearing the gospel of Christ.[141] He asserts that saving

faith does not always depend on whether or not a person hears the gospel during their

lifetime, and "the kind of faith God requires varies depending on the revelation with

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[136] "Marburg Colloquy," *The Marburg Colloquy and the Marburg Articles (1529)*, articles 6, also see articles 3-5,7-8.

[137] W. P. Stephens, "Bullinger and Zwingli on the Salvations of the Heathen," *Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 7, no. 2/3 (April 2005): 284.

[138] Martin Luther, "Word and Sacrament IV," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Martin E. Lehmann, vol. 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 290.

[139] Stephens, "Bullinger and Zwingli," 286.

[140] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith From the Ground Up* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 63.

[141] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 24.

which he has blessed an individual."[142] Therefore "*being saved and becoming a*

Christian are not the same thing."[143] But the concern here is that the 'faith' of

Tiessen's unevangelized 'believers' comes from extra-biblical revelation resulting in

a faith that must be something other than Christian. Zwingli, however, does not fall

into this particular trap as easily as Tiessen nor as cleanly as Luther supposes.

For Zwingli, salvation has always been by grace through God's election alone,

and this election is "free and not at all bound, and above baptism and circumcision;

nay, above faith and preaching."[144] There is only one essential component for

salvation, and that is God's free purpose in marking out certain individuals for

redemption through Christ. He explains:

> We see that the first thing is God's deliberation or purpose or election, second
> his predestination or marking out, third his calling, fourth justification [by
> faith]. Since then all these are of God, and faith hardly holds the fourth place,
> how is it that we say that salvation comes of faith?[145]

His answer is that faith is a sign of election for those who hear the gospel so that they

may know that God has chosen them for eternal salvation; for "faith is the sign of the

election by which we obtain real blessedness."[146] Thus, because God's choice is "not

at all bound" to such signs, faith is a sign only for those who hear the gospel.[147] Oliver

Crisp calls this view of election "justification in eternity," and explains, "According

to the doctrine of justification in eternity, the person who is eternally elect in Christ is

also eternally justified. Possession of faith makes no material difference to one's elect

status, because it is an effect, not a cause, of justification."[148] From this perspective,

writes Crisp, faith is "the means by which the elect individual comes to understand

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[142] Ibid., 163.
[143] Ibid., 202; emphasis original.
[144] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 237.
[145] Ibid., 239.
[146] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 201.
[147] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 237.
[148] Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 47.

that she is already a member of the elect, and already justified by God in Christ."[149] In short, the proclamation of the gospel is necessary for faith but preaching and faith need not precede salvation as salvation depends wholly upon God's free election.

Suffice it to say that unlike Tiessen, Zwingli's approach allows him to affirm the possibility of salvation among the unevangelized without having to deny the *fides ex auditu* principle for saving faith. As Gottfried Locher explains, faith's "decisive character is safeguarded in that one can only speak of faith as being necessary for salvation in the strict sense, when there is preaching of the gospel."[150] Of course, the fact that Zwingli denied the *sola fide* for salvation rather than the *fides ex auditu* for faith could hardly have assuaged Luther's anger. Tiessen, however, posits the existence of faith where there has been no preaching. The point is, Tiessen appears to be trying to follow the modern inclusivist line of Pinnock and Sanders rather than the historical theological position of Zwingli on the issue of the unevangelized. Thus, the onus is on Tiessen to explain how a non-Christian response to extra-biblical revelation and lived out through a faithful adherence to and practice of non-Christian 'authoritative truth' constitutes saving faith in Christ.

A Doctrinal Assessment

In the end, we find that from a scriptural, theological, and historical perspective Tiessen's separation of the *sola fide* from the *fides ex auditu* causes him to fall short of his intended goal. Nevertheless, Tiessen's project is not without merit and its main strength is his insistence on the necessity of faith for salvation and the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work of illumination for faith. To this extent, I suggest that if Tiessen will follow his scriptural and confessional material more closely, then

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[149] Ibid.
[150] Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 138.

he may still be able to affect the kind of doctrinal precision needed for proposing an accessibilist position.

For example, he is keen to categorize his position as "monergistic" and develop his proposal within a Reformed theological framework following Zwingli.[151] For this reason he might begin by adopting Zwingli's soteriology, which is summed up nicely in his statement that "the elect were chosen before they were conceived; they are at once then sons of God, even if they die before they believe or are called to faith."[152] Granted, this statement appears to belie Tiessen's stance that salvation is through faith alone. But there are indications that following Zwingli's theological trajectory will lead Tiessen to some creative yet doctrinally appropriate ways to maintain his position.

For instance, Zwingli maintains that just as circumcision was a sign of election for children born into the nation of Israel, baptism is now a sign of election for children born to Christian parents.[153] He states that because Israel and the church are one people and thus under the one covenantal promise, Christian parents whose child dies can be certain their child was saved.[154] For according to Zwingli, Scripture teaches:

> Original sin cannot damn the children of Christians, because although sin would, to be sure, damn according to the law, it cannot damn on account of the remedy provided by Christ, especially it cannot damn those who are included in the covenant which was concluded with Abraham.[155]

Thomas Noble explains Zwingli's view of sin, stating:

> Zwingli distinguishes then between original guilt (the *reatus*) and original sin (the *vitium*), and the latter, the *vitium* is not really sin at all: it is a defect. He

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[151] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 17-20; Tiessen, "Who Can Be Saved?" 291; Tiessen, "The Salvation of the Unevangelized." 231.
[152] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 241.
[153] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 28.
[154] Ibid., 23.
[155] Ibid.

defines sin as voluntary. An act of sin, for Zwingli, is a voluntary transgression of a known law.[156]

Hence, as Philip Schaff states, Zwingli "fully admits the distinction between original or hereditary sin and actual transgression, but he describes the former as a moral disease, or natural defect, rather than punishable sin and guilt."[157] In this way, Zwingli declares:

> There are none of whose election we are more sure than of those children who are taken away young, while still without the law. . . . For dying is just as much a sign of election in them as faith is in grown people.[158]

Although his view of covenant means that he is less certain about the children of non-Christians who die, Zwingli nonetheless states that one who holds the opinion that original sin cannot condemn even these children "will have more basis and authority for his view in the Scriptures than those who deny this."[159] Timothy George explains, "For Zwingli baptism with the Spirit rather than water baptism was the means by which individuals were drawn into the orbit of divine salvation. The Spirit was not bound to external signs."[160]

Having said this, despite Zwingli's argument that God's predestination is above baptism, faith, and preaching, we have seen that he nonetheless recognizes a necessary order to salvation.[161] And even though he considers faith a 'secondary thing' within this salvific process, he also admits that the certainty of election means that faith must be added at some point in this process. As Crisp explains, although God "eternally ordains" the justification of the elect, "the mechanism by means of

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[156] Thomas A. Noble, "The Doctrine of Original Sin in the Evangelical Reformers," *European Explorations in Christian Holiness* 2 (2002): 79.

[157] Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom With a History and Critical Notes*, Kindle Edition., vol. I, III vols. (Veritatis Splendor Publications, 1876), location 11200.

[158] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 207.

[159] Ibid., 23.

[160] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013) 143.

[161] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 237.

which this eternal act of election is actualized obtains in and through the work of Christ in time," and in time this work "is applied to the individual by faith."[162] For Zwingli, this view means that because the salvation of elect infants and adults is certain, "faith is in that order *the last thing beyond glorification*."[163] Thus, like Tiessen, Zwingli argues that the standard of explicit faith does not apply to those "who by reason of age are not able to hear, nor those to whom the knowledge of the gospel has not come," for nothing keeps God from saving anyone he wishes.[164] Yet unlike Tiessen, Zwingli concludes that "faith is not of all the elect, as now is clear of elect infants."[165] But what he means is only that we cannot know whether someone who has no knowledge of the gospel in this life is of the elect, and in this context we "may not measure by the norm and touch-stone of faith."[166] Thus he is not saying that the standard of belief or unbelief will never apply to them, because faith is a necessary link in the "chain and order" of salvation[167] – even if this must occur after death.[168] In the end, Zwingli affirms that justification depends on faith and that faith depends on hearing the proclamation of the gospel[169]; also, that faith "is the fruit of election, predestination and calling, *which is given in its fit time*."[170]

With this in mind, although Zwingli holds that the elect who die before hearing the gospel will nonetheless obtain faith 'beyond glorification,' he does not explain how this posthumous addition of faith might occur. Thus, if Tiessen will place himself more firmly within a Zwinglian position, he might take up where Zwingli left off and seek to provide an explanation for how the unevangelized elect will receive

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[162] Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 49.
[163] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 241; emphasis added.
[164] Ibid., 242. Also see, Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 42, 245.
[165] Ibid., 242.
[166] Ibid., 243.
[167] Ibid., 241.
[168] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 201.
[169] See, Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 237-247.
[170] Ibid., 242; emphasis added.

faith in Christ after death. One possible way forward is found in Zwingli's explanation of salvation for Old Testament believers. He argues that they, like Abraham, were justified by faith because "they desired to see the day of Christ the Saviour."[171] Yet while they had epistemic awareness of a promised Savior it was not until later, after the incarnation, that they gained the ontological reality of Jesus and, thus, explicit faith in Christ. Meanwhile, before the incarnation they went to "the bosom of Abraham" to await the completion of their salvation, which, Zwingli says, "can be nothing else than the sodality of the early believers to be everywhere preserved for the coming of Christ."[172] Thus he holds that God prepared a temporary space and a period of time for the preservation of those who *would be* glorified in Christ. So, to the degree that we are "one people and one church with them,"[173] Tiessen may finally discover an appropriate analogical connection with Old Testament believers. For if God safeguarded those who had faith in the promise of Christ yet had to wait for his atoning work to be given in its fit time, then Tiessen might consider the possibility that God preserves those whom he has chosen to save yet who must wait for the justification of faith through the hearing of the gospel. And to this extent, Zwingli provides some scriptural and doctrinal clues for how one might develop such a proposal.

Stephens points out that from the wider context of Zwingli's work, it is clear that the 'heathen' whom he names as members of heaven did not die with saving faith. Yet he also observes that Zwingli might have thought they would "receive eternal life only after hearing the Gospel, *by analogy* with preaching to the departed in 1 Pet. 3.18-20."[174] More specifically, Zwingli refers to the passage in 1 Peter and to

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[171] Ibid., 231.
[172] Ibid., 230.
[173] Ibid., 231.
[174] Stephens, "Bullinger and Zwingli," 288; emphasis added.

the statement of Christ's "descent into hell" in the Apostles' Creed to express the reach of Christ's salvation: "For to be reckoned with those below is to have gone from the land of the living, and shows that the efficacy of His redemption extended even to those below."[175] Yet while Zwingli speaks of obtaining faith after death, Tiessen is adverse to the possibility of postmortem evangelism and contends that there are no second chances after death.[176]

We might point out that for the unevangelized this option constitutes a first chance. The problem, however, is that Tiessen has rooted his project in the notion that "all have the opportunity to respond to God in faith during their life" through "less-complete forms of divine revelation."[177] Thus, if one does not respond with faith to the Spirit's illumination of general revelation during their lifetime, their fate is sealed in death and their condemnation is just.[178] Likewise:

> At the moment of death, those who had received forms of revelation less complete than the gospel, but who had responded in faith by a work of the Holy Spirit, will joyfully find in Christ the fulfillment of all their hopes and longings.[179]

In light of our argument in the previous section, we can note that the weak point in this statement is the assertion that these responses constitute 'faith.' Yet if Tiessen will speak of the Spirit's work of illumination in terms of preparation for faith rather than as faith itself, this will perhaps give him a firmer starting point for proposing an accessibilist option. Furthermore, a closer reading of Zwingli might also help him maintain his reasons for objecting to posthumous conversion in a way that does not depend on the existence of saving faith outside the preaching of the gospel.

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[175] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 245.
[176] Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 217.
[177] Ibid., 219.
[178] Ibid., 101-102.
[179] Ibid., 204; emphasis added.

As his theory stands, however, Tiessen's reformulation of the doctrine of faith based on 'lesser forms' of revelation compromises the regulative principles of the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*. For a gospel-less faith is also a Christ-less faith and thus a non-Christian faith. But if he will make better use of his particular theological and confessional resources, as demonstrated above, he may be able to find a way to affirm the possibility of salvation through faith for the unevangelized in accordance with the relevant doctrinal principles.

The Agnostic Position of John Stott

While the positions of Strange and Tiessen characterize exclusivism and inclusivism within evangelical theology, Gerald McDermott and Harold Netland point out that "many evangelicals . . . find themselves somewhere between restrictivism and inclusivism, convinced that each goes beyond what the biblical data affirm."[180] One of their examples is John Stott, who muses:

> In the Old Testament people were "justified by faith" even though they had little knowledge or expectation of Christ. Perhaps there are others today in a similar position, who know that they are guilty before God and that they cannot do anything to win his favour, but who in self-despair call upon the God they dimly perceive to save them.[181]

With this idea in mind, Stott claims to "have a solid biblical basis" for believing "that the majority of the human race will be saved."[182] But he insists that Christians should "remain agnostic about how God will bring it to pass."[183] Nevertheless, regarding those who might dimly perceive God and call upon him, he does not hesitate to assert that their salvation still comes through Christ by faith alone.[184] Stott's point is not that

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[180] McDermott and Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions*, 151.
[181] John Stott, *The Authentic Jesus* (Marshall Pickering, 1992), 81.
[182] David L. Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 327.
[183] Ibid., 328.
[184] Stott, *The Authentic Jesus*, 81.

Christians should remain agnostic about the possibility of salvation for the unevangelized, but about how God will save them through Christ by faith.

Inasmuch as Stott refrains from commenting extensively on the issue he does not provide us with enough material to warrant a threefold scriptural, theological, and historical evaluation of his approach. Thus, we will move directly to the doctrinal assessment and examine his treatment according to the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* principles.

A Doctrinal Assessment

Stott confesses, "I have never been able to conjure up (as some great Evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but will inevitably perish."[185] And this reticence to declare the impossibility of salvation for the unevangelized seems to be a chief motivation for agnostic positions. For instance, Christopher Wright, who follows Stott, similarly states, "I find it hard to accept that the sovereign saving grace of God is limited to the evangelistic obedience or effectiveness of the church."[186] Yet he also affirms that the salvation of unevangelized people would still be through Christ by faith.[187] Thus, we might commend Stott and Wright for seeking to extend a Christian hope for salvation among the unevangelized and for affirming that if this occurs it will happen by the sovereign grace of God through Christ by faith alone. But by refusing to resolve the apparent doctrinal discrepancy in the claim that God might save people 'by faith' outside the hearing of the gospel, they also complicate matters, and considering Stott's view there are at least two issues.

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[185] Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials*, 327.
[186] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Uniqueness of Jesus* (London: Monarch, 2001), 50.
[187] Ibid.

The first issue is with his comparison of Old Testament believers who were "justified by faith" and "others today in a similar position, . . . who in self-despair call upon the God they dimly perceive to save them."[188] Foregrounded by the question regarding the amount of knowledge necessary for salvation, Stott argues that the similarity lies in the fact that Old Testament believers were saved "even though they had little knowledge or expectation of Christ."[189] Yet it is important to recall the discussion from the previous sections, that while the Christological knowledge of Old Testament believers was less than what it is now for New Testament believers, Old Testament faith nonetheless obtained within the context of God's special revelation about the Messiah. Hence, a key difference is that Old Testament believers still had knowledge and an expectation of Christ, whereas the unevangelized do not. As Strange rightly states, "All Israelite believers had a 'forward looking' faith in God's promises and . . . they knew full well that they were saved not by their present 'type' of revelation but by the coming 'antitype' of which the 'type' was but a pre-figurement and shadow."[190] In other words, while Old Covenant believers did not know the identity of Christ they knew the promise of Christ and awaited its fulfillment.

Once this aspect is affirmed, Stott's notion of a 'similar position' between Old Testament believers and the unevangelized becomes too weak to support his theory without further explanation. Otherwise, as Walter Kaiser points out, "the only alternative . . . is to claim that there are two methods of salvation approved of in Scripture: the way of faith in Jesus Christ taught in the New Testament and that of a diminished faith, presumably allowed for in the Old Testament."[191] But given Stott's

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188 Stott, *The Authentic Jesus*, 81.
189 Ibid.
190 Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 166.
191 Walter Kaiser, "Holy Pagans: Reality or Myth?", in Morgan and Peterson, eds., *Faith Comes by Hearing*, 140.

assertion that salvation is "on the grounds of Christ's cross alone,"[192] we may safely assume this is not what he has in mind. Thus, he would need to either forgo his analogy regarding Old Testament believers or seek to provide a fuller explanation to better demonstrate similitude with the situation of the unevangelized.

The second issue concerns the *fides ex auditu* principle. Stott argues that if God saves those who "call upon the God they dimly perceive," then their salvation "is still only by grace, only through Christ, only by faith."[193] Yet rather than acknowledge the principle that faith comes from hearing and then simply choose to remain agnostic about how they will hear, he instead assumes that this faith will somehow obtain outside the preaching of the gospel and thus founds his agnosticism on the issue of how this faith (*non auditu*) might occur. Furthermore, after affirming the *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *sola fide* for the possibility of salvation among the unevangelized, he goes on to say, "But of course it is hard for people to call on one they have not believed in, or to believe in one of whom they have not heard, or to hear if no-one preaches to them (Rom. 10:14)."[194] However, as this statement relates to the *fides ex auditu* in verse 17, what could 'hard' possibly mean in this biblical context of calling, believing, and hearing based upon explicit knowledge of Christ? For while Stott claims that "it is *much easier* for people to believe once they have heard the gospel of Christ crucified,"[195] we may question whether Paul in Romans 10 is speaking of the 'easier' way of faith in contrast to the 'harder' way, or if he is referring to the only way of faith. Stott appears to hold the latter interpretation, stating, "It is when they learn from the cross about God's mercy to sinners that they cry 'God be merciful to *me*, a sinner!'"[196] Thus there is a disconnect between Stott's

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[192] Stott, *The Authentic Jesus*, 81.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.; emphasis added.
[196] Ibid., 81-82; emphasis original.

assertion that those who do not know Christ may yet "cry out to God and be saved,"[197] and his recognition that it is only through learning of Christ that a person is then able to call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

With this internal tension in mind, a further look may show that while Stott attempts to remain neutral on the issue of the unevangelized, his particular agnostic approach falls eventually into a kind of doctrinally disordered inclusivist position. In other words, by insisting that the salvation of an unevangelized person is still "only by faith,"[198] he also, in consequence, indicates a theological position on how they will be saved. As we saw with Tiessen, if one claims that an unevangelized person can be saved by faith outside hearing the proclamation of the gospel, then one must work out this assertion through the conceptual framework of implicit faith; a concept that Stott's theory implies but which he never brings into view. To be sure, admitting that his approach entails the notion of implicit faith would compromise his claim to agnosticism, but it would also help resolve the internal tension in his theory. As Lindbeck states, when the idea of implicit faith is "ontologically interpreted, salvation is primarily an inward grace which is articulated and strengthened by explicit faith."[199] So from this perspective, Stott might argue that while the salvific faith of the unevangelized "is still only by grace," it is nonetheless "easier for people to believe" when they hear the gospel preached because it is ultimately through knowledge of the cross that salvation is made sure.[200] To do this, however, he would need to explain how implicit faith is mediated and how it will eventually reach its fulfillment in explicit faith (*fides ex auditu*).

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[197] Ibid., 81.
[198] Ibid.
[199] George Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians," in *The Gospel and the Ambiguity of the Church*, ed. Vilmos Vajta (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 116.
[200] Stott, *The Authentic Jesus*, 81-82.

On the other hand, if this is not the direction that Stott intends, then substantial changes need to be made to his position. For instance, Lindbeck says that unlike implicit faith "explicit faith in Christ is understood, not as expressing or articulating the existential depths, but rather as producing and forming them."[201] Thus Stott, based on his conviction that there is 'a solid biblical basis' for hope that God will extend salvation to the unevangelized, might confess a valid hopeful agnostic position by affirming that not only will God do this through Christ by faith, but that he will bring it to pass through their hearing the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. From this position he might then choose to remain agnostic about how they will hear.

Nevertheless, once the *fides ex auditu* is given place in the discussion, there seems little reason to remain agnostic on the issue. For instance, when Stott leaves the *fides ex auditu* principle out of the conversation initially, we might agree with him that God "has not revealed how he will deal with those who have never heard."[202] But when the *fides ex auditu* is upheld in the discussion, then, as indicated in the previous sections, various scriptural, theological, and doctrinal materials become available for consideration. As his theory stands, however, there remains a disconnect between the *sola fide* and *fides ex auditu* principles suggesting that his view may represent less of an agnostic approach and more of an undeveloped inclusivist position.

Conclusion

Our analysis showed that Strange, Tiessen, and Stott affirm salvation by faith through Christ alone and that the fullness of faith comes by hearing, but they arrange these principles differently. This observation is helpful because it indicates that we are on the right track in our application of rule theory. As Lindbeck states:

> The issue is not whether salvation is through Christ, or faith is necessary, or explicit faith is important, or unbelievers are saved. On the level of the

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[201] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians." 116
[202] Edwards, *Evangelical Essentials*, 327.

properly religious or Christian use of language in worship, preaching, and action, it is possible, so we shall suggest, to make all these affirmations *no matter which position one chooses*.[203]

Thus we find that Strange, representing an exclusivist position, places all humanity in proximity to the *fides ex auditu* through the fall in Genesis 3, and argues that the unevangelized are not "invincibly *ignorant*"[204] but are in a state of unbelief and false faith. On the other hand, representing an inclusivist (accessibilist) view, Tiessen places faith before the *fides ex auditu* principle and argues that the unevangelized receive the Spirit's illumination of lesser forms of revelation during their lifetime and a person's positive response constitutes saving faith. Neither theologian denies the doctrinal principles necessary for the discussion, but the contrast in the ways each applies these rules to their respective arguments is substantial. This is why Lindbeck insists that "our question is a second-order theoretical one in systematic theology regarding the best way to organize faith affirmations and relate them to each other and to other statements of both a theological and nontheological character."[205] Nevertheless, while this task may be a 'second-order theoretical one,' it is no less important because, as we have seen, when theologians do not organize their material adequately they may profess correct faith affirmations – e.g., God will judge all those who remain in unbelief (Strange), or salvation is by grace through faith (Tiessen and Stott) – and yet express them through problematic applications of doctrinal rules – e.g., condemnation based on the notion of single-source revelation, or salvation based on a doctrine of lesser forms of revelation or on a vague scriptural hope.

With this in mind, the chief purpose of the rest of this thesis is to seek a better way to organize faith affirmations for offering a viable Reformation proposal to the

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[203] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians," 110; emphasis added.
[204] Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised*, 282; emphasis original.
[205] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu* and the Salvation of Non-Christians," 110.

question of the unevangelized. From a cultural-linguistic perspective, we might say that if it is indeed ontologically true that God will extend salvation to the unevangelized, then there must be an appropriate intrasystematic way to affirm this truth. Moreover, categorially speaking any meaningful answer will be able to demonstrate this truth without proposing special revelation, saving faith, or false faith outside the explicit preaching and hearing of the gospel. Therefore the only available alternative, as Lindbeck asserts, is the prospective *fides ex auditu* option.

Chapter 5

ASSESSING PROSPECTIVE *FIDES EX AUDITU* PROPOSALS

Introduction

In Chapter 4 we used the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*
principles to evaluate the theories of Daniel Strange, Terrance Tiessen, and John Stott
on the theological question regarding the fate of the unevangelized. We observed, in
part, that Strange connects all people to the *fides ex auditu* through the
protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15, and claims that an unevangelized person has 'false
faith' and is morally responsible for suppressing and distorting the pure knowledge of
God.[1] In contrast, we saw that Tiessen supports the idea that God gives lesser forms
of special revelation to unevangelized people and that this 'word' is sufficient for
faith to obtain *ex auditu*.[2] Finally, our examination of Stott revealed that while he
believes that God will save many unevangelized people through Christ by faith, he
nonetheless neglects the *fides ex auditu* principle and abstains from explaining how
saving faith might obtain apart from the proclamation of the gospel. Thus, all three
evangelical theologians posit the existence of faith (in either false or saving form)
outside a person's awareness of the gospel message. The problem with this conclusion
is that the rule instantiated by the *fides ex auditu* principle specifies that faith obtains
through the explicit preaching and hearing of the word of Christ (Rom 10:14-17).

In light of these findings, this chapter will evaluate Lindbeck's *fides ex auditu*
approach along with two other related proposals in order to become familiar with the
theological ground upon which prospective theories are cultivated. We should also
note that the theories to be assessed after Lindbeck's are by Roman Catholic

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[1] For instance, see, Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 93.
[2] For instance, see, Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 268-269.

theologians Joseph DiNoia and Gavin D'Costa.[3] While it might seem unusual to review DiNoia and D'Costa in light of our 'Reformation' emphasis of the *fides ex auditu*, the reason for doing so comes down to the simple fact that they are the only theologians whose theories are associated with Lindbeck's. This is not to say there are no prospective *fides ex auditu* theories by Protestant theologians, but these proposals are not genealogically connected to Lindbeck in the history of ideas.[4] Nevertheless, we may discover that DiNoia and D'Costa bring some rich theological resources to the discussion that otherwise might have gone unheeded.

Another item of note that effects our rule theory evaluation of these prospective theories is the tradition which teaches that a person's eternal fate is sealed at death – i.e., the doctrine of particular judgment. On the Catholic side, the notion of particular judgment is implied by the dogmatic statement in the Constitution issued by Benedict XII in 1336, which states that after death all purified souls will experience the divine essence "immediately revealing itself plainly, clearly and openly, to them."[5] Likewise, "the souls of those who depart in actual mortal sin immediately after their death descend to hell where they are tortured by infernal punishments."[6] In this way, if one goes 'immediately' to heaven or hell after death, then particular

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[3] J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992); Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[4] For instance, Gabriel Fackre develops his theory out of the debate on a future probation for the unevangelized from nineteenth century American Congregationalism, while Jerry Walls roots his theory in the Wesleyan Armenian notion of holiness and a reinterpretation of the doctrine of purgatory. See Gabriel Fackre, "Divine Perseverance," in Gabriel J. Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard?: Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 71-95; and Jerry Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45-51.

[5] DS, 198.

[6] Ibid.; reaffirmed by Eugenius IV during the council of Basel (1431-1445), see DS, 219-220.

judgement is implied. On the Protestant side, dogmatic statements that imply

particular judgment appear only in a few Reformed confessions; such as the

Westminster Confession of Faith, which states that souls,

> having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them:
> The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received
> into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and
> glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the
> wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness,
> reserved to the judgment of the great day.[7]

Nevertheless, even if the teaching of particular judgment is not a formal doctrine

across the spectrum of Protestant traditions, Walter Elwell states that "the mainstream

of Protestant theology urges that death is the *end* of man's probation and that the

spiritual condition of man after death is fixed, not fluid."[8] So it is perhaps safe to say

that this teaching functions as an informal doctrine within Protestantism, and that our

rule theory examination will need to consider the ways in which each proposal

considers the rules instantiated by the doctrine of particular judgment.

George Lindbeck's Theory of Religions and the *Fides ex Auditu*

Lindbeck introduces his prospective theory as a response to the approach of

Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. As noted in Chapter 1, Rahner uses the

notion of implicit faith and coins the term "anonymous Christian" to propose that if it

is indeed possible for a person to obtain saving faith "without being reached by the

proclamation of the Church's message, then it must be possible to be not only an

anonymous theist but also an anonymous Christian."[9] He reasons that faith for an

unevangelized person is implicit and grace leads their "consciousness subjectively,

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[7] "Westminster Confession of Faith," Ch. 32.1. Also see, "The Second Helvetic Confession," Ch. 26; "The Irish Articles of Religion of 1615," Art. 101; "The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689," Ch. 31.1.

[8] Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker reference library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1080; emphasis original.

[9] Rahner, *Theological Investigations*: V, 132.

even though it is not known objectively."[10] Thus, when an anonymous Christian hears

the gospel this proclamation becomes "the expression in objective concepts of

something which this person has already attained or could already have attained in the

depth of his rational existence."[11] In response, Lindbeck argues for a Protestant

alternative which emphasizes the explicit nature of saving faith.

To this purpose, he first points out that Protestant theologians have had little to

say on this subject of the unevangelized, and muses that "one reason for Protestant

silence is no doubt the traditional suspicion, grounded in the *sola scriptura*, of

speculative efforts to answer questions which are not directly dealt with in the

Bible."[12] In this case, because the Bible does not reveal how or if God will save those

who never hear the gospel, Lindbeck surmises that Protestant theologians remain

uncomfortable with discussing the issue.[13] He also complains that Protestant theology

in America occurs more in the academic realm than in the ecclesial context, and that

in this "university-oriented" environment the subject of the salvation of non-

Christians is not "fashionable or intellectually respectable."[14] So although this issue

"troubles a great many people in the churches," Lindbeck says "the professional

theologians of the major denominations are either unaware of this or do not take it

seriously."[15] He agrees that a certain reticence towards theological speculation is a

good communal value in itself, but he also points out that this particular hesitation has

never functioned as an absolute interdiction within Protestantism:

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[10] Ibid., 131.

[11] Ibid.; for more on Rahner see, Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 143-149; Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 72-74; Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 80-116; and D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 19-23.

[12] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu*," 107.

[13] Ibid., 104.

[14] Ibid., 108

[15] Ibid., 109.

From the time that Luther developed his theory of ubiquity, through the era of Orthodoxy and down into the modern period, Protestants have not been averse to discussing problems which go much beyond anything which Scripture says. It could be replied that what the Reformation is concerned with is the avoidance of useless speculation. Clearly many new questions have arisen in the course of history of which the biblical authors knew nothing, but these should be discussed only if they are important for the concrete life of faith.[16]

For his part, Lindbeck argues that the question of salvation for non-Christians is indeed an important issue for the church and is therefore worthy of theological inquiry.

Nevertheless, Lindbeck does not seem keen to develop a comprehensive theory himself, as his main purpose is to demonstrate that a prospective *fides ex auditu* option is at least as reasonable an option as Rahner's anonymous Christian approach.[17] He points out that even Rahner is forced to acknowledge that death marks the moment when the implicit faith of an anonymous Christian is transformed into explicit salvation through an encounter with Jesus Christ.[18] Thus he argues that the chief difference between Rahner's theory and the *fides ex auditu* option is in where one places the actualization of salvation – either in "a primordial, prereflective experience of Christ's grace" or in a future *fides ex auditu* encounter.[19] To be sure, Lindbeck is dubious of the former:

There is something arrogant about supposing that Christians know what nonbelievers experience and believe in the depths of their being better than they know themselves, and that therefore the task of dialogue or evangelism is to increase their self-awareness. The communication of the gospel is not a form of psychotherapy, but rather the offer and the act of sharing one's own beloved language—the language that speaks of Jesus Christ—with all those

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[16] Ibid., 107; Luther's theory of ubiquity refers to his eucharistic explanation of the substantial presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the elements. As to the speculative nature of this position, Philip Schaff says, "The ubiquity of Christ's body involves an important element of truth, but is a dogmatic hypothesis without sufficient Scripture warrant," see, Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Second Edition., vol. VII (Eerdmans, 1910), 373-374.

[17] See, Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu*," 120; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 44, 49.

[18] See, Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu*," 115; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 45.

[19] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 45.

who are interested, in the full awareness that God does not call all to be part of the witnessing people.[20]

One nontheological reason for this perspective stems from Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of religions.

Recall that in Part 1 we noted Lindbeck's argument that a religion is "like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities."[21] And like any cultural-linguistic system, a religion consists of a distinct vocabulary and grammar within a form of life which makes "possible the description of realities, the formulations of beliefs, and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings, and sentiments."[22] With this definition of religion Lindbeck then hypothesizes that the religious community which contains the particular concepts and categories capable of actually referring to "whatever in fact is more important than everything else in the universe," would be the unsurpassable religion.[23] He states:

> This religion would then be the only one in which any form of propositional, and conceivably also expressive, religious truth or falsity could be present. Other religions might then be called categorially false, but propositionally and expressively they would be neither true nor false. They would be religiously meaningless just as talk about light and heavy things is meaningless when one lacks the concept of "weight."[24]

If then Christianity is the unsurpassable religion (as Lindbeck holds), then we must assume that other religions cannot be alternative salvific structures as they do not speak the language of Christ (i.e., their beliefs, practices, symbols, vocabulary, grammar, experiences, and ways of being in the world are not cultivate by the Christian form of life). Lindbeck does not mean to say that followers of other

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[20] Ibid., 47.
[21] Ibid., 19.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 36.
[24] Ibid.

religions are lost, but that the question of their salvation becomes relevant only once

they begin to come into salvation's determinate setting:

> If this is so, there is a sense in which those unskilled in the language of faith
> not only fail to affirm but also cannot deny that "Jesus is Lord." . . .
> Nonbelievers are not yet confronted by the question of salvation
> because it is only by acquiring some familiarity with the determinate settings
> in which religious utterances acquire propositional force that one can grasp
> their meaning well enough genuinely to reject (or accept) them.[25]

Yet Lindbeck asserts that unsurpassability does not mean that Christians are incapable

of error[26] or that other religions have nothing to teach the Christian community.[27] For

instance, on a second-order level "perhaps . . . Buddhists know more about

contemplation, and Christians about social action, and perhaps they can learn from

each other in these domains even while retaining their categorially different notions of

the maximally important."[28] Moreover, he leaves open the possibility that other

religions have an eschatological salvific value, stating:

> One can admit the unsubstitutable uniqueness of the God-willed missions of
> non-Christian religions when one thinks of these faiths, not as objectifying
> poorly what Christianity objectifies well (as Karl Rahner proposes), but as
> cultural-linguistic systems within which potentialities can be actualized and
> realities explored that are not within the direct purview of the peoples of
> Messianic witness, but that are nevertheless God-willed and God-approved
> anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom.[29]

Hence, the main point Lindbeck tries to make with the notion of unsurpassability is

that Christians have only just begun to learn *ex auditu* what non-Christians have yet to

begin to learn – that salvation is in Christ alone.[30]

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[25] Ibid., 54.
[26] Ibid., 37.
[27] Ibid., 39.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 40-41.
[30] Lindbeck, "*Fides Ex Auditu*," 118. Also see, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 46.

A Critical Review of Lindbeck's Proposal

We will frame our review of Lindbeck by considering some relevant objections raised by Kenneth Surin in his critique of Lindbeck's theory of religions.[31] Having already dealt with a number of Lindbeck's critics in chapters 1-2, Surin will be our chief interlocutor for this section as his prime objective is to dismantle Lindbeck's *fides ex auditu* option. We should note, however, that while Surin's postmodern view of truth permits him to agree with the cultural-linguistic claim that religions are incommensurable, he does not agree with the notion "that there will be just one paradigm for 'interiorising the language of Christ'"; an idea, says Surin, that "falls well short of being truly 'postmodern.'"[32] Yet we should also recall that Lindbeck himself is ambivalent towards postmodernism,[33] and refers to it as a "parasitic negation" of modernity.[34] But to the extent that Surin makes Lindbeck's theory of truth and the *fides ex auditu* option the main object of his criticism, his review remains important for our study.

With this in mind, we will begin with a footnote in which Surin gives a brief evaluation of Lindbeck's view of truth:

> There is an ambiguity in Lindbeck's delineation of the [sic] 'unsurpassability'. When he likens a 'lived religion' to a 'gigantic proposition' (p. 51), Lindbeck indicates that what makes this proposition 'true' is 'the extent that its objectivities *are* interiorised and exercised by groups and individuals'. . . . However, on p. 52 he states that an unsurpassable religion is one which 'is *capable* of being rightly utilized'. . . . In the former case the 'utilisation' in question is evidently deemed to be one that *is in fact* realised or which *has in fact to be* realised, in the latter it is clear that only a *'capacity'* for such 'utilisation' is being talked about. Lindbeck is keen to stress that it is the *historical* practice of the community of faith which is determinative for the issue of truth, and this would favour the first reading of 'unsurpassability'. But this reading sits less easily with a 'prospective *fides ex auditu'* theory than the

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[31] Kenneth Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith': An Examination of Lindbeck's Chapter Three," *Modern Theology* 4, no. 2 (January 1988): 187-209.

[32] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 204.

[33] George Lindbeck, "The Church's Mission to a Postmodern Culture," in *Postmodern Theology: Christian Faith in a Pluralist World*, ed. Frederic B. Burnham (Eugene: Wipf And Stock, 2006), 50-51.

[34] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, xxxi.

second one, and this must cause us to favour the latter gloss: the *'ex auditu'* theory, after all, is absolutely crucial for Lindbeck's theology of religions.[35]

Surin's argument here is that Lindbeck's view of truth results in a contradiction, that it sees Christianity as both corresponding to and not corresponding to ultimate truth at the same time. In one instance Christianity is in fact true, while in another instance Christianity is merely capable of being true contingent upon right use of communal practices. He cannot have it both ways, so Surin wants to know which view of truth Lindbeck intends.

Although Surin recognizes the unique quality of Lindbeck's epistemology, calling it "an ingenious hybrid truth-theory,"[36] he nonetheless appears to interpret the implications of Lindbeck's theory of truth through a cognitive-propositional lens rather than from a cultural-linguistic perspective. That is to say, a closer look at his response to Lindbeck's statement about a religion being like a "single gigantic proposition"[37] may reveal that Surin conflates Lindbeck's "three senses of 'true'" (categorial, propositional, and ontological), and thus neglects the "three contrasting interpretations" of unsurpassability.[38] As we discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the cultural-linguistic determination of whether a religion (as a whole system) is true or false depends not on the actions of the community *per se*, but rather on its categorial adequacy. For it is only from a categorial sense of truth that the religion "which has the concepts and categories that enable it to refer to the religious object, i.e., to whatever in fact is more important than everything else in the universe" is deemed true – unsurpassable.[39]

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[35] Ibid., 205n6. Surin references an earlier printing of *The Nature of Doctrine* by SPCK, 1985.

[36] Ibid., 192.

[37] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 37.

[38] Ibid., 35.

[39] Ibid., 36.

When this understanding of religious truth is then added to Lindbeck's second sense of truth (propositional truth – the communal practice of religious concepts and categories), we find that the categorially true religion is also the only religion that is propositionally true (as a single gigantic proposition).[40] To be sure, this means all other religions are deemed categorially false, but it also means "propositionally and expressively they would be neither true nor false."[41] It is, then, only with the addition of the third sense of truth, ontological truth, that one may speak of the correspondence of first-order propositions. In other words, just as categorial truth makes propositional truth or falsity possible, ontological truth makes categorial truth or falsity possible. For instance, if the Triune God of Christianity is in fact "the Most Important, the Ultimately Real,"[42] then Christianity is thereby the only categorially true religion and the only propositionally true cultural-linguistic system – i.e., the only 'gigantic proposition' with the concepts and categories that in fact correspond to ontological truth.

With this in mind, we see that Surin interprets Lindbeck's statement that a lived religion is like a 'gigantic proposition' to mean that unsurpassability relies on right utilization of "the *historical* practice of the community of faith."[43] Yet, in regard to Lindbeck's three senses of truth, if Christianity is in fact the categorially true religion, then it is also the unsurpassable religion irrespective of any particular utilization of its beliefs and practices by individual Christians or sub-groups of Christianity. So when Surin states, "Given that religions are historical entities, the capacity of a religion to function in a 'categorially true and unsurpassable' way will be crucially affected by historical particularities and socio-economic forces,"[44] he

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[40] Ibid., 50-51.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 51.
[43] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 205n6.
[44] Ibid., 193.

appears to overlook the fact that the 'function' of categorial truth is to make propositional "error as well as truth possible."[45] Which means that the categorially true and unsurpassable religion is in no way crucially affected by any particular wrong use of its practices, for the capacity to err is part and parcel to unsurpassability.

Having said this, perhaps Surin's frustration is warranted on some level. For instance, in Lindbeck's explanation of propositional truth he states, "A religious utterance, one might say, acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence."[46] Yet if this performance "is not always and perhaps not even usually so employed,"[47] then, as Surin argues, how can one hold this understanding of correspondence "without ultimately derogating from the claim that Christianity (or the other faith in question) truly has the capacity to be character-forming and action-guiding 'in a way that corresponds to ultimate reality'"?[48] This is a valid question, and to address it fairly we will need to recall Lindbeck's explanation of propositional truth.

A simple explanation of the cultural-linguistic view of propositional truth is that this truth obtains through the exercise of beliefs and practices by members of the community. When applied generally, this definition means that because a religion is a cultural-linguistic system – i.e., "a total pattern of speaking, thinking, feeling, and acting"[49] – a living religion is itself a propositional truth claim. In other words, there is never a moment when a religion as a whole, "as actually lived," is not uttering "a single gigantic proposition."[50] As Bruce Marshall explains, "In at least this respect,

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[45] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 37.
[46] Ibid., 51.
[47] Ibid., 38.
[48] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 193.
[49] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 50.
[50] Ibid., 37.

the 'truth' of a religion belongs to the language itself of the religion and is not affected by appropriate or inappropriate performance on the part of the speakers of the language."[51] From this perspective, when individuals or sub-groups within Christianity utilize the concepts and categories wrongly, this does not necessarily affect the system's capacity to shape lives. As Lindbeck explains elsewhere, when viewed from a Christian perspective:

> One theological warrant for giving priority to practice is confidence that the Holy Spirit guides the church into the truth.
> If one believes this is so, one will think that the burden of proof rests on those who deny that the Christian mainstream has on the whole and in the long run rightly discerned God's word in Scripture.[52]

So rather than negate the is-in-fact-realized element of Lindbeck's delineation of religious truth (as Surin argues),[53] we find that historical practice (mixed with right and wrong use) is itself evidence of Christianity's capacity to conform lives to God. As Lindbeck explains in his example of the crusader's battle cry, it is only on an individual or sub-group level that an utterance can be true in one instance and false in another.[54]

That said, even if a religion remains unsurpassable when individuals and sub-groups within Christianity utter false propositions, the usual way non-Christians make judgments about Christianity is through the second-order application of propositions (i.e., individual and communal speech-acts). And in this respect, we might assume that false cognitive-propositional utterances by individuals or groups of Christians will at least affect the perception and reception of the historical evidence for Christianity's categorial truth. Or as Surin puts it:

> Given that Christianity was (at least notionally) the religion of the majority of those who adminstered [sic] the Nazi death camps, it would seem to follow

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[51] Bruce D. Marshall, "Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian," *The Thomist* 53 (July 1989): 360.
[52] Ibid., 146.
[53] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 205n6.
[54] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 51.

from Lindbeck's definition that Christianity is precluded from being a 'categorically true and unsurpassable religion' *when viewed from the standpoint of the inmates* of Dachau, Treblinka, Auschwitz, Sobibor, Bergen-Belsen, Majdanek, Buchenwald, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Belzec, Mauthausen, etc.[55]

It is perhaps safe to assume that Lindbeck would agree with this statement. And to be fair, he is not seeking to present a theodicy but to outline a cultural-linguistic theory of religions. As he states in the first sentence of his chapter:

It is not the business of a nontheological theory of religions to argue for or against the superiority of any one faith, but it does have the job, if it is to be religiously useful, of allowing the possibility of such a superiority.[56]

Thus, having observed that categorially different religions hold incommensurable notions of objective reality, he discusses what it might mean for one of these religions (Christianity) to actually correspond to ultimate truth.

Nevertheless, Surin maintains that Lindbeck's *fides ex auditu* approach destroys a person's socially constructed self, and he centers his argument on a paragraph where Lindbeck speaks of a universal encounter with the gospel and Christ in death. The paragraph states:

The proposal is that dying itself be pictured as the point at which every human being is ultimately and expressly confronted by the gospel, by the crucified and risen Lord. It is only then that the final decision is made for or against Christ; and this is true, not only of unbelievers but also of believers. All previous decisions, whether for faith or against faith, are preliminary. The final die is cast beyond our space and time, beyond empirical observation, beyond all speculation about "good" or "bad" deaths, when a person loses his or her rootage in this world and passes into the inexpressible transcendence that surpasses all words, images, and thoughts. We must trust and hope, although we cannot know, that in this dreadful yet wondrous end and climax of life no one will be lost. And here, even if not before, the offer of redemption is explicit. Thus it is possible to be hopeful and trusting about the ultimate salvation of non-Christians no less than Christians even if one does not think in terms of a primordial, prereflective experience of Christ's grace.[57]

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[55] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 193.
[56] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32.
[57] Ibid., 45.

Surin homes in on the idea that in death 'a person loses his or her rootage in this world,' and he responds:

> The author of *The Nature of Doctrine* posits a quite definite disjunction between a state of existence in which we have a 'rootage in this world' and one in which this 'rootage' has disappeared. . . .
> If it is acknowledged that our bodily (and hence our 'personal') identities are socially and culturally constituted, . . . then the non-Christian individual who, as Lindbeck sees it, confronts Christ and the gospel at the *eschaton* will certainly not do so as a *tabula rasa.* He or she will be someone whose body had, in 'this' life, been the bearer of a quite specific set of cultural and social inscriptions.[58]

He goes on to argue that Lindbeck's description of life before and after death affects a "two tracks" view of time and eternity which, according to Surin, means that

> we picture God's existence as a timeless state in which things do not happen successively, as a non-durational state which runs parallel to the historical process, so that when we die we 'jump the tracks' and continue to exist in this non-temporal divine sphere. . . . This picture is highly misleading.[59]

He says that even from a 'two tracks' view of time and eternity, Lindbeck must admit that a person's socially and culturally formed self will not simply dissolve in the next life.[60]

> Turning again to the example of the Jewish victim, Surin asks, what if she
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> were so moved by her experiences of what Christian anti-semites had done to her that she is not able in a Lindbeckian 'after-life' to attach any sense, let alone credence, to the notion of Christianity as a religion which, in his words, is 'capable of being rightly utilised . . . in a way that corresponds to ultimate reality'?[61]

He suggests Lindbeck might answer that "she would be so profoundly healed" that her previous experiences would not keep her from recognizing the unsurpassability of Christianity.[62] For if she were not so healed, argues Surin, then "there would be, for

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[58] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 195.
[59] Ibid., 194.
[60] Another reason Surin thinks this position is misleading is because he holds a Thomist version of time and eternity espoused by Nicholas Lash. For an example of Lash's position, see, "Eternal Life: Life 'After' Death?," *The Heythrop Journal* 19 (1978): 271-284.
[61] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 195.
[62] Ibid.

this one individual at any rate, no 'prospective *fides ex auditu*'" and Lindbeck's

theory would fall apart.[63] Yet because Lindbeck does indeed propose a universal *fides*

ex auditu experience, Surin asserts that his theory "can appropriately be described as

an eschatologically-qualified 'universalism.'"[64]

Dealing with the Gaps in Lindbeck's Theory

To begin, Surin asserts that Lindbeck's universalism "robs the question of the

unsurpassability of Christianity of any real point or urgency."[65] Which is to say, the

cultural-linguistic approach "views religion as something irreducibly communitarian"

which, in the case of Christianity, makes the church the "necessary condition of *both*

salvation *and* damnation."[66] And in light of Lindbeck's *fides ex auditu* theory and his

'two tracks' view of time and eternity, Surin claims this approach means that

> at the *eschaton* (glossed in terms of the Lindbeckian version of the
> 'subsequence' theory) all human beings will at least be endowed with the
> capacity for hearing and accepting the true religion, and so, as required by the
> 'cultural-linguistic' model, all would have been incorporated into the
> linguistic community that is the church. All would, willy-nilly, have been
> 'moulded' by the Christian language, and so all will be 'in' the church,
> regardless of whether or not they are disposed to reject Christ.[67]

In other words, if when unevangelized people 'jump the tracks' in death they also find

themselves suddenly able to speak the language of Christ, then according to Surin this

means they will also suddenly find themselves to be capable members of the Christian

community – including the Jewish victim who we might assume was personally

disposed to reject Christ before her death. Therefore, Surin concludes that Lindbeck's

prospective *fides ex auditu* theory makes the notion of unsurpassability and decisions

for or against Christ irrelevant, for if at the moment of death each person suddenly

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[63] Ibid., 195-196.
[64] Ibid., 196.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 197.

becomes a capable speaker of the language of Christ, then the logical conclusion is that they must be *de facto* members of the church.[68]

In order to consider Surin's objections adequately, we must first take note of a particular misapplication that occurs at the beginning of his argument. As noted earlier, Surin constructs his argument around a particular idea drawn from a particular paragraph in *The Nature of Doctrine* – that in dying "a person loses his or her rootage in this world and passes into the inexpressible transcendence that surpasses all words, images, and thoughts."[69] And it is this idea which leads him to conclude that Lindbeck holds a 'two-tracks' view of time and eternity. The problem is, this paragraph is not Lindbeck's summation of his own prospective *fides ex auditu* theory, but rather it is his summation of the experiential-expressivist notion of implicit faith. More precisely, this paragraph is Lindbeck's description of the position of Rahner.

Lindbeck sets up his argument by contrasting Rahner's concept of anonymous Christianity with the cultural-linguistic emphasis of Paul's *fides ex auditu* (Rom 10:17), and in this way he claims that "on the scriptural issue, the prospective *fides ex auditu* option seems to have the advantage."[70] He then briefly considers the early Christian view of non-Christians, concluding that they "appear to have had an extraordinary combination of relaxation and urgency in their attitude toward those outside the church," but that whatever theological means they used to maintain this tension went unrecorded.[71] Next, he moves ahead to the nineteenth century (inexplicably passing over the patristic and medieval contributions) to point out that during this period there were Protestant theologians who attempted to explain salvation for non-Christians through "what might be called a 'second chance'; but a

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 45.
[70] Ibid., 44.
[71] Ibid.; he does not reference any sources to support this assertion concerning the early Christian view of non-Christians.

long tradition (dogmatized on the Catholic side) holds that the ultimate fate of every human being is definitively decided at death."[72] Yet his introduction of this notion signifies an important moment in his argument, for he goes on to state that recent Roman Catholic scholars, "including Karl Rahner," have sought to construe the idea of a future opportunity so as not to violate the tradition and dogma prohibiting salvific decisions after death.[73] Thus we come to the paragraph under consideration.

In this paragraph, Lindbeck summarizes Rahner's position and highlights the fact that even in the case of anonymous Christianity "the offer of redemption is explicit" in death.[74] With this observation he then reasons that because Rahner's position ultimately admits to the necessity of explicit faith for the salvation of non-Christians, perhaps the prospective *fides ex auditu* approach has yet another advantage (along with the scriptural one).[75] Indeed, he asserts that the notion of implicit faith can appear "arrogant" and may increase "the temptation to religious pretentiousness,"[76] while the *fides ex auditu* approach reminds Christians that "judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17), and many of the first shall be last, and the last first (Matt 19:30)."[77] So from a prospective *fides ex auditu* approach the healing of Surin's Jewish victim (and those like her) would not come upon her willy-nilly when she dies, but would come as an offer to receive healing from Christ in the consummation.[78]

This is also why Lindbeck claims that "experiential-expressivist descriptions of implicit faith are far too glorious even for the *fides ex auditu* and must rather be

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[72] Ibid., 45; he does not cite any of these proposals.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 115.
[75] Ibid., 47-48.
[76] Ibid., 47.
[77] Ibid., 45.
[78] Ibid., 47.

applied to ultimate completion when faith passes into the beatific vision."[79] It seems, then, that Lindbeck's argument is less about the dissolution of a person's socially constructed self, and more about bringing every person into the only determinate setting in which they can "experience and accept the abysmal mystery on which they are grounded."[80] So how does this alternative reading of Lindbeck effect Surin's 'two tracks' characterization?

We see that for Rahner (according to Lindbeck), the explicit offer of redemption to an individual occurs "beyond our space and time."[81] But for Lindbeck, the offer of redemption and decisions about Christ are distinct movements within a single integrated cultural-linguistic process. The capacity to hear obtains only as one acquires a level of competence in the language and practice of the Christian community: "One must, in other words, learn the language of faith *before* one can know enough about its message knowingly to reject it and thus be lost."[82] Rather than result in a personal disjunction between this life and the afterlife, the cultural-linguistic approach implies that death involves some kind of active communal process of transformation, which in turn implies some kind of duration.

For example, we can discern this process in Lindbeck's description of Christian salvation:

> The Holy Spirit which is in them [Christians] is the pledge of, not the participation in, future glory. They have not yet learned to love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves, for this is what comes at the end of the road in eschatological fulfillment. What distinguishes their love from that of the non-Christian is, not its present subjective quality, but rather the fact that it is beginning to be shaped by the message of Jesus' cross and resurrection. Only at the end of the road, only in the eschatological fulfillment, will they have learned to love God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.[83]

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[79] Ibid., 46.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 45.
[82] Ibid., 45; emphasis added.
[83] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 46.

First, loving God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself is a learning process. Second, this learning process is perfected within the form of life cultivated by the message of Jesus' cross and resurrection (i.e., the church). Third, this learning process for Christians is not complete at the moment of death, because "only at the end of the road, only in the eschatological fulfillment, *will they have learned*."[84] This delineation is helpful in that it not only indicates a communal transformative process, but it also exposes a conceptual gap in Lindbeck's *fides ex auditu* approach. That is to say, between the second and third points we see that Christians go from 'still learning' in this life to 'have learned' in the *eschaton*. To be sure, it may be this conspicuous jump from 'not yet' to 'already' that is the source of Surin's dissatisfaction with Lindbeck's view of time and personal identity.

Yet it is important to also recognize that this anomaly in Lindbeck's design represents a gap within the already existing structure of the cultural-linguistic project and is not itself a structural flaw. For instance, we might picture a newly constructed house where all the rooms are finished except one; where the kitchen should be there is an empty space – no flooring, no cabinets, no appliances. The absence of furnishings does not compromise the structure of the house, but everyone can agree that a 'kitchen' should occupy this space. So in order to move towards making the house habitable one might begin by sketching a layout that is conscious of the physical dimensions and intended purpose of the space, and which is consistent with the overall esthetic and design of the house. In other words, to fill this space and make it functional there is no need to demolish the house.

Similarly, because the idea that a person will obtain immediate communal competence in death goes against the whole tone, organization, and character of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of religions, perhaps a better method of

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[84] Ibid.; emphasis added.

conjecture is to consider the logical flow of the material argument in which this conceptual gap exists. For instance, in regard to non-Christians, Lindbeck writes:

> Nonbelievers are not yet confronted by the question of salvation because it is only by acquiring some familiarity with the determinate settings in which religious utterances acquire propositional force that one can grasp their meaning well enough genuinely to reject (or accept) them.[85]

Whereas Christians 'have not yet learned,' here we find that non-Christians 'are not yet learning.' So if we assume that from a cultural-linguistic perspective the movement from 'not yet learning,' to 'learning,' to 'have learned' involves a real process delimited by an unequivocal context and a measure of time – and if at the moment of death this process is incomplete for Christians and just beginning for non-Christians – then we might also assume a certain symmetry exists between life before death and life after death in regard to the necessary conditions of faith. Conditions, according to Lindbeck, that include the proclamation of the gospel through word and deed, the hearing and receiving of the word through communal participation, and the salvific activity of the Holy Spirit:

> Faith, so the cultural-linguistic interpreter would say, comes from the acceptance and internalization of the external word (that is, the verbal, sacramental, and behavioral witness to Jesus Christ). The salvific role of the Holy Spirit is to join hearers and potential hearers (publically and communally and thereby internally) to that Word who is Jesus Christ.[86]

Thus, perhaps a more natural conclusion is that in death an unevangelized person will encounter the gospel through acquiring the habitude of the community of faith so that their future encounter with Christ in the consummation will be with a practiced awareness of who he is. As this understanding relates to the Jewish victim, perhaps it means that she will receive a true witness to Christ in the intermediate state in a way that will not affect her freedom to choose in the *eschaton*.

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[85] Ibid., 54.
[86] Ibid., 130.

Having said this, Surin argues that the prospective *fides ex auditu* approach causes the non-Christian to find themselves suddenly "'in' the church, regardless of whether or not they are disposed to reject Christ,"[87] and to a certain extent he is correct. For if one can come to faith only within the life of the Christian community, and if death marks this opportunity for non-Christians, then the only logical conclusion is that when they die they will be 'in' the church. One thing to consider, however, is that from a cultural-linguistic perspective it is only from within the life of the church that the disposition to either accept or reject Christ even becomes possible.[88] The logical frame here is that to be in Christ one must be in the church, but being in the church (i.e., one who is more or less learning the language of faith) does not necessarily mean one is also in Christ (i.e., having come to a point in which they are competent enough to accept or reject Christ). And according to Lindbeck, this situation is normative until the consummation when the true church will be revealed.[89]

Yet even if Lindbeck's approach does not necessarily view non-Christians as a kind of *tabula rasa* in death, Surin's objection does indicate another gap in his prospective theory. For if personal identity remains intact in death, then when a non-Christian dies "he or she will be someone whose body had, in 'this' life, been the bearer of a quite specific set of cultural and social inscriptions."[90] Or as Stephen Stell writes:

> Lindbeck's focus on the explicit faith of a cultural-linguistic tradition, and thus his emphasis on the future, is crucial; yet his polarization of experience and tradition, and thereby of present and future, is hermeneutically and theologically problematical. While one may affirm that the 'final die' is cast beyond our space-time existence, this does not mean that it can be so thoroughly severed from that existence. . . . Not that the final decision is necessarily made [before death]; but if there is any continuity to the 'self' after

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[87] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 197.
[88] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 45, 54.
[89] Lindbeck, "Performing the Faith," 29.
[90] Surin, "'Many Religions and the One True Faith,'" 195.

death, surely the cultural-linguistic preparation for that decision will influence one's abilities and orientations in making it.[91]

We can assume that Lindbeck agrees with this statement, but he neglects to carry forward this theological datum into his prospective *fides ex auditu* option. As Marianne Moyaert observes:

> By emphasizing what happens in the *eschaton* so much, Lindbeck seems, first, to say that people no longer have these inscriptions after death. Second, he seems to suggest that the "falling away" of these specific social and cultural inscriptions makes people receptive to the gospel.[92]

Thus, we find another gap between Lindbeck's claim that other religions (other cultural-linguistic systems) can be viewed as "God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom," and his assertion that non-Christians begin learning the language of Christ only in death.[93] Yet, as Moyaert suggests, one way to work through this issue theologically is to consider "the universal activity of the Spirit."[94] For if the salvific role of the Holy Spirit is to join "potential hearers" to Christ,[95] then this might open up ways to explain the importance and relevance of a non-Christian's form of life and personal identity in preparation for their encounter with the gospel and Christ in death.

Some Tentative Conclusions

Lindbeck organizes his prospective theory in a way that seems to fit comfortably within the doctrinal environment of the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* principles. First, he foregrounds the discussion by pointing out that

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[91] Stephen L Stell, "Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 682-683.

[92] Marianne Moyaert, "Postliberalism, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Analysis of George Lindbeck's Fiduciary Interests," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 84-85.

[93] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 40-41, 54.

[94] Moyaert, "Postliberalism, Religious Diversity," 85.

[95] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 130.

"the major doctrinal concern has been to preserve the *Christus solus*, not to deny the possibility of salvation to non-Christians," and his notions of incommensurability and unsurpassability assure that his theory admits to no other way of salvation.[96] Indeed, in a later writing he asserts that God "is the one who justifies, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae,* the meta-dogma by which all other doctrines and uses of doctrine are to be judged."[97] Second, by denying the need for the concept of implicit faith to explain the salvation of non-Christians, Lindbeck is able to use the scriptural precept of explicit faith as a ligature to bind together the *solus Christus* and *sola fide* principles. An approach which ensures that "saving faith cannot be wholly anonymous, wholly implicit, but must be in some measure explicit: it comes, as Paul puts it, *ex auditu* (Rom. 10:17)."[98] So epistemologically, the possible salvation of a non-Christian initiates only when they come into faith's determinate setting.

Nevertheless, Lindbeck frames his proposal as a nontheological approach and his goal is merely to convince the reader "that the salvation of non-Christians in the eschatological future makes at least as much theological sense as the myth of a primordial, prelinguistic experience of the *gratia Christi*."[99] One result of this approach is that his prospective *fides ex auditu* option seems to raise more theological questions than it answers. First, when we recall the delineation of the doctrine of particular judgment from the introduction we see that Lindbeck is perhaps too quick to assume that Rahner's position overcomes the teaching that a person's eternal fate is fixed at death. To be sure, Rahner's answer – that in death a person with implicit faith receives explicit faith and redemption – offers a creative way through the doctrinal

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[96] Ibid., 42.
[97] George Lindbeck, "Confessional Subscription: What Does It Mean for Lutherans Today?," *Word & World* 11, no. 3 (1991): 319.
[98] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 43.
[99] Ibid., 49.

impasse, but it also opens him up to the full force of Surin's argument concerning time, personal identity, and decisions for or against Christ. This section has sought to defend Lindbeck against some of these concerns, but if we have succeeded in this endeavor then we have also succeeded in showing how Lindbeck neglects the principle of particular judgment. For if an unevangelized person does not come into the necessary conditions of faith until after death, then what else can their acceptance be but a postmortem conversion?

A second related problem in need of theological attention is that Lindbeck's description of the eschatological moment of ultimate decisions includes all people generally with no distinction of persons. Perhaps by giving careful attention to the doctrine of particular judgment there could be a way for him to argue that the *sola fide* and *fides ex auditu* principles make it nomologically possible that an unevangelized person will have the opportunity to learn the language of faith after death before the eschatological judgment, but his general explanation of the possibility leaves little recourse for him to explain how his theory is any different from other 'second chance' options. Maybe it is not.

Third, bracketing out the doctrine of particular judgment, let us recall the observation that Lindbeck's prospectus *fides ex auditu* approach implies some kind of duration after death as people must acquire a certain level of proficiency in the language of Christ. We described this facet as a conceptual gap in his theory and also visualized it as an empty space in an otherwise furnished house. In this way, we were able to see that it is the active presence of the Holy Spirit and the witnessing church that should occupy this space in Lindbeck's theory, but his cultural-linguistic structure does not provide any theological resources for furnishing this conceptual space between death and resurrection, and yet this material is greatly needed. Dovetailing with this concern, we also identified a conceptual gap between his claim

that other religions have a present missions value and his assertion that the salvific

possibility for non-Christians begins only in death. Thus, his alternative solution fails

to account for how the cultural-linguistic self-identity of a non-Christian prepares

them for a future encounter with the gospel of Christ. Keeping these issues in mind,

let us now consider the prospective *fides ex auditu* approaches of DiNoia and

D'Costa.

Joseph DiNoia's Prospective Theory

The chief focus of this section is the prospective theory of Gavin D'Costa. But

as he follows Joseph DiNoia in his development of a prospective approach, we will

begin our assessment with a cursory description of DiNoia's proposal.[100] In his book,

The Diversity of Religions, DiNoia dispenses with the notion of implicit faith and the

idea that other religious structures can mediate salvation, and he appropriates instead

Lindbeck's idea of the "unsubstitutable uniqueness" of other religions within God's

salvific plan.[101] In this way, he suggests that while religions differ in their claims to

ultimate reality, this need not rule out the possibility that certain moral aspects of non-

Christian religions could end up being a boon to salvation rather than part of that

which will be forfeit in the consummation. So while these moral aspects do not

produce a present salvific effect, they might nonetheless function as a *preparatio*

evangelica orienting a person towards salvation at a future time. DiNoia explains:

> A theology of religions developed along these lines could acknowledge the
> goodness and uprightness of other religious people without ascribing
> immediate salvific value to these qualities. . . .
>   At the same time, appropriate Christian valuations of such qualities
> could be framed in terms of an "eschatological" rather than a present salvific
> value. The specific ways in which the presently observable and assessable
> conduct and dispositions of non-Christians will conduce to their future
> salvation are now hidden from view and known only to God.[102]

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[100] See, D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 31.
[101] DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 67-68.
[102] Ibid., 75.

His point here is a practical one. Christians can affirm that non-Christians are within the purview of God's salvific plan without imposing a direct Christian significance to their religious beliefs and practices. They can trust that "other religious communities, while pursuing their distinctive aims, foster rather than obstruct the development in their members of the disposition to attain and enjoy the true end of life, fellowship with the Blessed Trinity."[103]

DiNoia insists that this kind of prospective view means Christians can accept the moral practices and doctrinal self-descriptions of other religious communities at face value, while also ascribing "an indirect contributory (broadly providential rather than specifically salvific) value to them."[104] In this way, if part of their socially constructed self includes elements of *preparatio evangelica*, then a person's cultural-linguistic inscriptions plays a vital part in their eschatological salvation. Nevertheless, how does a non-Christian move from merely having a disposition that is conducive to Christian fellowship to actually having a personal relationship with God if they die before hearing the gospel? DiNoia suggests that this issue might be overcome "by appeal to the doctrine of purgatory."[105]

Similar to what we observed with Lindbeck, DiNoia's theoretical framework does not envision the possibility of moving from the state of a partially fostered disposition to a state of full fellowship with the Triune God outside a real interval of personal transformation. Indeed, he notes Surin's complaint against Lindbeck's view of time and identity and points out that "between earthly life and the life to come . . . the doctrine of purgatory supposes a real continuity: a link obtains between purgation in this life and purgation in the next."[106] And given DiNoia's assertion that salvific

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[103] Ibid., 67; a description DiNoia sees as being consistent with Vatican II, see no3.
[104] Ibid., 90.
[105] Ibid., 104.
[106] Ibid., 191.

knowledge "is ineradicably particular insofar as it is transmitted in sources entrusted by God to the Christian community," this transformative process for him also involves the active presence of the witnessing church.[107] Moreover, DiNoia addresses the doctrinal principle of particular judgment stating that the notion of purgatory cannot be used to support life-changing decisions after death:

> The interval between individual judgment and the general judgment cannot be considered as one in which conversion could now occur when none had taken place prior to death, or that the fundamental orientation of one's life could be altered. The decisions taken in life cannot turn out to have been irrelevant to the shape of the life to come.[108]

The key idea here is that those who die with a disposition conducive to fellowship with God might be able to continue moving towards this destination in purgatory. Except that in the case of non-Christians, DiNoia insists that "purgatory would involve the realization of the continuities as well as the discontinuities between what they had practiced and believed and what is indeed the case about the true aim of life."[109] Thus he argues that their salvation does not involve a postmortem reversal of life-shaping decisions, but embraces a process of personal transformation that is consistent with the decisions made in life as shaped by moral elements within their cultural-religious environments.[110]

Gavin D'Costa's Further Development of DiNoia

In his book *Christianity and World Religions*, D'Costa grounds his discussion of the unevangelized in the express teaching of the Roman Catholic Church – that a non-Christian can be saved – and "the problems thus left unresolved" by this affirmation.[111] For instance, Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* states:

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[107] Ibid., 84.
[108] Ibid., 105.
[109] Ibid., 106.
[110] See, Ibid., 103-108.
[111] Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 162.

> Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.[112]

The difficulty in working out this statement is that the Catholic Church also teaches that salvation, even for the unevangelized, "is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church."[113] So the question is, how can a person who does not know Christ and his church receive salvation if it is always given through this very knowledge? D'Costa says the "usual answer" given by Catholic theologians is that good non-Christians "can *implicitly* know Christ and his church through an implicit or unconscious desire."[114] Yet he argues that this response does not explain how these people are saved in an eschatological sense, because "final salvation requires not only an ontological and causal, but also an epistemological relationship to Christ."[115] More precisely:

> This salvation won by Christ is only available through faith in Christ, which comes from hearing the gospel preached in this life or the next (*fides ex auditu*), requiring repentance, baptism, and the embracing of a new life in Christ.[116]

From this position, D'Costa claims that the postmortem option "is actually implied in . . . Roman Catholicism" through the resources provided by the confession of Christ's descent into hell (from the Apostles' Creed).[117]

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[112] DCC (1964), "*Lumen Gentium*," 7, accessed August 6, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[113] CDF (2000), "*Dominus Iesus*," accessed July 30, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html.

[114] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 163.

[115] Ibid., 24.

[116] Ibid., 25.

[117] Ibid., 162. Two of D'Costa's primary resources for developing this aspect of his argument are, DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*; and, Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death, and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, 2nd ed., Dogmatic theology 9 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

To set up his argument, D'Costa begins by characterizing the type of unevangelized person the Catholic Church teaches can attain salvation by introducing a hypothetical scenario involving a practicing Buddhist called Jane, who has never heard the gospel but "has lived a good life, following the truth to the best of her ability in the light of her conscience"; also, "it is assumed that possibilities of the good, true, and beautiful life might be found in positive elements within her religion" – i.e., opportunities for her to respond "to the promptings of the Holy Spirit."[118] With this description in place, he states:

> The question is: how can original and personal sins be forgiven, how can persons consciously share in the beatific vision, how can they participate in the joy and glory of the risen Lord, without knowing Christ and his church in any possible way when they die as a non-Christian?[119]

In other words, how does one account for the *fides ex auditu* in the salvation of Jane?

One observation at this point is that while DiNoia ascribes only a future-oriented salvific value to aspects of other religions, D'Costa does not hesitate to ascribe a present-tense salvific value to these elements. This is not to say that he thinks Jane is now saved; he maintains that there is no salvation outside an objective relation to Christ and his church (e.g., the problem question above). Rather, in light of his reading of the Vatican II statements on non-Christians and other religions, D'Costa seeks to affirm "that there are elements, not structures, of grace within them."[120] Similar to DiNoia, he posits a future-oriented salvation and yet argues further for a present-tense relation to grace and the work of the Holy Spirit (through conscience and "positive elements" within the religion).[121] It is, then, from this perspective that he circumscribes the problem further, stating:

> Ontologically, they have become "related" to the reality of God through grace, but epistemologically do not know God in the way God has revealed himself

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[118] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 162.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid., 189.
[121] Ibid., 162.

so that the lack of unity between the epistemological and ontological is deeply unsatisfactory, for the beatific vision requires both.[122]

He suggests that the statements from *Lumen Gentium* and *Dominus Iesus* encourage an after-death solution to the dilemma, and in search of a resolution he follows the trajectory of Lindbeck and DiNoia.[123]

D'Costa's Correctives

As mentioned earlier, implied in the doctrine of particular judgment is the notion that a person's eternal fate is fixed at death. D'Costa highlights this doctrinal principle by noting Augustine's denial of postmortem conversion and he points out that "Lindbeck's solution falls foul of the Augustinian prohibition against such changes and freedom after death."[124] On the other hand, while DiNoia's solution seeks to uphold this prohibition D'Costa argues that there is an internal tension in his theory. This tension is caused by two conflicting claims: "Other religions should be seen as professing different means and ends to that of Christianity while at the same time, he argues, non-Christians in these religions may be justified or in a state of grace."[125] The problem is, if the particular aims of other religions are not Christological and their means are not ecclesiological, then how can they orient members towards the beatific vision?

Furthermore, even if the moral elements within other religions do indeed develop the dispositions of members to attain fellowship with God, D'Costa states, "I question whether purgatory can be assimilated to the non-Christian without further argument, as it has traditionally been understood as the process for those who are already epistemologically 'in Christ.'"[126] In other words, the established

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[122] Ibid., 164.
[123] Ibid., 162.
[124] Ibid., 164.
[125] Ibid., 190.
[126] Ibid., 189.

understanding of purgatory is that it is an opportunity extended to Christians alone;

for instance:

> If those truly penitent have departed in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for sins of commission and omission, the souls of these are cleansed after death by purgatorial punishments; and so that they may be released from punishments of this kind, the suffrages of the living faithful are of advantage to them, namely, the sacrifices of Masses, prayers, and almsgiving, and other works of piety, which are customarily performed by the faithful for other faithful according to the institutions of the Church.[127]

According to this Roman Catholic formulation, DiNoia's good non-Christians need

explicit faith before they can enter purgatory (e.g., suffrages 'performed by the

faithful for other faithful'). So the question is, how does a non-Christian who dies

with a disposition conducive to faith subsequently obtain faith through hearing the

proclamation of the gospel when, in principle, the purgatorial doors are close to non-

Christians? D'Costa argues that incorporating the doctrine of Christ's descent into

hell, as it relates to the traditional teaching on the limbo of the just, will help resolve

this issue. He writes, "Given the various dogmatic parameters, . . . only in the event of

the 'descent' does the unity of the epistemological and ontological take place to

answer satisfactorily the question about Jane."[128]

Christ's Descent and the Limbo of the Just

       D'Costa recognizes that the theology of Christ's descent into hell presents "a

complex and shifting picture," so he seeks to frame the discussion by noting some of

the more consistent elements within the Roman Catholic tradition.[129] First, he

explains that in Catholic theology hell consists of four dimensions: 1) hell proper,

which is "the place of damnation" and "a perduring reality"; 2) the limbo of

unbaptized infants, "a state that has always been disputed" and "if it exists, is a

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[127] DS, 693.
[128] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 167.
[129] Ibid., 165.

perduring reality"; 3) the limbo of the just, "empty after Christ's descent" and "not a perduring reality"; and 4) purgatory, "a place of purification."[130] Second, D'Costa considers the traditional Catholic interpretation of the doctrine of descent in light of the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar.[131]

The general understanding of the descent is that while Christ's victory on the cross was made known throughout all the levels of hell, he redeemed only those in the limbo of the just. Yet D'Costa explains that "Balthasar argues that the limbos and purgatory are irrelevant" to the doctrine of descent, because "death and damnation are the outcome of sin."[132] In other words, Christ not only had to experience death but also alienation, which means "the Son descends into the depths of damnation,"[133] an assertion that looks rather different from the traditional view but which Edward Oakes nonetheless insists represents "a legitimate doctrinal development."[134] The reason for this insistence, says D'Costa, is that Oakes argues for Balthasar's solution for the descent into hell in relation to non-Christians because "it allows Christ to 'bestow grace eschatologically on whom he will' (2007, 188); which means that all non-Christians might be saved."[135] Yet D'Costa is unsatisfied with this quasi-universalism position, and he turns next to Alyssa Pitstick's critical evaluation of Balthasar's theology.[136]

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[130] Ibid., 165-166.
[131] Ibid., 201-210. D'Costa references, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000); and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).
[132] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 202.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 206. Also see, Edward T. Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 198-199.
[135] Ibid., 204.
[136] See, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent Into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); and, Alyssa Pitstick, "Development of Doctrine, or Denial? Balthasar's Holy Saturday

D'Costa explains that for Pitstick, Balthasar's theology is not a doctrinal development but rather it "corrupts a true doctrine."[137] Indeed, she argues that the definitive Catholic teaching is that Christ's redeeming work was finished on the cross and that the descent was "Christ's application of the fruit of redemption."[138] D'Costa agrees with Pitstick, stating: "I would conclude that Balthasar's descent into hell teaching is both in danger of contradicting the teachings of the Catholic church, . . . and in danger of advancing a deeply problematic Christology and trinitarian doctrine of God."[139] For if Christ experienced genuine alienation, then he experienced an ontological separation from the Father resulting in "a rupture in the Godhead."[140] Thus D'Costa maintains that Christ descended "in his soul to the limbo of the just and not in this manner to the other regions, although his power and authority are known in all four regions through his descent."[141]

Finally, he points out that the early teaching on the subject "was grounded on a number of biblical texts:

> The most important being Luke 16:22 – the parable of Dives and Lazarus at "Abraham's bosom"; Luke 23:43 – where Jesus on the cross tells the penitent thief that "today you shall be with me in paradise"; Ephesians 4:9 – where Paul says that before Jesus ascended he "also descended first into the lower parts of the earth"; and 1 Peter 3:10-4:6.[142]

He then states that the 1 Peter passage (which speaks of Christ's proclamation "to the spirits in prison" - 3:19) "is probably the most pivotal," and he proceeds to give a concise survey of the patristic interpretation of this passage.[143]

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and Newman's Essay," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 129-145.

[137] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 206.

[138] Pitstick, "Development of Doctrine, or Denial?" 132.

[139] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 209-210.

[140] Ibid., 209.

[141] Ibid., 166.

[142] Ibid., 168.

[143] Ibid.

D'Costa begins with Clement of Alexandria (150-215) who argues that because it is the work of Christ to save, his descent into hell occasioned salvation for both the Jew and the non-Jew alike. For example, Clement declares, "Do not the Scriptures show the Lord preached the Gospel to those that perished in the flood?"[144] D'Costa says that in this way, Clement initiated "a long tradition that includes both Jews and pagans in the limbo of the just."[145] Yet he also highlights Clement's use of the *Shepherd of Hermas* (first or second century), which teaches that when the apostles and other teachers of the gospel died they went and preached to those who had "fallen asleep" before them, so that these too might be "made to know the name of the Son of God" and be saved.[146]

Another interpretation he notes is from Origen (184-254), who reads 1 Peter 3:19-20 (and Ezekiel 16:53) as a message of hope. For Origen, God's just punishment of sinners is given "with the prospect of improvement, . . . of which hope Peter himself thus speaks in his first Epistle" concerning those destroyed in the flood.[147] However, D'Costa is careful to point out that "in his response to Celsus (*Against Celsus* 2.43), Origen says Christ converted only those 'who were suitable and were willing to hear him' (30), which runs counter to any easy universalism."[148] He also mentions Cyril of Alexandria (378-444) and John Damascene (676-749) as examples of those in the Greek church who maintained Origen's interpretation of the 1 Peter

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[144] Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* (6.6), trans. William Wilson, *New Advent*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm.

[145] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 170.

[146] Ibid. Also see, Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Shepherd of Hermas* (9.16:5-7), trans. F. Crombie, vol. 2 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), accessed April 21, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02013.htm; Book III, Ch. 16.

[147] Origen, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: De Principiis* (2.5), ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Frederick Crombie, vol. 4 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), accessed April 21, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04122.htm.

[148] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 172.

passage – "although John is very clear that Christ saves only the righteous who deserve salvation."[149] Finally, he turns to Augustine (354-430) in the Latin tradition in order to concentrate on his reading of the 1 Peter passage and his prohibition against postmortem conversion.

D'Costa explains that Augustine "suggests 1 Peter 3-4 be understood as Christ's pre-existent nature preaching to Noah's sinful contemporaries during their lifetime, through the person of Noah."[150] For example, in Augustine's comparison of the nature and purpose of the flood event with the present age of the church, he writes:

> For that transaction had been typical of future events, so that those who do not believe the gospel in our age, when the Church is being built up in all nations, may be understood to be like those who did not believe in that age [during the time of Noah].[151]

D'Costa also claims that Augustine's commentary on this point argues that the passage refers "to those who responded positively to Noah's/Christ's teaching just before the flood."[152] So even though the flood destroyed those who had repented, these particular souls were permitted a place among the just in limbo to await the completion of their salvation in Christ. He writes, "Without necessarily following Augustine's interpretation of the pre-existent Christ operating in Noah, the descent was increasingly understood as Christ's coming to set the just free, rather than preaching the gospel to those who had earlier rejected God."[153]

We should note, however, that while D'Costa is correct regarding Augustine's Noah/Christ interpretation, it was not Augustine who considered the possibility that

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[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Augustine, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (5.15), ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Cunningham, vol. 1 (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), accessed November 30, 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102164.htm.

[152] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 172.

[153] Ibid., 173.

some people repented before dying in the flood. Rather, as Stephen Bullivant notes, "this reading belongs to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuit cardinal (and later saint and Doctor of the Church) Robert Bellarmine."[154] For Augustine, the very fact that these people perished in the flood is itself proof that they rejected the gospel, and there is then no hope for their salvation.[155] Nevertheless, in light of the fathers' use of the teaching of Christ's descent into hell to explain the salvation of Jews who died before the incarnation, and the tradition which includes righteous non-Jews in the limbo of the just, D'Costa writes:

> Can we analogically argue that the limbo of the just must conceptually exist in relation to non-Christians like Jane who are in a similar situation to the pre-Christian just? . . . The answer I think is a yes and a no.[156]

As regards this yes and no answer, D'Costa explains that one obstacle to an easy comparison is in the teaching that after his resurrection Christ emptied the limbo of the just, and "if the limbo of the just is empty, . . . then the analogy breaks down."[157]

He proposes a solution to this dilemma, referring to the penitent thief on the cross in Luke 23:40-43 (sometimes called Dismas) he observes that "most of the fathers" say that after his death Dismas is located in "the limbo of the just [i.e., paradise], not in heaven (for no one could enter until Christ's resurrection)."[158] And because Dismas was both a recent convert and a recent thief, we might assume he was not ready for the beatific vision when Christ opened the doors of heaven at the time of his ascension, so perhaps Dismas, along with the repentant souls who perished in the flood (from his reading of Augustine), "still require 'time' to mature into the new life

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[154] Bullivant, "The Salvation of 'Jane' and the Problem of Ignorance," 122; he also cites, Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 50.; Bo Reicke mentions Thomas Cajetan and Alfonso Salmeron as proceeding Bellarmine for this interpretation, see, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Pet. III. 19 and Its Context* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 43.

[155] See, Augustine, "Letter 164" 5.14-15.

[156] Ibid., 174.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 176.

of faith that they had begun."[159] D'Costa concludes that even though Christ emptied the limbo of the just and opened the doors of heaven after his resurrection, this does not necessarily mean that everyone was prepared to experience the Blessed Trinity at that time. He states, "I am not arguing that Christ is unable to transform the individual instantaneously. Rather, from the human point of view, if one inhabitant of the limbo of the just, Dismas for example, might still require purification, why not others?"[160]

Another objection D'Costa addresses is in regard to the special status of Israel as a covenant people. He asserts that while other religions are in no way comparable to "the *sui generis* nature of Judaism, both after and before the time of Christ," the analogy may yet lie in the fact that Christ's descent completes what is lacking for those who were on their way to salvation before their death.[161] Therefore he suggests that "if the righteous Jew is not said to 'convert,' but rather to come to fulfillment, it is fair to conclude that this is also possibly true, with a very different sense of fulfillment, in the case of the righteous pagan."[162] That is to say, as Christ's descent into the limbo of the just explains how those who were ontologically related to God before death became epistemologically related to Christ after death, perhaps a qualified application of this teaching will also support a similar explanation for the salvation of good non-Christians since the time of Christ's ascension.

With this delineation in mind, we can now observe that the chief elements of D'Costa's theory are: 1) the Roman Catholic Church's affirmation that certain non-Christians can be saved; 2) an emphasis of Christ's descent into hell in relation to the limbo of the just; 3) the patristic inclusion of good non-Jews with those who benefited from Christ's descent into hell; and 4) the notion that Christ's descent not only

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[159] Ibid., 177.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., 174.
[162] Ibid., 174-175.

emptied the limbo of the just but also opened the doors of purgatory for those in need of further transformation. D'Costa concludes:

> First, the limbo of the just conceptually explains the entry of non-Christians into a relationship with Christ and his church, and their subsequent enjoyment of the beatific vision. Second, the limbo of the just illuminates the necessity of Christ and the church as a means of salvation and unites the ontological (which has already begun in this life, in ways that have already been articulated in part – through conscience, through noble and good elements within a person's religion, through the activity of grace and the Holy Spirit in both these modes) with the epistemological, thus allowing the fulfillment of salvation to come about and addressing the entire cluster of problems related to Jane. Third, conceptually, it is very likely that some of the just, after their encounter with Christ and his church in the analogical space of the limbo of the just, will require purification, and then they, like their Christian brothers and sisters, may enter the Christological fires of purgatory.[163]

He reiterates that the postmortem response to the gospel by the good non-Christian does not constitute a conversion, "but a coming to maturation and completion."[164]

A Critical Review of D'Costa's Proposal

Before proceeding we should note that along with the teaching of Christ's descent into hell, the limbo of the just, and purgatory D'Costa's argument also includes the Roman Catholic teaching on the "Eucharistic mediation" of the church and the tradition regarding the children's limbo.[165] To be sure, his proposal deserves a review which attends to all its composite parts, and it is only for the sake of our intended goal that we have limited our assessment of his theory to just a few elements. Our primary interlocutors for this assessment will be Tan Loe Joo, Wouter Biesbrouck (Protestant), and Stephen Bullivant (Roman Catholic).[166]

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[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 179.
[165] Ibid., 180-186, 194-201.
[166] Loe-Joo Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Assessment," *New Blackfriars* (April 2, 2013): 88-104; Wouter Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus, Sed Extra Mundum Nulla Damnatio*: Reappropriating Christ's Descent into Hell for Theology of Religions," *Louvain Studies* 37 (2013): 107-132; Stephen Bullivant, *The Salvation of Atheists and Catholic Dogmatic Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2012). We will consider the critique of Edward Oakes (Roman Catholic) in more detail in Chapter 7; see, Edward T. Oakes, "Descensus and

In the initial development of his theology of religions D'Costa followed Rahner's version of inclusivism, which proposes that other religions serve as provisional salvific structures by which non-Christians can be saved.[167] D'Costa no longer holds this view, and one important reason for this change is that "the *fides ex auditu* is missing from Rahner's position."[168] So while he still maintains that non-Christians are ontologically united to God through their positive response to elements (not structures) of grace and the activity of the Spirit within their religions, he also argues that outside hearing the gospel with faith these elements are insufficient for salvation. As Wouter Biesbrouck explains:

> Whereas for Rahner, it seems that this causal and ontological link with God/Christ is sufficient for the salvation of the non-Christian, it is not so for D'Costa. . . . The implication is that non-Christians, who are linked to Christ in an ontological way, must also be confronted with Christ epistemologically in one way or another.[169]

Therefore, D'Costa seeks to develop a proposal that is able to maintain the tension between Vatican II's statements on the possibility of salvation for non-Christians and the biblical principle of hearing with faith. Nevertheless, Tan surveys a broad spectrum of D'Costa's work in the theology of religions and insists that a critical theological shift occurs within his main statements on the subject in regard to the universal salvific will of God and his notion of universal salvific grace.[170]

Development: A Response to Recent Rejoinders," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 1 (January 2011): 3-24; Edward T. Oakes, "The Internal Logic of Holy Saturday in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 184-199. Some other reviewers are, Terrence W. Tilley, "'Christian Orthodoxy and Religious Pluralism': A Rejoinder to Gavin D'Costa," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 3 (2007): 447-454; and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 67-80, 171-180.

[167] See, Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*, Signposts in theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[168] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 19.

[169] Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*," 126.

[170] The former refers to God's desire that all be saved even though not all will be saved, the latter refers to the notion that the possibility of salvation is available to all

Tan begins by noting D'Costa's confirmation of the universality of God's salvific will in one of his early works, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*,[171] and then compares it to a later work, stating:

> Subsequently, in his paper, "Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions", this universality axiom became modified as, "God loves and desires the salvation of all men and women, thereby emphasising the *universality* of grace." . . . There is an unaccounted movement here from the assertion of a universal salvific *will* to universal salvific *grace* which affects the subsequent trajectory of his theology.[172]

To demonstrate this trajectory he turns to D'Costa's next monograph, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*,[173] in which the "underlying assumption of *a priori* grace remains" and where, says Tan, "the categories of natural and supernatural grace were collapsed such that all grace is viewed as salvific and universal."[174] Indeed, perhaps the most telling example of this 'collapse' of grace is when D'Costa suggests that it is possible for one to hold that other religions are not salvific *per se*, "while holding at the same time, without contradiction, that supernatural saving grace is operative in other religions and that in those other religions there is much that is true, good, and holy."[175] It is one thing to claim that grace is present in other religions, but another thing altogether to call this grace 'saving.' Tan concludes:

> Given the prior assertion of salvific grace to be found universally, the conclusion of "Christ-like" religious Others to be found in the religions is almost theologically inevitable, and does not appear to differ in kind from the theory of anonymous Christians, even though he had rejected Rahnerian transcendental anthropology and posited a closer Spirit-Christ connection. Because of the lack of a clear economic connection between grace with the operations of the Spirit and Christ, the subsequent outworking of his theology at times seems more governed by an implicit theology of grace rather than the

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even though not all will be saved. Tan argues that only the former has biblical support. See, Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian," 101-102.

[171] D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, 18.

[172] Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Assessment," 14; quote from, D'Costa, "Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions," in *A Universal Faith?*, eds. C. Cornille and V. Necke- brouck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 140.

[173] Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000).

[174] Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Assessment," 15.

[175] D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 105.

operations of the divine Persons as should befit a *Trinitarian* theology of religions.[176]

This is an interesting argument. Tan claims that while D'Costa has rejected Rahner's notion of implicit saving faith he has nonetheless replaced it with a notion of equivalent consequence – i.e., implicit saving grace.

To support his assertion, Tan highlights D'Costa's analogical use of the limbo of the just for explaining the salvation of non-Christians. He writes:

> Placing the non-Christian in the limbo of the just suggests the non-Christian occupies a theological position analogous to the OT Fathers, which contravenes his own assertion of a *sui generis* Judaism-Christianity connection.[177]

His argument is that D'Costa's utilization of Christ's descent into limbo for satisfying the *fides ex auditu* principle obscures a crucial difference between the Old Testament righteous and the good non-Christian. That is, the righteous Old Testament figures were not in limbo merely because they responded positively to elements of grace outside the covenant, but "because they had *already* exhibited *fides* through the hearing of God's Word proclaimed by the OT prophets."[178] Thus Tan argues that D'Costa's construal of Jane "runs the danger of downplaying the special revelation received by the Fathers, over-elevating the significance of the general revelation she has received, and casts doubts on his system's ability to preserve a singular Judaism-Christianity relationship."[179] To be sure, D'Costa claims that his analogous application does not have in view "the reality of the covenant embedded within Israel, which is not embedded in other religions," but rather "the righteousness that might be present within Israel and other religions."[180] Yet Tan's concern remains valid to the extent that the qualifications for 'righteousness' – and thus entrance into the limbo of

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[176] Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Assessment," 17.
[177] Ibid., 102-103
[178] Ibid., 16.
[179] Ibid.
[180] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 175.

the just – includes Old Testament figures having been the particular recipients of the messianic promise. So while D'Costa's analogy hinges on the notion of Old Testament righteousness, this righteousness was still contingent upon an act of believing God's proclaimed word.

The point here is not that the Old Testament figures knew the person of Jesus before his descent, but that like Abraham (and the analogy concerns 'the bosom of Abraham') they possessed an explicit faith in the promise of a Savior. And when we look to Abraham as the exemplar of faith we find that instead of being something that is added to an already existing righteousness, the explicit act of faith itself signifies the beginning of righteousness (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). This is not to deny God's gracious work among non-Christians through the Spirit's activity or to say that a non-Christian cannot be deemed 'good,' 'just,' or even 'righteous' simply because they lack Christian faith. Rather, it is to say that perhaps further argument is needed before the analogical doors of the limbo of the just can be opened to non-Christians.

Finally, just as it is important for DiNoia that a non-Christian be able to die "justified or in the state of grace" so that they might thereby gain entrance into purgatory,[181] it is also important for D'Costa that a non-Christian be able to "begin to participate in the life of the triune God" before death so that their response after death "does not require conversion."[182] For his part, D'Costa stops short of claiming that a non-Christian can die in a state of justification, but he nonetheless argues that the good non-Christian (e.g., Jane) has an ontological relation with Christ through 'saving grace.'[183] Yet what remains uncertain is the exact nature of Jane's ontological relation to Christ. Presumably it is a state of grace, but how is this particular work of grace deemed 'supernatural' and 'saving' when it occurs outside the church's proclamation

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[181] DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 105.
[182] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 179.
[183] See, Ibid., 186-187; 190-191.

of the gospel of Christ? For as D'Costa himself affirms, "Based purely on tracing the contours of what scripture permits us to say: *as far as we know* the conditions of salvation require *solus Christus*, *fides ex auditu*, and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*."[184] Yet if salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone and faith comes from hearing the church's proclamation of the gospel, then what else can Jane's postmortem response to the gospel be except a conversion? As Bullivant states:

> It could be argued that D'Costa minimizes here what one might call the *necessary newness* of faith. This may be seen most clearly if Jane's post-mortem 'coming to maturation and completion' is instead extrapolated backwards into her earthly life. Suppose, then, that she is 'existentially' confronted with the gospel proclamation while still alive, and hence leaves Buddhism in order to be baptized into the Catholic Church. In this case, one would surely be justified in speaking of 'conversion'. . . . Jane herself may well view her becoming a Christian as 'a fulfillment of what was already present [...] coming to its full maturation' (172). Yet she would almost certainly regard it as being *something more besides* (perhaps incalculably so), and as very much 'a new decision'.[185]

Based on D'Costa's approach we can assume that all who obtain faith in Christ when confronted with the gospel are also those who have already been responding positively to the "elements of *preparatio evangelica* that allow God's grace to work toward the final salvation of such persons."[186] Yet, as Bullivant points out, if this moment of decision constitutes a conversion in life before death, then why should the nature of this decision be any different for those who are confronted by the gospel after death?

Let us take stock. Jane, who is a Buddhist, responds positively to the good and beautiful elements in her religion through her conscience and through the work of grace and the Holy Spirit through these elements and is thereby on her way to salvation. She is not saved insofar as her response is not yet secured by faith, but she is nonetheless ontologically related to Christ through her positive response and is

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[184] Ibid., 23; emphasis original.
[185] Bullivant, "The Salvation of 'Jane' and the Problem of Ignorance," 132.
[186] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 211.

therefore on her way to salvation. In death she will receive faith and this prospective *fides ex auditu* solution is countenanced largely through an analogical application of Christ's descent into the limbo of the just and the doctrine of purgatory. Our noted concerns, then, revolve around one main issue – the nature and work of grace in Jane's life before her death. For if this grace is 'saving' then in effect Jane is saved before faith. If, however, this grace only orients her towards salvation then her decision to accept faith in Christ after death must constitute a conversion.

A Few Observations and Tentative Suggestions

Recall Tan's accusation that D'Costa collapses natural and supernatural grace within the notion of God's universal salvific will; that "there is an unaccounted movement here from the assertion of a universal salvific *will* to universal salvific *grace* which affects the subsequent trajectory of his theology."[187] With this in mind, Tan insists that D'Costa's theory lacks "a clear economic connection between grace with the operations of the Spirit and Christ."[188] We suggested that the difficulty lies with D'Costa's use of the terms 'salvific,' 'saving,' and 'supernatural' for describing this universal grace, and tentatively concluded that his theory needs further explanation concerning the nature and function of grace outside the context of gospel proclamation and faith.

To this purpose, we might look more closely to the theological environment in which D'Costa makes his argument; i.e., Roman Catholicism. For instance, Ludwig Ott explains that in its "wider sense" natural grace refers to "the Creation and gifts of the natural order, such as bodily health and mental soundness."[189] Yet Catholic theology also teaches that a person, by nature, is able to "perform good works without

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[187] Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions," 14.
[188] Ibid., 15.
[189] Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch (Charlotte: TAN Books, 1974), 220.

help of Divine grace, by his natural powers alone" and "can know God by the sole light of reason" (albeit in a limited way mixed with error).[190] Nevertheless, because of "the 'wound of ignorance' . . . caused by the Fall" no one is saved by natural grace alone, which requires 'supernatural' grace bestowed through "supernatural Revelation" (i.e., Scripture and tradition through the Roman Catholic Church).[191] So even though a person can know something about God and can do good works through 'the sole light of reason' and by their own 'natural powers,' this natural achievement in no way merits saving grace nor does it constitute a preparation for grace. As Ott states, "A natural positive disposition for grace is not possible, since between nature and grace there is no inner proportion."[192] In other words, if a person has a positive disposition for grace (i.e., for saving grace), this is due solely to the supernatural work of God "which intrinsically moves the soul, that is, actual grace by way of preparation for the reception of sanctifying grace."[193] Hence, the issue for D'Costa and other Catholic theologians is in how to explain "the way in which the salvific grace of God – which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the church – comes to individual non-Christians."[194] How does a person who has only natural grace receive supernatural preparation for saving grace?

D'Costa's proposal is that the Vatican II position appears to expand the traditional understanding of *preparatio evangelica* so that what was once viewed as strictly 'natural' elements might now be understood in supernatural terms.[195] As noted above, D'Costa does not suggest that other religions are alternative ways of salvation, but that perhaps good and true elements within them function as supernatural means

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[190] Ibid., 234-235.
[191] Ibid., 235.
[192] Ibid., 237.
[193] Ibid., 238.
[194] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 210.
[195] See especially, Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 99-105.

by which an unevangelized person can become ontologically related to Christ.[196] Yet it is this very point to which Tan objects, saying that without this distinction between natural and supernatural grace the categories of grace are "collapsed such that all grace is viewed as salvific and universal."[197] But a closer reading may show that D'Costa has a rather different interpretation in mind.

Tan uses a partial quote from *The Meeting of Religions* to support his claim that D'Costa's theory collapses the categories of grace, which states, "Thus, the grace in other religions was seen as '*not* in terms of a division between the grace of creation and the grace of salvation.'"[198] But the context of this statement is D'Costa's summation of two writings by Pope John Paul II regarding the Council's position on other religions.[199] In short, the Pope emphasizes the *preparatio evangelica* while also affirming the Holy Spirit's work through that which is good and true in the world. For example, in *Redemptoris Missio* he states, "Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ."[200] D'Costa's conclusion, then, is that based on the statements by Pope John Paul II and the Council, although other religions do not serve as salvific structures,

> it is also clear that the grace encountered in non-Christian religions is viewed as a *preparatio evangelica*, though *not* in terms of a division between the grace of creation and the grace of salvation, or of natural and supernatural grace, but only because within the historical church is *this grace* finally properly ordered toward its eschatological fulfillment. Therefore, *this grace* is "not an alternative to Christ."[201]

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[196] For example, see, D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 101-109.

[197] Tan, "Gavin D'Costa's Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Assessment." 15; emphasis original.

[198] Ibid., 15, quoting, D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 108-109.

[199] See, John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994); and John Paul II (1990), *Redemptoris Missio*, accessed October 25, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

[200] John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," 29.

[201] D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 108-109, quoting, John Paul II, "*Redemptoris Missio*," 29; emphasis added.

His point is that 'this grace' does not fit into the traditional division of natural and supernatural grace *per se*. For this grace is like natural grace in that it occurs outside the church's proclamation of the gospel and is thereby, in itself, insufficient for salvation. Yet it is also like supernatural grace in that it is a work of the Holy Spirit to prepare a person for the gospel. Thus, we find that rather than a collapse of categories D'Costa's theory seeks to address the need for defining how the Spirit draws individuals outside the church towards an eschatological salvation in Christ. As he asserts in *Christianity and World Religions*, his solution

> allows for the real variety of religious ends in the world's religions, while still recognizing that within these differences there may be sufficient elements of *preparatio evangelica* that allow God's grace to work toward the final salvation of such persons.[202]

If we consider D'Costa's example of Jane, then the idea here is that Jane is not merely responding to "the light of her conscience" and to "the good, true, and beautiful . . . found in positive elements within her religion," but in doing so she "is acting in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit."[203]

That said, until this particular grace is labeled and better defined, Tan's objection remains valid. For if, as D'Costa rightly claims, the true and good elements by which this grace is mediated do not constitute supernatural revelation, and if this grace is still insufficient for salvation, then calling it 'salvific,' 'saving,' and 'supernatural' only confuses the point. Moreover, as regards the ecumenical discussion, Protestant theology (especially in the Reformed tradition) does not often distinguish the grace present among all people and the grace given only to believers as 'natural' and 'supernatural.' Unlike the Catholic view, Protestant theology holds that by nature a person cannot reason their way towards God nor perform morally

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[202] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 211.
[203] Ibid., 162.

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good acts. As Herman Bavinck states, "Nothing good remained in fallen man; all his thoughts, words, and deeds were polluted by sin."[204] Therefore the existence of the good, true, and beautiful in the world is not due to nature, but to divine intervention, and in this way the distinction is expressed as common grace (also called 'general' or 'universal' grace) and special grace, so that common grace includes not only physical blessings but also the divine restraint of sin. P. E. Hughes explains:

> Were it not for the restraining hand of God, indeed, our world would long since have degenerated into a self-destructive chaos of iniquity, in which social order and community life would have been an impossibility. That a measure of domestic, political, and international harmony is enjoyed by the generality of humankind is due to the overruling goodness of God.[205]

From this perspective, we can say that in a technical sense both common grace and special grace are forms of 'supernatural' grace, as both constitute the work of the Spirit. Hence, as Bavinck argues, the difference is "between the working of the Spirit in all creation [to restrain sin and compel towards the good] and the work of sanctification that belongs only to those who believe."[206] Thus the idea that elements of natural revelation mediate 'supernatural' grace is not a problem for Protestant theology *per se*, and only becomes an issue when this grace is called 'saving.' So a Protestant equivalent to the issue in D'Costa's Catholic proposal would be to seek a clear category and definition for a grace that is not merely common grace or special grace, but which nonetheless constitutes a 'preparing' work of the Spirit for orienting a person towards the attainment of salvation at a future time.

For instance, we noted earlier that Ott labels the grace which prepares a person for receiving sanctifying grace as "actual grace."[207] He explains that actual grace (also called 'assisting' or 'helping' grace) "is a temporary supernatural intervention by God

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204 Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 50.
205 Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 519.
206 Bavinck, "Common Grace," 51.
207 Ibid., 238.

by which the powers of the soul are stirred up to perform a salutary act which is directed to the attaining or preservation or increase of sanctifying grace."[208] We might say, then, that in Jane's case the temporary divine intervention which enables her positive response to the work of the Holy Spirit directs her *towards the attaining of sanctifying grace at a future time*. Thus, we will discuss this theological notion of grace in more detail in the following chapter as we seek to develop a Reformation prospective *fides ex auditu* option.

Conclusion

Our examination of Lindbeck showed that his prospective *fides ex auditu* theory requires a cultural-linguistic space and time after death so that an unevangelized person can become competent enough to accept or reject the gospel in the *eschaton*. Yet he does not provide a theological explanation of this conceptual space, nor does he deal adequately with the doctrine of particular judgment. Furthermore, although an unevangelized person will not enter this intermediate state as a blank slate *per se*, Lindbeck's theory seems to imply that their socially constructed self will have little value for determining their ultimate fate. Thus, he leaves us with two conceptual gaps in need of theological explanation.

Next, we saw that DiNoia attempts to give a measure of salvific weight to the socially constructed self of an unevangelized person as well as resolve Lindbeck's conceptual gap between death and resurrection. First he notes Lindbeck's comment that there may be "unsubstitutable" features in other religions which are "God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom," and then he develops this notion within the *preparatio evangelica* tradition proposing that even though other religions have different aims perhaps the moral elements within these

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[208] Ibid.

religions foster dispositions that allow for the possibility of a future fellowship with God.[209] Yet because these dispositions are insufficient for experiencing the beatific vision after death, DiNoia suggests that good non-Christians might be able to complete their personal transformation in purgatory. The problem is, this interval of purification is only for those who already have explicit faith in Christ.

Finally, D'Costa seeks to open the doors of purgatory to good non-Christians via the teaching of Christ's descent into hell and the traditional inclusion of righteous non-Jews in the limbo of the just. He proposes that the good and true within other religions may be 'supernatural' elements of grace through which a person's positive response connects them ontologically to Christ so that when they are confronted by the gospel in death the epistemological element of their salvation is added. Yet a crucial weakness in D'Costa's theory is the nature of 'saving' grace outside the proclamation of the gospel.

So in light of our analysis of Lindbeck, DiNoia, and D'Costa, Part 3 will give careful consideration to the universal work of the Holy Spirit within the *preparatio evangelica* tradition, Christ's descent into hell, the limbo of the just and purgatory, and the Augustinian prohibition (particular judgment) as we seek a solution that is shaped by a Reformation emphasis of *sola fides ex auditu*.

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[209] DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 67-68. Also, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 40-41.

Part 3

A Reformation Prospective *Fides Ex Auditu* Option

Chapter 6

Natural Law and the Nature of Grace

Introduction

In the previous chapter we evaluated George Lindbeck's prospective *fides ex auditu* solution and found two conceptual gaps in his theory. The first concerns the nature and means of an unevangelized person's encounter with the gospel in death, while the second gap lies between Lindbeck's affirmation of a present-tense 'missions' value of other religions and his 'emphatic insistence' that the potential salvation or condemnation of a person starts only after they begin to learn the language that speaks of Christ.[1] This chapter will focus on the latter issue in an attempt to understand how the cultural-linguistic context of non-Christians figures into the future salvation of an unevangelized person. We will then deal with the former issue in the next chapter.

To this purpose, recall Gavin D'Costa's theory in which he suggests that the good and true aspects in other religions are elements of grace that prepare an unevangelized person for the gospel. His argument relies on the Second Vatican Council's application of the *preparatio evangelica* tradition to non-Christians. For instance, as regards the tradition itself, Joseph Carola explains:

> The *praeparatio evangelica . . .* does not date back to the creation of the human race but rather finds its origin in God's choice of a people whom he gathers together and to whom he singularly reveals himself for the sake of the world's salvation.[2]

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[1] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009), 41, 45-47.

[2] Joseph Carola, "Appendix: Vatican II's Use of Patristic Themes Regarding Non-Christians," in *Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study*, ed. Karl Josef Becker and Ilaria Morali (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), Kindle location 5963.

Thus, "without exception the patristic texts . . . envision the *praeparatio evangelica* to be uniquely a matter of God's revelation to the Hebrew people,"[3] and Carola says the Council, in reference to the people of Israel, "faithfully express this theological idea which comes to us from the Fathers" (*Lumen Gentium* 2, 9).[4] Yet in regard to those who are outside Abrahamic faith, Carola notes that the statement "declares whatever good or truth is found among them to be a *praeparatio evangelica*" (*Lumen Gentium* 16), and that "such usage goes beyond the patristic term's traditional meaning."[5]

D'Costa argues that this untraditional application is not a mistake, but rather represents an intentional effort by the Council to develop the notion of *preparatio* further. He states, "What was traditionally only applied to Israel because of its supernatural revelationary history is now being applied to what was formerly thought of as natural religions"; thus, he tentatively suggests that this new application to non-Christians "opens the door to see that all religions may have what are called 'supernatural' elements in the way that Israel did."[6] Or as he states in *Christianity and World Religions*, "There may be sufficient elements of *preparatio evangelica* that allow God's grace to work toward the final salvation of such persons [those who respond to these elements]."[7]

With this in mind, Marianne Moyaert argues that what Lindbeck's approach lacks is reference to natural theology and the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.[8] Yet she also indicates an aspect of Lindbeck's approach that may serve to our

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[3] Ibid., Kindle location 5979.
[4] Ibid., Kindle location 6026.
[5] Ibid., Kindle location 6029.
[6] Gavin D'Costa, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 105, 107.
[7] Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 211.
[8] Marianne Moyaert, "Postliberalsim, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Analysis of George Lindbeck's Fiduciary Interests," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 79.

advantage, which is that "Lindbeck does speak about the Spirit as *verbum internum*, that is, the capacity of the human being to *receive* God's Word. The Paraclete prepares people to receive God's Word in Christ."[9] Indeed, in his theological application of the cultural-linguistic approach Lindbeck says the *verbum internum* is "crucially important."[10]

Taking D'Costa's and Moyaert's cues, we will begin to construct our Reformation approach by first considering the positions of Magisterial Reformers Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli on the question of salvation for the unevangelized.[11] Both reformers affirm the possibility of salvation for an unevangelized person, and it will help us to know their reasons for doing so and thereby discover some important rules of discourse. Second, we will evaluate the ways in which Zwingli and Luther utilize the natural law tradition. This exercise will demonstrate that Luther is more consistent than Zwingli in upholding the *fides ex auditu* principle and, for our purposes here, provides a better theological framework for addressing the subject at hand. Thus, the third step will consist of a creative extrapolation of Luther's teaching on the 'proper function' of the law and its relation to grace. The point of this section is not to critically examine Luther's reading of Scripture, but rather to incorporate certain themes and ideas into our own Reformation application of the *preparatio evangelica*. Finally, the chapter will end with a statement on Christian missions and a summary of the proposal.

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[9] Ibid. Also see, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 20.
[10] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 20.
[11] John Calvin is not included in this survey because he does not address this question directly. He recognizes the good and true elements among non-Christians 'as a special gift of God,' but he also assumes that the lack of special revelation among a people is evidence of God's judgment. For example, see, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), 170, 287 (2.14, 11.14); François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1997), 263-283.

Luther and Zwingli on the Question of the Unevangelized

Martin Luther once wrote a letter to a wealthy supporter of the Reformation called Hans von Rechenberg, to counsel him "on the question whether God can or will save people who die without faith."[12] Before giving his answer, Luther insists that only mature Christians should ponder this question. In particular, those who have reconciled the truths that not all will be saved, and that God is always fair and loving in his judgments even when we do not understand his reasons. His concern is to guard against notions of universalism and charges of divine injustice, and his answer is simple and straightforward: "We have formidable passages of Scripture [to the effect] that God cannot and will not save anyone without faith."[13]

Luther says the reason God will not save anyone without faith is because he cannot save them, and the reason God cannot save them is because he has given his word that salvation is through faith alone and God cannot deny himself. Indeed, "it is as impossible for God to save without faith as it is impossible for divine truth to lie."[14] Yet Luther also introduces a possible way forward in the discussion by changing the question altogether. While it is true that Scripture teaches salvation by faith through Christ alone:

> It would be quite a different question whether God can impart faith to some in the hour of death or after death so that these people could be saved through faith. Who would doubt God's ability to do that?[15]

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[12] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Devotional Writings*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Martin H. Bertram, American ed., vol. 43 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1968), 51.
[13] Ibid., 53.
[14] Ibid., 53-54.
[15] Ibid., 54.

Thus Luther does not hesitate to affirm God's ability to grant saving faith to someone just before or after death. He only cautions that this notion must remain speculative as Scripture is inconclusive on the matter.[16]

In contrast, Luther's contemporary reformer Ulrich Zwingli demonstrates no such reluctance to the question. As we noted in the previous chapter, Zwingli emphasizes the concept of divine election above all else – even faith. He argues that salvation has always been by grace through God's election alone, and this election is "free and not at all bound, and above baptism and circumcision; nay, above faith and preaching."[17] From this perspective, Zwingli reasons that "the elect were chosen before they were conceived; they are at once then sons of God, even if they die before they believe or are called to faith."[18] His point here is that faith is merely the evidence and not the cause of election. As Timothy George explains, "It was true that some of those elected outside the visible sphere of Christendom might never come to faith in this life. Yet even that was a negligible consideration because faith follows (rather than precedes) election."[19]

Nevertheless, while Zwingli views faith as a secondary issue he still recognizes an order of salvation that includes the addition of faith at a certain point in time: "The first thing is God's deliberation or purpose or election, second his predestination or marking out, third his calling, fourth justification [by faith]."[20] So although he claims that elect people are saved even before they believe, we also see

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[16] Ibid. Neither Paul Althaus nor Bernhard Lohse comment on this aspect of Luther's theology.

[17] Ulrich Zwingli, *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, trans. Lawrence A. McLouth and George W. Gilmore (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), 237.

[18] Ibid., 241.

[19] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 129.

[20] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 239.

that the actual salvation of these people (i.e., justification) comes only as they hear

with faith. In this way, says W. P. Stephens, salvation

> begins in God's election and depends entirely on his will and purpose, and not
> on us. God's election, however, is in Christ, which does not simply mean the
> eternal Christ, but the Christ who was born, suffered, died, rose, and ascended
> for the salvation of mankind. Salvation, however, is not accomplished in us,
> until the Spirit leads us to faith. For Zwingli therefore salvation was seen to be
> altogether the work of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[21]

Hence, in regard to the elect who die before hearing the gospel, justification occurs

for them after death; for "faith is in that order the last thing *beyond glorification.*"[22]

Thus Zwingli not only affirms God's ability to impart faith after death, he also

maintains the conviction that God does indeed do this for certain individuals.[23]

It is important to recognize that neither Luther nor Zwingli argues for the

possibility of a second-chance option – that those who reject Christ in this life will

have the opportunity to accept him in the next. Their discussions concern only those

who have had no opportunity to hear the gospel message before death. As Zwingli

puts it, "It is not . . . a universal rule that he who has not faith is damned, but him who

has heard the doctrine of faith expounded and remains and dies in unbelief, we can

perhaps count among the wretched."[24] So their affirmations concern only

unevangelized persons and is contingent upon the addition of faith during the time of

death.

We might now tentatively suggest that the idea that God, should he so choose,

is able to grant saving faith to certain unevangelized people just before or after death

is a valid statement within Reformation theology. Which is to say, there is no

historical theological contradiction *per se* in the simple claim that God is able to

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[21] W. P. Stephens, *Zwingli: An Introduction to His Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 69.

[22] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 241; emphasis added.

[23] For example, see, Ulrich Zwingli, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1922), 201.

[24] Ibid., 200.

perform this action. This is not to say that God will in fact grant salvation in this way

(despite Zwingli's confidence), but rather that this notion signifies an actual

possibility and is therefore worthy of consideration. Which leads us to another

question: can a Reformation approach support the notion that God prepares these

individuals by grace through conscience and good and true elements in the world; i.e.,

through natural law?

Natural Law and the Unevangelized

Although the theological concept of natural law is part of a long tradition in

historical Christianity (as discussed in Chapter 1), the Lutheran theologian Carl

Braaten declares that "one of the most surprising developments in the twentieth

century was the nearly wholesale rejection of the natural law tradition in modern

Protestantism."[25] Also observing this general opposition by Protestants, Reformed

theologian J. Daryl Charles argues that this dismissal is both unprecedented and in

danger of reductionist thinking. He states:

> Many, Protestant evangelicals in particular, presume that natural-law thinking
> fails to take seriously the condition of human sin and places misguided trust in
> the powers of human reason debilitated by the Fall. Consequently, natural-law
> theory is thought to be insufficiently Christocentric and located outside the
> realm of grace, thereby engendering a version of works-righteousness. . . .
>   But the belief, however widespread, that natural-law thinking is
> insufficiently Christocentric and therefore detracts from divine grace is
> misguided. Nothing of the sort was believed by the early Church Fathers, the
> medieval fathers, or the Protestant Reformers. . . .
>   However deeply entrenched the bias against natural-law thinking is
> among Protestant thinkers, it cannot be attributed to the Reformers of the
> sixteenth century themselves.[26]

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[25] Carl E. Braaten, "A Lutheran Affirmation of the Natural Law," 5-6, in Robert C.
Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke, eds., *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (St. Louis:
Concordia Pub. House, 2011).Ibid.

[26] Daryl J. Charles, "Protestants and Natural Law," *First Things*, last modified
December 2006, accessed March 17, 2017,
https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/12/protestants-and-natural-law.

Considering our effort to develop a Reformation approach using the natural law tradition, Charles' assertion is intriguing. Thus, we will turn again to Zwingli and Luther to see how these two reformers utilize natural-law thinking.

Zwingli's Use of the Natural Law

In Romans 2 the apostle Paul says that even though the Gentiles do not have the law of Moses, they nonetheless show "that the work of the law is written on their hearts" when they "do by nature things required by the law" (v. 15). Moreover, it is not merely the hearers of the law but the "doers . . . who will be justified" (v. 13), hence, "a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God" (v. 29). Alluding to these verses, Zwingli writes:

> When, therefore, we see the uncircumcis[ed] do what the law directs, why do we not recognize the tree by its fruit? Why do we not perceive that God hath engraved the works of the law upon his heart? If, therefore, he doeth the work of God under impulse from God, why do we damn him because he has not been baptized or circumcised, especially when, again, the apostle attributes to such [people] accusation or absolution of conscience in the day of judgment.[27]

Once again, Zwingli warns Christians not to assume that all those who do not now have faith are under condemnation, and he points out that it is God who inscribes the work of the law on people's hearts so that if an unevangelized person acts in accordance with this law then they do so 'under impulse from God.' In this way, says Stephens, "the Spirit is not limited to those who have explicit faith in Christ," and

> this is related to Zwingli's understanding of the Spirit as the Creator Spirit and to his doctrine of election. As the Spirit was not limited to Palestine in the creation, for he created the whole world, so he is not limited to Palestine in his continuing work. The Spirit's work is also manifest in the writing of law in the hearts of the Gentiles in Romans 2: 14-15. . . . Yet the renewing in the Gentiles of the image of God by the Holy Spirit is related to Christ, precisely because they are those who were elected in Christ before the foundation of the world.[28]

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[27] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 11.
[28] W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 131.

The idea here seems to be that outside the enabling work of God a person cannot do what the law requires. Thus, if there are indeed people who follow the natural law outside knowledge of Christ, then these works indicate an internal work of God. Zwingli concludes:

> Hence children and those who have not heard the Gospel are not bound by this law [belief or unbelief], but with grown persons the point is whether the law of God is written on their hearts or not. For thus again they stand or fall unto the Lord, through Christ Jesus the only way to salvation. . . .
>   In a word, election is unshaken and the law written on the hearts of men, but so that those who are elect and do the works of the law in accordance with the law written on their hearts come to God through Christ alone.[29]

For Zwingli, God writes the law upon the hearts of all people so that the moral lives of some indicate his election of those individuals unto salvation. But what about the doctrinal principle of faith by hearing? In what way is election 'unshaken' outside explicit faith in Christ?

To the charge that his explanation constitutes a works-righteousness position, Zwingli writes:

> This point also arises—If a heathen shows by the works of the law that the law is written in his heart, and Paul really prefers him to the circumcised, then the office of faith is done away with and everything comes back to works. To this I answer, that Paul presupposes that he who does the works of the law, does them in consequence of faith.[30]

But it is not at all clear what Zwingli means here by faith. He also appears to contradict his own delineation of the order of salvation as this statement places justification by faith before calling. Indeed, in another writing he considers the notion of 'heathen' faith in regard to Socrates and Seneca, and Stephens notes:

> The lack of clarity about faith continues to the end, for Zwingli quotes Augustine to show that when the heathen do what the law requires they do so "by grace, by faith, by the Spirit of God, and are to be counted among those justified by the grace of Christ" (S VI/I 242.6-243.1).[31]

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[29] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 13.
[30] Ibid., 24.
[31] W. P. Stephens, "Bullinger and Zwingli on the Salvations of the Heathen," *Journal of the Society for Reformation Studies* 7, no. 2/3 (April 2005): 289.

Perhaps Zwingli is merely speaking by figure of speech, but at the Marburg Colloquy (1529) he agreed with Luther that faith comes through Christ alone and that God gives faith through the Holy Spirit "when we hear the gospel or the word of Christ."[32] For Luther, the notion that one can be saved by faith outside knowledge of Christ is unacceptable. So when Zwingli later claims that every "single pious heart or believing soul" will be in heaven,[33] Luther declares, "What can such an author, preacher, and teacher believe about the Christian faith except that it is no better than any other faith and that everyone can be saved by his own faith."[34] Stephens explains, "Luther's concern was with Zwingli's placing in heaven with the apostles and prophets, who manifestly had faith in Christ, the heathen who clearly did not."[35]

To put it another way, if the natural law mediates God's election among the unevangelized, then we must also recognize that the mediation of the natural law (i.e., its apprehension and interpretation) occurs through particular cultural and religious forms of life. Zwingli affirms the former but neglects the latter, which then leads Luther to the logical conclusion that Zwingli views other religions as alternative means of salvation. For the nature of such faith by an unevangelized person would have to be something other than Christian. To be fair, Zwingli never follows this line of reasoning and his primary concern is to uphold the concept of God's free election in salvation. G. W. Bromiley explains:

> The pious heathen might well be the recipients of divine grace and redemption even though they remained outside the temporal reach of the Gospel. They were not saved because of their piety, but because of the eternal activity of God in election and atonement."[36]

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[32] "Marburg Colloquy," *The Marburg Colloquy and the Marburg Articles (1529)*, article 6. Also see articles 3-5,7-8.

[33] Huldrych Zwingli and Johann Heinrich Bullinger, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 276.

[34] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament IV*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Martin E. Lehmann, vol. 38 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 290.

[35] Stephens, "Bullinger and Zwingli," 286.

[36] Zwingli and Bullinger, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 243.

Nevertheless, in the end Zwingli's use of the natural law to explain salvation among the unevangelized falls short of satisfying the *sola fide ex auditu* principle when he speaks of justifying faith outside knowledge of the gospel.

Thus, considering Luther's strong emphasis of faith by hearing alone, we may find that his delineation of the natural law will take us further than Zwingli in our effort to formulate a Reformation approach to the question of the unevangelized. Again, it is important to remember that we are not seeking to critically assess Luther's reading of Scripture, but rather to discover and cultivate some of the theological concepts provided by his explanation of the law's purpose and its relationship to grace.

Luther on the Law

Luther sets up his exposition of Romans 2:12-16 by noting that "the Law in this passage, that is, in this entire chapter, means the complete law of Moses, where both the Ten Commandments and also the love of God and of neighbor are enjoined."[37] Yet how does this interpretation apply to the Gentiles who do not have the law of Moses? Luther says that even though the Gentiles do not have the Mosaic Law, they nonetheless

> have received a spiritual law which the rites and ceremonies indicated in the moral sense (quite apart from the fact that they symbolized Christ). This law is impressed upon all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, and to this law all people are bound.[38]

He therefore claims that the law "is inborn and present in creation."[39]

When he focuses on Romans 2:14 – "For when Gentiles . . . by nature do what the law requires" – he considers it in light of two possible interpretations given by

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[37] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Romans*, trans. Helmut T. Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 180.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 182-183.

Augustine. He says Augustine suggests that the term "Gentile" could refer to Gentile Christians whose natures have been restored "by the Spirit of the grace of Christ," or that it refers to those who "even though they lead an ungodly life, . . . are doing some of the things which are of the law."[40] After noting that Augustine favors the first interpretation, Luther explains why he thinks both options fall short of Paul's intended meaning.

He argues that if one views these as the ungodly Gentiles who merely do some of the works of the law, then "this interpretation is opposed to the word that says they do by nature the things which are of the Law, and those who do the Law are righteous."[41] Yet if one says Paul is referring to Gentile believers, then "this interpretation of 'by nature' is forced."[42] Thomas Pearson explains:

> Here we see that Luther understands φύσις, "nature," as posited in opposition to grace. Grace does not perfect our sinful nature, but operates independently to separate us from our sinful nature; grace stands to justification as nature stands to unbelief. Thus, for Luther, Christians (including, in this case, Gentile believers) are positioned in a different relationship to the law than are non-Christians: the former do not receive the law, nor do they perform the works of the law, naturally.[43]

We find, then, that this is a key moment in Luther's exposition. For although Augustine teaches that "sin, indeed, is contrary to nature, and it is grace that heals it,"[44] here Luther initiates his argument that nature itself is sinful and thus contrary to grace. Regarding this turning point in Luther's soteriology, George writes:

> Luther believed he had recovered the original meaning of the Greek verb used by Paul in Romans [δικαιόω]. Augustine and the scholastic tradition had

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[40] Ibid., 185.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Thomas D. Pearson, "Luther's Pragmatic Appropriation," in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*, ed. Robert C. Baker and Roland Cap Ehlke (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2011), 46-47.
[44] Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," Ch. 47, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis. *New Advent*, accessed June 2, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1502.htm.

interpreted it as "to make righteous," whereas Luther insisted on its legal connotations, "to declare righteous."[45]

In other words, by nature a person can achieve the righteousness of works but God still regards that person as an unrighteous sinner.[46]

In this way, Luther does not deny the human capacity to achieve good works through "purely natural endowments" or even "from a gift from God," but these activities constitute a righteousness of works by which people justify themselves and are thus contrary *per se* to "the righteousness of faith, which God imputes to us through Christ without works."[47] As Oswald Bayer explains:

> The passive righteousness of faith takes place when justifying thinking (metaphysics) and justifying doing (morality), together with the unity of both that some seek, are all radically destroyed. In other words, both metaphysics and morality with their claim to justify our being are brought to nothing by the work of God. God slays, but he does so only to make alive.[48]

As Deanna Thomson states, for Luther "grace does not equip human beings to become righteous; rather, the gift of grace fundamentally alters the situation for

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[45] George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 70-71.

[46] There are a number of contemporary Protestant scholars who, similar to Augustine, argue that Paul is referring to Gentile Christians in Romans 2. Nevertheless, I would suggest that the broader theological argument being presented here is feasible within either interpretive scheme. In chapter 1 Paul argues that people 'became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened' (21), and yet in chapter 2 he speaks of 'righteous' people who 'show the work of the law is written on their hearts' (15). If in the first instance God 'gave them up in the lusts of their hearts' (1:24), then their righteous hearts in chapter 2 must be due to a gracious act of God. For examples of the contemporary 'Gentile Christian' view, see, N. T. Wright, "The Law in Romans 2," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 131-150; S. J. Gathercole, "A Law unto Themselves: The Gentiles in Romans 2.14-15 Revisited," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24, no. 3 (March 2002): 27-49; Wendel Sun, "Seeking (Exchanged) Glory: The Gentiles of Romans 2," *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* 20, no. 2 (September 2016): 45-54.

[47] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians Chapters 1-4*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 26 (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1963), 4.

[48] Oswald Bayer, *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey William Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Kindle location 292-294.

humanity *coram Deo* [before God]."[49] Nevertheless, if these verses in Romans 2 do not refer to the Gentiles who do good works or to Gentile Christians, then to whom do they refer? Luther states:

> I prefer to think . . . of the people who are in the middle between the ungodly Gentiles and the believing Gentiles, those who through some good action directed toward God as much as they were able earned grace which directed them farther, not as though this grace had been given to them because of such merit, because then it would not have been grace, but because they thus prepared their hearts to receive this grace as a gift.[50]

Yet Luther argues that Paul in Romans 2, "did not intend thereby to assert that they are righteous, except with a particular and legal righteousness, but not with the universal, infinite, eternal and wholly divine righteousness, which is not given to us except in Christ."[51] So both the good Jew and the people who are in the middle "still need the grace and mercy of Christ, . . . both are under sin, no matter how much good they may have done."[52] As Bernhard Lohse states, "Spiritually construed, this law in no way assists us to achieve righteousness. On the contrary, it only reveals our sinfulness and increases it."[53]

Nevertheless, if outside of Christ people remain sinners before God, and if they cannot in fact fulfill the law outside of faith, then how do the people in the middle 'prepare' their hearts for grace? As Thomas Schreiner notes, "Luther rejected the idea that human beings can do anything to prepare for grace. They cannot do their best and as a result receive God's righteousness."[54] So what then is the nature of this 'good' and 'humble' action directed towards God by the people in the middle? To be

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[49] Deanna A. Thompson, "Letting the Word Run Free: Luther, Romans, and the Call to Reform," in *Reformation Readings of Romans*, ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and R. Ward Holder (New York: T&T Clark International, 2008), Kindle location 509.
[50] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 186.
[51] Ibid., 219.
[52] Ibid., 186.
[53] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 271.
[54] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification, What the Reformers Taught and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 40.

sure, answering this question is of utmost importance for our efforts to work out a Reformation approach to the question of the unevangelized.

The Proper Function of the Law

At this point in the discussion we can say for sure that the particular quality of Luther's 'people in the middle' is inextricably linked to the inborn natural law. Yet more explanation is needed before we can discern the exact nature of this relationship. As regards the law, Luther teaches a two-fold function; "that is, politically, for restraining the wicked; and theologically, for terrifying and bruising the proud."[55] And yet it is the latter, the theological function, that "is the true and proper use of the Law."[56] Luther states:

> The proper function of the Law is to make us guilty, to humble us, to kill us, to lead us down to hell, and to take everything away from us, but all with the purpose that we may be justified, exalted, made alive, lifted up to heaven, and endowed with all things. Therefore it does not merely kill, but it kills for the sake of life.[57]

What Luther is at pains to show is that the works of the law do not themselves prepare a person for salvation, but rather preparation comes through the realization and acceptance that these works cannot make one righteous. In other words, preparation is not through *doing* that which is in one (i.e., the good) but through *being* shamed that one is a sinner (i.e., the convicting use of the law). A person is not prepared for grace by doing good works, but by being "tortured in their conscience" when they "recognize the evil they have done."[58] As Paul Althaus explains, the law "intends to,

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[55] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 409. Some argue that Luther and other early Lutheran theologians taught a threefold or even a fourfold use of the law. Yet our discussion here is concerned only with Luther's teaching on the 'proper function' of the law. For the different functions of the law in Lutheran teaching see, Edward Engelbrecht, *Friends of the Law: Luther's Use of the Law for the Christian Life* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2011).

[56] Ibid., 337.

[57] Ibid., 345.

[58] Ibid., 187.

and actually does, awaken men out of their unawareness, make them feel the power of the law, recognize their sin, experience God's wrath, and be led to repentance."[59] In short, "What is the value of this effect, this humiliation, this wounding and crushing by the hammer?" says Luther, "It has this value, that grace can have access to us. *Therefore the Law is a minister and a preparation for grace*."[60]

Moreover, as regards the proper function of the law Luther sees no difference between the Law of Moses and the natural law. For instance, highlighting the 'law of love' in 1 Timothy 1:5 and Matthew 7:12, he states:

> There is one law which runs through all ages, is known to all men, is written in the hearts of all people, and leaves no one from beginning to end with an excuse, although for the Jews ceremonies were added and the other nations had their own laws, which were not binding upon the whole world, but only this one [the law of love], which the Holy Spirit dictates unceasingly in the hearts of all.[61]

Concerning this view, Althaus writes:

> Moses thus is not really the author of the Decalog. He has a more modest rank. Properly understood, he only interprets and clarifies the natural laws written in men's hearts. . . . Christ, too, only interprets the law. He, also, is not a lawgiver but only wants to make clear to us what the law written in our hearts, or respectively, the Decalog, really demands.[62]

To this extent, we find that a common characteristic of the people in the middle is a tortured conscience due to the convicting function of the law. But until they receive the righteousness of faith given by the Holy Spirit "through God's Word or gospel, which preaches Christ,"[63] they are still regarded before God as "sinners and in need of the mercy of God."[64] Yet there remains a critical issue that we must address, which is

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[59] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 254-255.
[60] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 314; emphasis added.
[61] Ibid., 355.
[62] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 252.
[63] Luther, *Word and Sacrament*, 368.
[64] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 186.

the nature of grace in relation to the proper function of the law for preparing the people in the middle.

Considering Law and Grace

Outside of grace how can the natural law prepare people for grace? For "on the part of man," says Luther, "nothing precedes grace except indisposition and even rebellion against grace."[65] As discussed above, a chief element of Luther's theology is that salvation does not involve the healing of an inherent righteousness, but consists of "a righteousness that comes completely from the outside and is foreign."[66] So even though by nature a person might have the righteousness of works, Luther maintains that these good works do not meet the divine standard for fulfilling the law: "What the law wants, the will never wants, unless it pretends to want it out of fear or love [of temporal things]."[67] How then shall we proceed?

A way forward might be found through a creative extrapolation of Luther's view of the convicting use of the law. The intent here is not to represent Luther's position *per se*, but rather to incorporate motifs and ideas from his writings which will aid our discussion of the unevangelized. That said, our method will remain rooted in Luther's view of justification by faith. This means that as we consider the notion of law and grace in relation to the unevangelized, the only dogmatic assumption is that while this preparation by the law might be seen as a kind of grace, it is not itself the grace of faith (i.e., justifying and sanctifying grace).

In regard to Luther's view of grace, Lohse states, "What is striking is that he made little use of the terminology developed to such an extraordinary degree in

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[65] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Harold J. Grimm, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 11.
[66] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 136.
[67] Luther, *Career of the Reformer*, 14.

scholasticism, with its numerous distinctions regarding the doctrine of grace."[68] Yet Thompson points out that "for Luther, a crucial error for scholastic theologians was their appropriation of Aristotelian categories within the realm of grace."[69] In particular, Aristotle taught that people have inherent qualities that give them the capacity to act virtuously towards others, which he calls 'an act of friendship' for which the benefits are reciprocated.[70] And it was the appropriation of this Aristotelian concept within theology (i.e., the nominalist tradition) that Luther opposes in his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*. For instance, he writes:

> An act of friendship is not the most perfect means for accomplishing that which is in one. Nor is it the most perfect means for obtaining the grace of God or turning toward and approaching God.[71]

On the contrary, a person "is by nature unable to want God to be God" and the only valid act of friendship "is an act of conversion already perfected, following grace both in time and by nature."[72]

An interesting aspect of this last statement is Luther's insistence that grace precedes conversion (i.e., precedes faith) 'both in time and by nature.' Even more, he defines this preceding grace in another statement when he writes, "An act of friendship is done, not according to nature, but according to prevenient grace."[73] Having already stated that the law prepares a person for justification, here Luther rightfully calls this preparation 'prevenient grace.'[74] To be sure, Luther argues that the convicting use of the law is itself a preparation for grace, as it teaches people "that they need grace, to destroy their own righteousness."[75] But considering that by nature

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[68] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 55.
[69] Thompson, "Letting the Word Run Free," Kindle location 477.
[70] See, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 450-515.
[71] Luther, *Career of the Reformer*, 10-11.
[72] Ibid., 10, 11.
[73] Ibid., 10.
[74] Luther is using the traditional sense of the term.
[75] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 191-192.

people cannot know they need grace, it seems that any realization and subsequent seeking by a person can be due only to a preceding grace. In other words, the core of Luther's disagreement with the nominalist view of grace is against the idea that a good act merits a response from God, or that in some sense God 'owes' grace to those who do good works.[76]

Yet once we establish Luther's theological position that there is no "work performed before grace" and that the "the Law only shows sin, terrifies, and humbles; thus it prepares us for justification and drives us to Christ,"[77] then we might say that to the extent that the natural law effectively terrifies and humbles an unevangelized person, this preparation is itself an act of grace. Indeed, Lohse states that "Luther did not describe this effect of the law as a *causa efficiens* (efficient cause) but rather as a *causa ostensiva* (ostensive cause). The law is to lead to sin's becoming 'great.'"[78] And, as Althaus points out, "making sin great is inseparably connected with exalting and praising grace."[79] Thus, as this understanding of the relation between law and grace takes shape, I suggest that the theological concept of 'actual grace' best suits the argument for preparation through the natural law.

Considering Actual Grace

Thomas Oden defines "actual grace" as "the help of God by which one is made fit to act in a way accountable to God."[80] More specifically:

> Actual grace is to be distinguished both from ordinary providence (the ordering of causality by which God sustains all creation), and from natural talent, since it is specifically defined as supernatural gift – unmerited internal divine assistance which enables the performance of salutary acts.[81]

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[76] For instance, see, Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 124.

[77] Ibid., 126.

[78] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 271.

[79] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 142.

[80] Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 57. Oden cites, Council of Mileum 2, SCD §§103-5, 45.

[81] Ibid., 57.

Furthermore, Ludwig Ott explains that the traditional understanding of actual grace teaches that this salutary act "is directed to the attaining or preservation or increase of sanctifying grace," and he subdivides it further into three categories.[82] The first distinction of actual grace is "*gratia illuminationis*, i.e., the enlightenment of the intellect and *gratia inspirationis*, i.e., the strengthening of the will."[83] To this extent, Oden says that "the process by which each person is illumined by grace is specific to that person's own story."[84] This means that in regard to the proper function of the law, the way in which this grace stirs an individual's moral conscience is contingent upon their particular cultural understanding of good and evil (more on this later).

Ott's second subcategory is "*gratia praeveniens* . . . which precedes and affects a deliberate act of will, and *gratia subsequens* . . . which accompanies and supports the deliberate act."[85] For our purposes here, this delineation is helpful because, as Oden states:

> Prevening grace antecedes human responsiveness so as to prepare the soul for the effective hearing of the redeeming Word. This preceding grace draws persons closer to God, lessens their blindness to divine remedies, strengthens their will to accept revealed truth, and enables repentance.[86]

If we view these distinctions as 'movements' within the operation of actual grace, we see that this process first prepares the intellect and the will to be able to understand and to seek, and then it gives illumination to the intellect and strength to the will in support of a subsequent salutary act. And these movements of actual grace are summed up nicely by the final distinction, which is:

> Sufficient grace (*gratia sufficiens*) and efficacious grace (*gratia efficax*). The former gives a person the power to accomplish the salutary act, the latter de facto secures that the salutary act is accomplished.[87]

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[82] Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, ed. James Canon Bastible, trans. Patrick Lynch (Charlotte: TAN Books, 1974), 222.
[83] Ibid., 222.
[84] Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 42.
[85] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 222.
[86] Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 47.
[87] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 222.

So not only does actual grace prepare and empower the soul for a salutary act, it also

ensures the completion of that act. Or as Oden puts it, grace "is effective as it elicits

willing cooperation and sufficient insofar as it does what is necessary to lead the will

to cooperate, even when the deficient will is resistant."[88]

If we then apply this sense of grace to the proper function of the law, we might

say that in the case of the unevangelized actual grace directs a person *towards* the

attaining of sanctifying grace at a later time. So while in itself this grace is not

sufficient for salvation, it is nonetheless given for the benefit of salvation. Yet for our

Reformation approach, we must not understand the notion of a salutary act as

connoting a meritorious work, but rather as an act of humility where the act itself is a

person's conscience tortured by the knowledge "that they have done evil."[89] In other

words, the emphasis here is not on the inherent knowledge of the natural law, but on

the divine act of illumination; not a healing of human reason, but a gift of enabling

and apprehension. As Oden explains:

> What this grace transforms in its work of enabling is not simply our
> understanding of truth, but more so our disposition to embody the truth. The
> willingness and desire of the seeker behaviorally to embody the truth is made
> increasingly possible.[90]

Thus, while actual grace is not itself sufficient for salvation, it is nonetheless

sufficient and efficacious according to its purpose; that is, the salutary act directed

towards the attaining of salvation at a future time. This grace does not change an

unevangelized person's situation as a sinner before God, but it does work to expose

their wickedness in relation to the law. To be sure, to the extent that actual grace is

mediated through the natural moral law outside the proclamation of the gospel, an

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[88] Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 51.
[89] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 187.
[90] Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 43.

unevangelized person does not possess the promise of salvation. Yet Luther does provide us with a measure of hope.

As discussed above, Luther says the proper function of the law is to condemn and convict people of sin. Indeed, the law humiliates, wounds, and crushes, but its purpose in doing so is to prepare a person for salvation:

> Now once a man has thus been humbled by the Law and brought to the knowledge of himself, then he becomes truly repentant; for true repentance begins with fear and with the judgment of God. . . .
> Terrified by the Law, he despairs of his own strength; he looks about and sighs for the help of the Mediator and Savior. *Then there comes, at the appropriate time*, the saving Word of the Gospel, which says: "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven (Matt. 9:2). Believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified for your sins."[91]

So even though the convicting, crushing, condemning function of the law "is the true and proper use of the law, . . . it is not permanent," and Luther asserts that "this terror, humiliation, and custody are not to last forever;

> they are to last until faith should come. That is, they are for our salvation and for our benefit, so that we who have been terrified by the Law may taste the sweetness of grace, the forgiveness of sins, and deliverance from the Law, sin, and death, which are not acquired by works but are grasped by faith alone.[92]

It is, then, from this perspective that we can suggest that when the convicting use of the natural law is efficacious in the life of an unevangelized person, this preparation is an act of actual grace directing them towards salvation. Nevertheless, an 'act' implies an actor and we must further circumscribe this sense of grace as a temporary intervention by a Person – the Holy Spirit. For as Oden states, "Although all grace as such is the work of the triune God, the enabling and appropriation of grace is primarily the constant work of God the Spirit."[93]

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[91] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 131-132; emphasis added. Luther is referring here not merely to the Mosaic Law, but to the natural 'divine law' as it is expressed through any religion.

[92] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 337-338. Also see, 381 in reference to Galatians 4:6.

[93] Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 36.

The Holy Spirit and the Proper Use of the Law

As regards the Lutheran perspective, Steven Paulson observes that "the early Lutherans carefully distinguished *favor* (grace as God's reckoning) and *donum* (the gift of grace) as Paul did in Romans 5:5."[94] To be sure, this distinction between grace and the gift of grace already existed in the traditional language of theology.[95] But what set the early Lutherans apart was the assertion that "the gift of grace is the Holy Spirit *himself*, not a *quality* given to us."[96] For example, Luther's fellow reformer Philip Melanchthon makes this distinction in his *Loci Communes*, where he writes that grace is

> the favor of God by which he has loved Christ and, in Christ and on account of Christ, all the saints. Next, because he is favorable, God cannot but pour out his gifts upon those on whom he has had mercy. . . . But the gift of God is the Holy Spirit himself.[97]

The gift of grace, wherever it is found, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that the unevangelized receive the gift of communion, "for sins are not removed by the Law, nor is the Spirit granted through it."[98] Rather, it is to suggest that even though this gift is not the indwelling of the Spirit – as it is for Christians – it is nonetheless a singular work of the Spirit upon lost hearts (John 16:8).

Therefore, as we apply Luther's explanation of the convicting use of the law to the situation of the unevangelized and call this application an act of 'actual grace,' we must also establish that it is the Holy Spirit who is the chief agent of this use. For as Luther declares, "The grace of God is never present in such a way that it is

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[94] Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011), 127.
[95] See, Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 219..
[96] Paulson points out that the early Lutherans credited Peter Lombard for holding this understanding as well; Paulson, *Lutheran Theology*, 127.
[97] Philipp Melanchthon, *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*, trans. Christian Preus (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), Kindle location 2304-2306.
[98] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 222.

inactive, but it is a living, active, and operative Spirit."[99] This does not mean that grace outside the church is itself sufficient for salvation, but it is to recognize that the Holy Spirit (who is "the Spirit of grace" Heb 10:29) is at work to convince the world of their need for Christ (John 16:8-11).

The Proposal

In light of our reading of Luther's understanding of the natural law and the proper function of the law, the proposal here is that we expand the notion of preparation for the gospel to include more than just human conscience and elements of truth and goodness. For if this preparation of 'the people in the middle' is itself an act of actual grace by the Holy Spirit, then the notion cannot merely refer to 'elements' of truth and goodness. Rather, from this perspective the idea of preparation signifies an integral process that in some sense involves the whole social, cultural, philosophical, linguistic, political, educational, familial, physical, psychological, geographical, temporal, historical, religious environment in which each person lives and moves and has their being in God (Acts 17:26-28). For although we have called this preparation a kind of internal grace that works directly upon the soul through the universal moral law, this law is nonetheless mediated through the cognitive, emotive, experiential dimensions of 'the soul' which are formed by particular external contexts.

For instance, Luther asserts that the natural moral law "is impressed upon all people" and it is this law to which "all people are bound."[100] Yet while this law is common to all it is nonetheless perceived in various ways. The Jews learned it through the Mosaic Law, while others "learned to know in a different way."[101] In

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[99] Luther, *Career of the Reformer*, 13.
[100] Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 180.
[101] Ibid., 181.

other words, the universal natural law is first an inherent human capacity for knowing and doing good and evil, which is then cultivated into knowledge and action by numerous external factors (e.g., cultural-linguistic contexts which may include but are not limited to religious and philosophical structures).

Thus, the immediate standard of God's judgment (according to Luther) is not some abstract notion of good and evil or even one particular interpretation of the natural law. Instead, God's immediate judgment is according to the specific measures by which each society (and thus each person) judges themselves.[102] This, says Luther, is why Paul states that the Gentiles "'will perish without the Law' just as they are saved without the Law if they have kept *their law*, the law that is inborn and present in creation."[103] His conclusion is that irrespective of one's cultural delineation of good and evil, no one can fulfill even their own interpretation of the universal law and thus all "are sinners and in need of the mercy of God."[104] We might assume, then, that if the Spirit prepares a person to receive this mercy through the convicting use of the natural law, then this use is particular to the moral conscience of the individual which is itself determined by their contextual situation.

To be sure, Luther does not intend to deny the *sui generis* nature of the Mosaic Law. It is only through the apprehension of one's position under the law as it is revealed through Scripture that one is truly prepared for Christ. As Althaus explains, Luther maintains that "the proclamation of the law is the indispensable and necessary presupposition for the preaching of the gospel," for "the law is to be interpreted through the gospel; and its intention is to be understood on the basis of the gospel."[105] Nevertheless, the point here is that if we limit the concept of preparation to just

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[102] Ibid., 187-188.
[103] Ibid., 182-183; emphasis added.
[104] Ibid., 186.
[105] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 258, 259. Althaus references, *WA* 39I, 466, cf. 348.

'elements' of truth and goodness, then we risk overstating the importance of these particular elements for salvation. For if we say that the good and true *are* elements of grace, then it is by these elements and *these elements alone* that the Spirit must work to prepare unevangelized people for the gospel. This then entails a sense of grace that is in danger of equating these elements with other outward means of grace thus making proclamation and faith superfluous. Yet if we understand preparation of the unevangelized as a temporary special *action* by the Holy Spirit through the natural law rather than as enduring *things* within religions and cultures, then these issues fall away.

For instance, Simon Chan argues that "primal religious societies" tend to be more receptive to the Christian message than "societies dominated by the axial religions," and he claims that this openness is due to traces of ancient knowledge about God subsiding within the "collective memory" of these societies.[106] He concludes:

> Whether the knowledge of the supreme being in many ancient cultures owes its origin to some primeval revelation or traces of ancient people's memory of a prelapsarian state, the fact of the matter is that it is often a concrete point of contact between primal religious societies and the gospel. It constitutes a de facto *praeparatio evangelica*. It prepares the way for the gospel and accounts for its ready reception in these societies.[107]

From the perspective of this chapter, we can agree with Chan that this lingering knowledge of God (if it exists) would constitute an element of truth and therefore might provide a good 'point of contact' for sharing the gospel. We can also agree that to the extent that this residual theistic awareness plays an obvious role in a person's coming to faith it can be said to have functioned as part of a *preparatio evangelica*.

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[106] Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith From the Ground Up* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 62. In the philosophy of religions, 'primal religion' (also called indigenous or folk religion) refers to localized beliefs and practices which attempt to deal with the existence of spirits residing in natural objects, sacred or cursed articles, and even in people.
[107] Ibid.

However, what we do not want to say is that this or any other element of truth is itself the thing which 'accounts for' a society's openness to the gospel.[108] As argued above, it is grace alone that accounts for a person's preparation and this grace is the work of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, the Spirit may use various notions of a higher being embedded in the collective memory of a society to orient them towards Christ (e.g., Acts 17:16-32). But we must also recognize that the Spirit might choose to forego the use of such notions of the divine (e.g., Acts 14:8-18). Thus, while vestiges of truth in primal religious societies can indeed serve the work of preparation, this element does not itself function as a necessary medium by which the Spirit prepares these communities for hearing the gospel.

Nevertheless, the crucial question at this point is how does this expression of *preparatio evangelica* resolve the issue at hand in Lindbeck's theory? Let us recall his assertion in full:

> One can admit the unsubstitutable uniqueness of the God-willed missions of non-Christian religions when one thinks of these faiths, not as objectifying poorly what Christianity objectifies well (as Karl Rahner proposes), but as cultural-linguistic systems within which potentialities can be actualized and realities explored that are not within the direct purview of the peoples of Messianic witness, but that are nevertheless God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom.[109]

If we compare this statement to the 'elements' version of *preparatio evangelica*, we find that Lindbeck's emphasis is not on the present-tense nature of 'aspects' within non-Christian religions, for he qualifies these as 'anticipations of the coming kingdom' and thus gives them a future-tense value. Instead, the present-tense value of 'the God-willed missions of non-Christian religions' is characterized by certain

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[108] We might also point out that while Chan attributes the high response by those from 'primal religions' to traces of knowledge about God, such 'traces' can also be said to exist within the 'axial religions.' Yet, in this case these 'points of contact' do not appear to be a *preparatio evangelica* as the historical response to the gospel by adherents of the major religions is comparatively low.
[109] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 40-41.

actions rather than by certain elements; namely, the exploration of realities and the actualization of potentialities. Thus, in the case of an unevangelized person, if we say that these actions constitute the Spirit's work of actual grace through the natural law, then that person's cultural-linguistic self-understanding has a great deal to do with how they will respond when confronted by the gospel in death. This also means that for the unevangelized, the commencement of this process involves 'realities' and 'potentialities' that are currently outside the purview of the church but are not outside the present work of the Spirit in the world.

The point is simply that the Holy Spirit is free to use any created element necessary to stir the moral conscience of a person or a people. For this work of grace operates through the socio-cultural identity of the individual or society to cultivate dispositions to the attainment of faith at a future time. So while a deep sense of shame is the common factor, the way in which the Spirit brings a person or group of people to this moral self-awareness is dynamic and affectingly personal. The idea here is not to deny the importance of human conscience and elements of the good and true for orienting people towards God, but rather to place these elements within the sovereign grace of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. And it is, then, in this way that we offer a Reformation contribution towards filling the first gap in Lindbeck's prospective *fides ex auditu* option. For as Lindbeck states, "The salvific role of the Holy Spirit is to join hearers and potential hearers (publically and communally and thereby internally) to that Word who is Jesus Christ."[110] We therefore have offered a theological proposal for how the Spirit might prepare 'potential hearers' for this explicit encounter with Christ.

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[110] Ibid., 130.

What About World Missions?

If we acknowledge that God is able to impart faith to an unevangelized person just before or after death, then what happens to missionary zeal and urgency? Why bother going to the ends of the earth to make disciples if, as Zwingli states, "The elect were chosen before they were conceived; they are at once then sons of God, even if they die before they believe or are called to faith"?[111] To be sure, this is no small concern.

During a candid interview in 2016 with the emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, he admits that Vatican II's contingent affirmation of the possibility of salvation for an unevangelized person "seems to remove any motivation for a future missionary commitment."[112] Moreover, he rightly points out that "if faith and salvation are no longer interdependent, faith itself becomes unmotivated."[113] Benedict is not suggesting that the Council erred with this affirmation, but he recommends careful reflection on the issue and warns against "simplistic" solutions which engender "unmotivated" approaches.[114]

The point is, believing that God can save certain unevangelized individuals might contribute to an indifferent attitude towards missions and faith, but this particular response is not a necessary consequence. Any good and necessary consequence as deduced by Scripture will maintain that the definitive solution to the problem of the unevangelized is the missionary activity of the church under the sovereign grace and election of God. Only from this perspective can one affirm a

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[111] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 241.
[112] Jacques Servais, "Full Text of Benedict XVI's Recent, Rare, and Lengthy Interview," *Catholic News Agency*, last modified March 17, 2016, accessed March 23, 2016, http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

conditional hope for the unevangelized without compromising the urgent need to preach repentance to all people in the name of Christ.

For instance, the Anglican missiologist Roland Allen (1868-1947) claims that Scripture itself maintains this tension between hope and urgency. He argues that even though some people use the belief that God can save unevangelized people to try and weaken support for missions, the conviction of hope is not itself the cause of such a result.[115] On the contrary, he insists that a biblical hope for the unevangelized is one that upholds the conviction of urgency:

> In face of this difficulty it is well to return to the Acts and to read again the history recorded by St Luke. The apostolic missionaries, in his story, saw both sides of this question, they stated both sides, yet their zeal was not diminished at all. On the contrary, they lived and died in earnest, eager effort to bring the world to Christ. That is the fact set before us in the Acts. Obviously hope for the heathen does not necessarily weaken zeal for the propagation of the gospel.[116]

The only way to strike this balance between hope and urgency, says Allen, is by regarding the issue as a spiritual reality to be lived out rather than as an academic problem to be solved, for "missionary zeal does not grow out of intellectual beliefs, nor out of theological arguments, but out of love."[117] And in this case 'love' is not merely the human emotion, but the presence of the Holy Spirit.

With this point in place, Allen then makes a distinction between reasons for doing missions and the motive of missions. He states:

> Belief that the religion of the heathen is bad is not the motive which impels men to preach Christ; belief that the religion of the heathen has much truth in it is not the motive. These are only opinions which may change; the motive is the presence in the soul of the Redeeming Spirit of Christ, the Spirit which seeks to bring all men back to God in Christ. That motive does not change.[118]

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[115] Roland Allen and David M Paton, *The Ministry of the Spirit*, (Lutterworth Press, 2006), 34-35.
[116] Ibid., 35. For his fuller treatment of New Testament verses in support of his claim, see, 33-34.
[117] Ibid., 35.
[118] Roland Allen, *Missionary Principles* (Lutterworth Press, 2006), 35.

In other words, within Christian history and among contemporary Christians we find various justifications given for why the church should take the gospel to the unevangelized – e.g., belief in the imminent return of Christ; belief in the superior morality (civilization) of Christians; belief that those who die before hearing will be condemned; belief that the church must seek out God's elect; etc. Yet Allen argues that these views and others like them simply represent opinions and reasons for why we do missions, and that such motivations change over time and usually vary from person to person. What does not change, however, is the *true* missionary zeal for reaching the lost. This is because the prime motive of missions is rooted not in communal or personal reasons, but in the active immutable presence of the Holy Spirit. True missionary zeal remains constant in the midst of changing views because it "is grounded in the nature and character of the Holy Ghost."[119] In this way, Allen also indicates a conceptual space in which we might locate the theological hope for the unevangelized; that is, within the nature and character of God.

We have noted that the theological hope for the unevangelized is not based on a promise, as God never said whether he would grant faith to those who die before hearing the gospel. Yet we might now suggest that while this hope is not based on a promise, it is nonetheless based on the revealed nature and character of God, and to this extent Luther once again provides us with a way forward in the discussion.

In his commentary on Genesis Luther discusses the curse put upon Cain for killing his brother Abel, and he notes that although God sent Cain into exile he nonetheless granted him a measure of mercy – i.e., protection and a wife. Luther writes:

> These are two favors which should not be regarded lightly and which Cain could not even have hoped for when he first heard his sentence from his father. Their purpose was that he might have opportunity and time for

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[119] Ibid., 33.

repentance, although they are a matter of accident and not one of command. . . .

This was, to express myself in this way, accidental mercy, of which no assurance had previously been given through a promise.[120]

In other words, God was in no way obligated to bestow mercy upon Cain or his descendants, so Luther argues that the only way to explain the preservation of Cain and the subsequent salvation of many of his descendants (and others), is in reference to the divine prerogative:

I do not think that all [of Cain's descendants] were condemned without exception. But those who were converted to the faith were not saved as the result of a definite promise made to them; they were saved as the result of what I would call "irregular grace." Thus the Gibeonites and others were saved when the people of Israel occupied the land of Canaan. Similarly, Job, Naaman the Syrian, the Ninevites, the widow of Zarephath, and others from among the heathen were saved, not as the result of a promise but as the result of irregular grace.[121]

If then we apply these notions of 'accidental mercy' and 'irregular grace' to the issue at hand, we can base the theological hope for the unevangelized on the fact that it is within the nature of God to sometimes grant saving faith to those who have no promise of salvation.

To be clear, this is not to say that God will indeed act in this way towards the unevangelized, but to say that the conviction of hope is not a wholly unfounded position. Indeed, theologically speaking, we might simply rest on Zwingli's assertion that "nothing prevents God from choosing from among the heathen men to revere Him, to honor Him, and after death to be united to Him. For His election is free."[122] And yet the quality of this hope is such that it reinforces the conviction of urgency, for no one knows whether God will do this. It is, then, due to the scriptural and

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[120] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis, Chap. 1-5*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick (Saint Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1958), 302. Luther uses 'accidental' to connote a previously unrevealed divine intention and not a previously unintended divine action.
[121] Ibid.*,* 177-178.
[122] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 201.

theological nature of this hope, and to the active immutable presence of the Holy

Spirit in the hearts of believers, that this view of the unevangelized does not

necessarily weaken missionary zeal. As John Stott writes:

> Our supreme motivation in world evangelisation will not primarily be
> obedience to the great commission, nor even loving concern for those who do
> not yet know Jesus, important as these two incentives are, but first and
> foremost a burning zeal (even 'jealousy') for the glory of Jesus Christ.[123]

Summary and Recognition of Issues for Further Study

Through a creative extrapolation of Luther's view on the theological use of the

law we have attempted to develop a Reformation interpretation of *preparatio*

evangelica in regard to the fate of the unevangelized. To this end, we described the

preparation of unevangelized individuals for hearing the gospel as occurring through

the Holy Spirit's temporary use of the proper function of the natural law to bring 'the

people in the middle' to an understanding of themselves through a genuine sense of

shame for the wrong they have done, and a dawning realization that they can never

understand nor obtain that which is true, good, and holy by their "own strength, effort,

or works."[124] We then called this preparation an act of 'actual grace' whereby the

Holy Spirit enables and strengthens the soul to receive the convicting use of the law,

and also 'accompanies and supports' a subsequent act of humility.[125] Yet this salutary

act is not a good work that merits grace, but is itself a work of grace by which a

person is prepared for the hearing of the gospel at a future time. In this case, that time

would come just before or after death.

In short, this chapter argues that the assertion that God is able to impart faith

in the hour of death or after death is best understood in relation to his gracious activity

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[123] David L. Edwards and John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 328-329.
[124] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 131.
[125] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 222.

in this life. For if we confess that God *can* do something, then this affirmation, no matter how tentative it might be, derives its certainty from standard doctrinal and theological principles. Hence, by drawing upon the relevant principles there must also be a way to explain *how* God can do this thing, no matter how speculative it might be. This then is what we have tried to do here in regard to a Reformation approach to the question of the unevangelized.

Having said this, even if we accept the proposal as it stands, there still remain at least two related issues in need of further study. First, it is not often that a person comes to faith in Christ upon hearing the gospel for the first time. Usually, an act of conversion is a process that takes time so that even when the Holy Spirit has prepared an unevangelized person for hearing the gospel, it is still through 'hearing' that this person is then prepared for faith. The act of believing and calling upon Christ often occurs after a period of additional learning, contemplation, observation, participation, and discussion. Thus, the idea that someone might obtain saving faith during the time of death, whether just before or immediately after, is perhaps the most unrealistic aspect of this proposal. For even Luther understands the concept of "accidental mercy" as the "opportunity and time for repentance."[126]

Nevertheless, we might resolve this issue by specifying that the preparation of these unevangelized individuals will continue after death, thereby granting an opportunity and time for repentance – presumably before the final judgment. To this purpose, we will pursue an answer to this question in the next chapter through a study of the early church and Reformation teachings on Christ's descent into hell and the intermediate state, as well as a closer reading of D'Costa's appropriation of these theological materials. Thus, guided by the same doctrinal rules which frame this chapter – no universal or second-chance option, God is just in all his judgments,

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[126] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 302.

salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone and faith comes from hearing –
perhaps this endeavor will reveal a rich theological environment in which the
proposal can bear good fruit.

Chapter 7

Reconsidering the *Descensus*

Introduction

In the previous chapter we sought to resolve the issue in George Lindbeck's prospective *fides ex auditu* theory regarding the present-tense missions value of other religions and the potential therein for orienting a person towards a future salvation. To this purpose, we followed Gavin D'Costa's lead and considered the problem in light of the *preparatio evangelica* tradition. But rather than view this preparation as occurring through elements of truth, goodness, and beauty in other religions we proposed that this preparation is a work of actual grace by the Holy Spirit through the convicting use of the natural law. In itself this grace does not save a person, but it nonetheless prepares individuals for hearing the proclamation of the gospel at a future time. The focus of this chapter, then, is on the subsequent issue in Lindbeck's theory concerning the time when the *fides ex auditu* obtains, presumably after death. Our examination of Lindbeck revealed that his theory requires a cultural-linguistic space and time after death so that an unevangelized person can become competent enough to receive Christ as Lord. Yet he does not provide a theological explanation for how this opportunity might occur after death.

Recall Joseph DiNoia's proposal that the doctrine of purgatory could help fill this gap in prospective theories (like Lindbeck's), as it allows for an interval of transformation for those who die with a disposition for faith but who are unprepared for the beatific vision.[1] Yet D'Costa points out that because it is traditionally taught that purgatory is available only to those who die with explicit faith in Christ, further explanation is needed to understand how a non-Christian might be able to experience

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[1] See, J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 104-108.

this transformative process. He then seeks to open the doors of purgatory to certain unevangelized people through an analogical application of the *descensus* article in the Apostles' Creed; i.e., 'He descended into hell.'[2] D'Costa follows the teaching which says that Christ descended not to the place of torment but only to the abode of the righteous, and there is no possibility for conversion after death. He then interprets the abode of the righteous through the theological concept of the *limbus patrum* – the limbo of the fathers – and the long tradition that includes righteous Gentiles with those whom Christ saved in his descent. With this proposal in mind, we will now seek to develop an alternative application of the *descensus* doctrine for a Reformation approach.

Our first step will be to consider a claim made by a few within evangelicalism that the *descensus* article in the Apostles' Creed should be removed. I will point out several critical weaknesses in the argument and explain why retaining the article is in our best interest. Second, we will survey some early church treatments of the *descensus* doctrine as well as the teachings of Magisterial Reformers Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. The reason for this exercise is to try and apprehend the doctrinal rules instantiated by the early church fathers and familiarize ourselves with the theological grammar of Reformation teachings on the subject. Third, we will note some of the difficulties associated with D'Costa's analogical use of the limbo of the just and offer an alternative theological framework to allow for an objective connection to the analogical use of Christ's descent into hell. Fourth, we will consider Augustine's argument that Christ descended only to the righteous in hell and that there is no possibility for repentance after death. Through a closer reading of his treatments of the descent, this section will seek a way to affirm the possibility of

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[2] See, Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 161-211.

posthumous salvation and still keep an Augustinian trajectory. The chapter will then conclude with a summation of the ways in which the proposal contributes to the discussion of the unevangelized.

The Argument for Removing the *Descensus* Article

Evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem argues that the phrase, 'He descended into hell,' should be excluded from the Apostles' Creed. He asserts that this article is "a late intruder into the Apostles' Creed that never really belonged there in the first place and that, on historical and Scriptural grounds, deserves to be removed."[3] Grudem points out that the Creed developed "from about A.D. 200 to 750," and that although the phrase appeared in several versions from A.D. 390 "it is not included again in any version of the Creed until 650."[4] He then asserts that "unlike the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition, the Apostles' Creed was not written or approved by a single Church council at one specific time."[5] Furthermore, he evaluates some of the biblical proof texts traditionally used to support this doctrine and claims that everyone "should be able to agree at least that the idea of Christ's 'descent into hell' is by no means taught clearly or explicitly in any passage of Scripture."[6] He therefore concludes that "there would be all gain and no loss if it were dropped from the Creed once for all."[7] This is a bold claim, and further consideration might show that both history and church teaching are rather on the side of retaining the *descensus* article.

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[3] Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend Into Hell: A Plea for Following Scripture Instead of the Apostle's Creed," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (1991): 103.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 112.
[7] Ibid., 113; John Piper holds a similar position. See, "Did Jesus Spend Saturday in Hell?," *Desiring God* (2012), accessed November 22, 2013, http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/did-jesus-spend-saturday-in-hell--2.

For instance, Grudem asserts that the Creed "has no claim to being apostolic and no warrant (in the sense of a 'descent into hell') from the first six centuries of the Church."[8] But there are at least two critical problems with this statement. First, Christians accept the Creed as authoritative based not on the assumption of apostolic authorship but, as Calvin puts it, because the Apostles' Creed "gives, in clear and succinct order, a full statement of our faith, and in every thing which it contains is sanctioned by the sure testimony of Scripture."[9] Even more, Calvin uses the Creed as an outline for his treatise on the salvation of Christ;

> because it states the leading articles of redemption in a few words, and may thus serve as a tablet in which the points of Christian doctrine, most deserving of attention, are brought separately and distinctly before us.[10]

And the late addition of the *descensus* article and the question of authorship does not bother Calvin, who states:

> It is of little consequence by whom and at what time it was introduced. The chief thing to be attended to in the Creed is, that it furnishes us with a full and every way complete summary of faith, containing nothing but what has been derived from the infallible word of God.[11]

Hence, the authority of the Apostles' Creed with all its articles rests not in its authorship or date, but in its concise, faithful, and 'complete summary of faith' in accordance with the Scriptures.

Second, concerning historical evidence, Martin Scharlemann asserts:

> The fact . . . that the statement on the *descensus* was incorporated in the Creeds at a rather late date does not mean to suggest that there was no doctrine of Christ's descent in the early church. On the contrary, it has become abundantly evident that the subject matter of Christ's κατάβασις came under discussion very early in the life of the church.[12]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), 325.

[10] Ibid., 324.

[11] Ibid., 317.

[12] Martin H. Scharlemann, "'He Descended into Hell': An Interpretation of 1 Peter 3: 18-20," *Concordia Journal* 15 (1989): 312.

Regarding this abundance of early evidence, Wouter Biesbrouck points out that "nearly all the early Fathers, starting from the beginning of the second century, make mention of it,"[13] and Jared Wicks notes that "we have twelve different attestations of this belief in works dated before A.D. 180."[14] Nevertheless, while we might have sufficient historical warrant for maintaining the article's inclusion, what about the scriptural support?

Biesbrouck writes, "It is certainly true that there is no direct unambiguous biblical reference to Christ's descent. Yet, if we look at the Scriptural witness that is put forward by the Church Fathers, a whole battery of proof texts is proffered."[15] The most common reference is 1 Peter 3:18-21; 4:6, and Grudem seeks to discredit a *descensus* interpretation by arguing that "the most satisfactory explanation" of this passage is by Augustine, who does not see this text as referring to Christ's descent but rather to "Christ 'in spirit' . . . preaching through Noah to the hostile unbelievers around him."[16] What Grudem fails to consider, however, is that despite Augustine's reading of 1 Peter 3:18-20, he nonetheless does affirm the doctrine of Christ's descent based on Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:24, 27, and he declares, "Who, therefore, except an infidel, will deny that Christ was in hell?"[17] Thus, in the end, Grudem's argument for excluding the *descensus* article from the Apostles' Creed is unpersuasive.

Having said this, as regards the intent of this thesis we need only recall that this work is an application of Lindbeck's rule theory approach to doctrine, which means that our use of the *descensus* article rests on the fact that "historically, . . . the

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[13] Wouter Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus, Sed Extra Mundum Nulla Damnatio*: Reappropriating Christ's Descent into Hell for Theology of Religions," *Louvain Studies* 37 (2013): 116.

[14] Jared Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead: Early Witnesses from Ignatius of Antioch to Origen," *Pro Ecclesia* 17, no. 3 (2008): 282.

[15] Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*," 112.

[16] Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell," 110.

[17] Augustine, "Letter 164," Ch. 2, trans. J. G. Cunningham, *New Advent*, accessed November 30, 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102164.htm.

articles of the Apostles' Creed . . . have been treated as unconditionally and permanently essential."[18] In other words, like the *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu* principles, the *descensus* article also functions as an irreversible doctrine for Christian theological discussion.[19] Thus, let us consider the doctrinal rules instantiated by early church treatments of Christ's descent into hell.

The Doctrinal Rules Instantiated by the Early Church Fathers

Fergus King explains that "in its classic form the Descent into Hell is a doctrine that addresses the fate of those who died in the period before the Incarnation, that is, those who had no opportunity in their earthly life, to hear and accept Christ."[20] From this premise, early Christian thought on the subject is rather straightforward in its teaching; e.g., because Jesus proclaimed salvation to the living during his time on earth, it is reasonable to assume that he did the same during his time among the dead. Indeed, the idea that the events in hades in some ways mimic the events which occurred upon the earth is a common theme in the early treatments.

For instance, the Orthodox theologian Hilarion Alfeyev notes that Hippolytus "was one of the first to speak of John the Baptist preaching in Hades before Christ's descent therein."[21] The idea is that just as John prepared the way for Christ on earth, so also he prepared the way for Christ's descent to the place of the dead. Moreover, J. A. MacCulloch states in his comprehensive study of the *descensus* doctrine that "the

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[18] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2009), 72.

[19] For Lindbeck's taxonomy of doctrines, see, Ibid., 70-71.

[20] Fergus King, "'He Descended to the Dead': Towards a Pastoral Strategy for Making Peace with the Living Dead," *Soma: An International Journal of Theological Discourses and Counter-Discourses* (2012): 7; also see, Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent Into Hell* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 9-85.

[21] Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, 45. Also see, Hippolytus, "On Christ and Antichrist," Ch. 45, trans. J. H. MacMahon, *New Advent*, accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0516.htm.

announcement of the good news of salvation in Hades forms the earliest and most widely diffused conception of the purpose of the presence of Christ's soul in Hades."[22] One example of this interpretation of the descent is from Clement of Alexandria, who asserts:

> If, then, He [Jesus] preached the Gospel to those in the flesh that they might not be condemned unjustly, how is it conceivable that He did not for the same cause preach the Gospel to those who had departed this life before His advent?[23]

Within this frame of thought early Christian treatments often signify a two-fold purpose for Christ's descent into hell: 1) to proclaim freedom to those held captive therein, and 2) to assert his victory over sin, death, and the devil.[24] For instance, Origen expresses this two-fold purpose when he writes:

> By this death he [Christ] destroyed him who possessed the power of death (*mortem imperiam*), that is the devil, in order to liberate those held by death. For, having bound the strong man and having conquered him by the cross, he entered into his house, which is the house of death, or Hades, and spoiled his goods, that is, liberated the souls which death held.[25]

Yet this liberation does not mean these souls went directly to heaven. As Jacques Le Goff explains:

> He [Origen] assures his readers that the righteous go to Paradise the moment they die, but this Paradise, he says, is different from heaven, in which the soul arrives only after the Last Judgment and trial by fire, a trial that may last for a shorter or longer period.[26]

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[22] J. A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 240.

[23] Clement of Alexandria, "*Stromata*," 6.6, trans. William Wilson, *New Advent*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm.

[24] See, Malcolm L. Peel, "The '*Decensus Ad Inferos*' in 'The Teachings of Silvanus' (CG VII, 4)," *Numen* 26, no. Fasc. 1 (1979): 39-47; Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead"; Biesbrouck, "Extra Ecclesiam,"116-119; Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 30-60; Hilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, 43-82.

[25] Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 5, 10, in Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, 51; also see, Malcolm L. Peel, "The '*Decensus Ad Inferos*' in 'The Teachings of Silvanus' (CG VII, 4)," *Numen* 26, no. Fasc. 1 (1979): 39-47.

[26] Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 56. He cites, *De Principiis* 2.11 n6; *In Esechielem*, homily 13 n2; *In Numeros*, homily 26.

The power of sin, death, and the devil is spoiled but heaven must wait till the consummation.

We find a similar position with Tertullian, who considers the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and states:

> It must therefore be evident to every man of intelligence who has ever heard of the Elysian fields, that there is some determinate place called Abraham's bosom, and that it is designed for the reception of the souls of Abraham's children, even from among the Gentiles (since he is "the father of many nations," which must be classed among his family), and of the same faith as that wherewithal he himself believed God, without the yoke of the law and the sign of circumcision. This region, therefore, I call Abraham's bosom. Although it is not in heaven, it is yet higher than hell, and is appointed to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous, until the consummation of all things shall complete the resurrection of all men with the "full recompense of their reward."[27]

From this perspective, Tertullian argues that until the time of the resurrection the doors of heaven remain closed to all except martyrs, for "the sole key to unlock Paradise is your own life's blood."[28] So even after Christ's descent Abraham's bosom remains the abode of all who will be saved in the consummation, both Jews and Gentiles.

Irenaeus also teaches the continuation of the intermediate state after Christ's descent, saying that the souls of the righteous do not go immediately to heaven after death, but "shall go away into the invisible place allotted to them by God, and there remain until the resurrection, awaiting that event."[29] His reason is simple – disciples are not greater than their master; hence, just as "the Lord observed the law of the

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[27] Tertullian, "*Against Marcion*," 4.34, trans. Peter Holmes, *New Advent*, accessed May 6, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03124.htm.
[28] Tertullian, "A Treatise on the Soul," Ch. 55, trans. Peter Holmes, *New Advent*, accessed December 7, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0310.htm. Perhaps referring to Revelation 6:9.
[29] Irenaeus, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against Heresies*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Ex Fontibus, 2010), 638 (5.31.2).

dead" before his resurrection and ascension, so must his disciples do likewise.[30] He

writes:

> As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but
> awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father, . . . and rising
> again after three days was taken up [to heaven]; so ought we also to await the
> time of our resurrection prescribed by God and foretold by the prophets, and
> so, rising, be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this
> [privilege].[31]

Thus, however Irenaeus envisions the nature of the 'invisible place,' he is certain that

this place is not yet heaven.

Finally, the *Shepherd of Hermas* states that the apostles also descended after

their deaths to preach to those who had "fallen asleep" so that these too might be

"made to know the name of the Son of God" and be saved.[32] Clement refers to this

passage in the *Shephard of Hermas* and insists that the purpose of the apostles'

descent was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles:

> For it was requisite, in my opinion, that as here, so also there [hades], the best
> of the disciples should be imitators of the Master; so that He should bring to
> repentance those belonging to the Hebrews, and they the Gentiles.[33]

Commenting on this statement, MacCulloch says:

> Clement thus argues that, as was insisted on by other writers, Gentiles were as
> acceptable to God as Jews; but, as no other had yet done, he applies this
> argument to those Gentiles who had passed away before Christ's coming.[34]

Clement reasons that because God is a just judge and is not a respecter of persons, he

will make sure that all have the opportunity to respond to the preaching of the gospel

– both Jews and Gentiles, both the living and the dead.[35] However, Wicks surveys a

broad spectrum of early writings on the issue, and notes:

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[30] Ibid., 637.

[31] Ibid.

[32] "*The Shepherd of Hermas*," Similitude 9.16, trans, F. Crombie *New Advent*, accessed December 6, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02013.htm.

[33] Clement of Alexandria, "*Stromata*," 6.6, trans. William Wilson, *New Advent*, accessed August 1, 2014, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm.

[34] MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell*, 98.

[35] Clement, "The Stromata." 6.6.

> In most cases the preached message extends Christ's salvation to the righteous dead of Israel, to whom Hippolytus added Adam (2.3). Others, however, increase the number of those whom Christ addresses to include the rest of humanity, for example, Pseudo-Hippolytus (1.12), Clement of Alexandria (2.4), and Origen in *De principiis* (2.5 [2]).[36]

In this way, the early Christian writings demonstrate various opinions regarding the extent of Christ's liberating descent into hades.

Through this concise survey of the early church treatments of the descent we discover that, notwithstanding some differences, these writings present a rather organic picture of Christ's descent into hades. Just as the fulfillment of the messianic promise was announced by John the Baptist among the living, so likewise he prepared the way among the dead. After which time Christ descended in triumph and proclaimed his salvation to the souls in hades – either to the righteous alone (with the possible inclusion of Gentiles) or to all captive souls in general. In so doing he also either brought them to a heavenly state, or he brought comfort and rest to those who still must await their full redemption in the consummation.[37] Finally, some taught that the evangelistic ministry of the apostles did not end with their deaths, but that they too descended and preached to the Gentiles.[38]

With this picture of the descent in mind, we might consider these early formulations of the doctrine as comprising a kind of standard doctrinal lexicon for subsequent theological discussions on the subject. For example, following Lindbeck's taxonomy of doctrines we might say that the 'unconditionally essential' rules are that Christ died an actual death upon the cross, and yet he was not a victim of death but rather a victor who conquered the grave and secured freedom from sin, death, and the

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[36] Wicks, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead": 308; see, Hippolytus, "Exegetical Fragments: On Psalm 109 or 110," trans. S. D. F. Salmond, *New Advent*, accessed December 2, 2016, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0502.htm.
[37] See Wicks' summation of this point, "Christ's Saving Descent to the Dead," 309.
[38] Alfeyev gives a similar synopsis. See, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, 51.

devil for those bound by "the law of the dead."[39] Hence, any expression of the *descensus* doctrine must affirm these principles.

On the other hand, concerning the issues of the extent of this offer and of whether those whom Christ freed are now in a heavenly state or still in the bosom of Abraham/paradise, we might categorize as 'conditionally essential' rules.[40] That is to say, each of these interpretations is a possible option within traditional orthodox Christianity, and the particular view one holds will depend on one's theological convictions, reading of Scripture, denominational confessions, or some combination of these and other factors. We should also recognize that from an ecumenical perspective we need to include in this category the teaching of John the Baptist's descent into hades, as the Eastern Orthodox tradition continues to uphold this teaching.[41] For example, a hymn (*troparion*) sung each year by Orthodox Christians to commemorate John's martyrdom states: "The glorious beheading of the Forerunner was a certain divine dispensation, that the coming of the Savior might also be preached to those in Hades."[42] Also, to the extent that D'Costa uses the notion of the apostles' descent to argue for the instrumental causality of the church in the salvation of the unevangelized, this teaching is shown to be a 'conditionally essential' rule as well.[43]

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[39] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 637.

[40] For Lindbeck's 'Taxonomy of Doctrines,' see, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 70-74.

[41] Following Andrew Louth, the terms "Eastern Orthodox" and "Orthodox" are used in this chapter to refer to those groups within Eastern Christianity who are in communion with each other; e.g., Greek, Russian, Romanian, and Bulgarian Orthodox churches. See, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), xiii-xx.

[42] *Apolytikia and Kontakia* (St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 2009), 1215; accessed December 5, 2016, http://www.stanthonysmonastery.org/music/Apolytikia.pdf.

[43] He links it to the Roman Catholic teaching on Eucharistic mediation. See, *Christianity and World Religions*, 170-171, 180-186.

Taken altogether, this basic doctrinal typology will guide our application of the *descensus* doctrine for developing a Reformation prospective solution to the question of the unevangelized. But before we proceed, we must also consider the theological grammar of the reformers.

Reformed and Lutheran Interpretations of the Descent

By the time of the Reformation the general position of the Western church was that upon death a person's soul separates from their body whereby they immediately obtain either eternal life in heaven, eternal life in hell, or "temporal punishment" in purgatory.[44] Moreover, Scharlemann notes that by the time of the Middle Ages "the descent into hell came to be interpreted in terms of the *limbus patrum*, where Jesus offered the departed souls of patriarchs and prophets the benefit of His sacrifice."[45] Thus, when the Reformation began the Western church held that Christ descended only to the just in limbo and not to the wicked in hell proper, and that Christ emptied the limbo of the just and opened the doors of heaven to the righteous and the doors of purgatory to those in need of further cleansing after death.[46] So in regard to the conditionally essential rules of the *descensus*, this interpretation shaped the theological context of the issue during the time of the Reformation, and therefore influenced the reformers' expressions.

Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli affirms the *descensus* article in the Apostles' Creed, stating:

If He had not "died and been buried," who would believe that He was a real man? Therefore the apostolic Fathers added in the creed, "*descendit ad inferos,*" *i.e.*, He descended to those below, using the expression as a circumlocution to signify real death. For to be reckoned with those below is to have gone from the land of the living, and shows that the efficacy of His

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[44] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 482. Also see, ibid., 473-485 and DS 40, 321, 410, 429, 456-457, 464, 530, 570s, 693.

[45] Scharlemann, "'He Descended into Hell,'" 312.

[46] For example, see, DS 456-457; 464.

redemption extended even to those below. And this St. Peter hints at when he says [I Pet. 3: 19 f.] that the Gospel was preached also to them that are dead, that is, to those below who following the example of Noah from the foundation of the world, believed the warnings of God, when the wicked were scornful.[47]

To be sure, this particular statement by Zwingli appears to limit the benefits of Christ's descent to those who, like Noah, had 'believed the warnings of God.' But elsewhere he also mentions figures such as "Hercules, Theseus, Socrates, Aristides, Antigonus, Numa, Camillus, the Catos and Scipios" as being among those who received Christ's salvation.[48] As we discussed in previous parts of this thesis, the sole basis of salvation for Zwingli is divine election; hence, "the elect are ever elect, even before they believe."[49] Timothy George explains that in this way, "the presumed salvation of such 'heathen' was not based on the universal revelation of God in nature, much less on their own meritorious deeds. It depended instead on the free decision of God to choose whom he will."[50] Or as G. W. Bromiley states:

> The decree of election upon which all salvation depends was a decree from all eternity, enclosing men of all generations within its embrace. Chronologically the patriarchs and pious Israelites preceded the coming of the Saviour, but this did not prevent their salvation by anticipatory faith. Similarly the pious heathen might well be the recipients of divine grace and redemption even though they remained outside the temporal reach of the Gospel. They were not saved because of their piety, but because of the eternal activity of God in election and atonement.[51]

As regards the intermediate state, Zwingli interprets the 'bosom of Abraham' less as a particular place and more as a phrase indicating that the righteous were safeguarded

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[47] Ulrich Zwingli, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1922), 245.
[48] Ibid., 272.
[49] Ulrich Zwingli, *Selected Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, trans. Samuel Macauley Jackson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1901), 242. Also see, 239-247.
[50] Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 129.
[51] Huldrych Zwingli and Johann Heinrich Bullinger, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 242-243.

until Christ: "For it [the bosom of Abraham] can be nothing else than the sodality of the early believers to be everywhere preserved for the coming of Christ."[52]

For this reason, Gergely Juhász suggests that Zwingli may have held a view similar to his protégé Heinrich Bullinger, who argued for a figurative interpretation of Christ's descent into hell.[53] Regarding Bullinger's position, Juhász states:

> Based on the quotation Peter uses in Acts 2:27 where he cites Ps. 16:10—"you will not leave my soul *in inferno*"—and based on Gen. 42:38 and 44:29, Bullinger identified the word *infer(n)um* with *sepultus* (grave). Consequently, Bullinger rejected both the bodily and the spiritual interpretation of this article of faith. Rather, he argued that the virtue of Christ's death and salvation had its beneficial effect on the faithful of the OT, just as baptism, through the virtue of Christ's resurrection, washes away the sins of the baptized.[54]

Nevertheless, Zwingli does maintain "that through His precious death the captives were redeemed, and Christ, the victor, led them upwards, as is professed in the Creed: 'he descended into Hell.'"[55] And based on his reading of the Creed Zwingli dispenses with the intermediate state after Christ's descent, stating, "I believe, then, that the souls of the faithful fly to heaven as soon as they leave the body, come into the presence of God, and rejoice forever."[56] And for Zwingli 'the faithful' comprise all the elect both before and after Christ, which includes individuals who die before hearing the gospel.[57] As W. P. Stephens explains:

> For him there is no contradiction between God's sovereignty in election and Christ's role as mediator in the salvation of the Gentiles. All people are saved through Christ, by which he means the mercy of God shown in Christ. They can be saved, however, whether or not the gospel is preached to them.[58]

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[52] Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 230.

[53] Gergely Juhász, *Translating Resurrection: The Debate Between William Tyndale and George Joye in Its Historical and Theological Context* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 230-231.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 202.

[56] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 271.

[57] For instance, see, Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 237-242.

[58] W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125-126.

In short, Zwingli holds that the doctrine of the descent teaches that by his death upon the cross Christ freed all the elect from the bonds of death and opened to them the doors of heaven. This did not, perhaps, include an actual journey to a specific location, but these souls received the benefit of Christ's atoning work nonetheless. Thus, all elect individuals after the time of Christ experience the beatific vision immediately after death.

Martin Luther

Paul Althaus says that Luther holds a two-fold view of the *descensus* doctrine. On one hand he says that Luther understands the article in the Creed as referring to "part of Christ's death agony," and is therefore meant to convey Christ's humiliation on the cross as he "suffers hell and the wrath of God."[59] But on the other hand, says Althaus:

> On the basis of Scripture passages such as Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:24-27 and in view of the sequence of the Articles in the Apostles' Creed (where the descent into hell follows his death) Luther also teaches a descent of Christ into hell after his death.[60]

Yet when considering Luther's overall position, Althaus argues that his emphasis of the descent is chiefly on "the passion, Gethsemane, and Golgotha," and that in contrast to his fellow reformer Philip Melanchthon and to later Lutheran orthodoxy he does not affirm "the descent into hell as Christ's triumphal victory march into hell."[61] Yet Bernhard Lohse cautions that "the importance of the victory motif [in Luther's theology] should not be ignored. Not only in the context of atonement doctrine but also in ethics and in general observation of the world, the idea of victory has

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[59] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996), 207.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

considerable significance."[62] Emerson also tempers Althaus' assertion by arguing that Luther does indeed envision a triumphal descent, but that "the Patristic perspective on Christ's victorious descent is decoupled from their liberating motif, at least in the sense that it universally liberates humanity from Adam's bonds."[63]

To be sure, Emerson's observation appears to be closer to the mark. In a sermon at Torgau in 1533, Luther affirms the victory motif of the descent, but indicates that it was not universal:

> Before Christ arose and ascended into heaven, and while yet lying in the grave, He also descended into hell in order to deliver also us from it, who were to be held in it as prisoners. . . . However I shall not discuss this article in a profound and subtle manner, as to how it was done or what it means to "descend into hell," but adhere to the simplest meaning conveyed by these words, as we must represent it to children and uneducated people.[64]

What is the simplest meaning conveyed? He continues:

> Accordingly, it is customary to represent Christ in paintings on walls, as He descends, appears before hell, clad in a priestly robe and with a banner in His hand, with which He beats the devil and puts him to flight, takes hell by storm, and *rescues those that are His*. Thus it was also acted the night before Easter as a play for children. And I am well pleased with the fact that it is painted, played, sung and said in this manner for the benefit of simple people. . . .
> Since we cannot but conceive thoughts and images of what is presented to us in words, and unable to think of or understand anything without such images, it is appropriate and right that we view it literally, just as it is painted, that He descends with the banner, shattering and destroying the gates of hell.[65]

Here Luther preaches a victorious descent whereby Christ defeats sin, hell, and the devil but rescues only 'those that are his.' Furthermore, while Luther asserts that it is good to 'view it literally,' he means only in the sense of how the doctrine is traditionally represented through paintings, plays, and songs; "for it certainly did not

[62] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 228.
[63] Emerson, "'He Descended to the Dead,'" 119-120.
[64] F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Lutheran Confessions," *The Book of Concord*, accessed December 9, 2016, http://bookofconcord.org/historical-19.php.
[65] Ibid.; emphasis added.

take place in a bodily and tangible manner although we can only paint and conceive it in a coarse and bodily way and speak of it in pictures."[66]

That said, when Luther speaks elsewhere about Christ's descent in a 'profound and subtle manner,' we discover why he thought it best to keep his sermon simple. In his commentary on Genesis he does not hesitate to dismiss the theological concept of the limbo of the just:

> They say [the Roman Catholic Church] that Christ descended to this place, broke it open, and set free—not from hell but from the limbo—the fathers who were troubled by the longing and waiting for Christ but were not enduring punishment or torments.[67]

In response to this teaching, Luther writes:

> Their talk about a limbo of the fathers is inappropriate. It would have been better if they had called it the bosom of Abraham; for those who died before Christ were saved in the promise of the Word in which they lived in this life, and when they died, they entered into life and were truly alive.[68]

From this perspective, Luther's extended point is that the effects of Christ's descent – i.e., freedom from the torments of hell – were actualized even before the occurrence of the historical event. And it is here that we must seek to grasp Luther's 'subtle and profound' explanation. In the quote above we see that he does not envision the Old Testament saints as having had to wait for their salvation in Christ, as they were already saved based on their faith 'in the promise of the Word.' Althaus explains that for Luther:

> Christ's work was done at a particular time in history. But in God's sight it has existed from all eternity. . . . For the gospel and the promise are there from the beginning and these include Christ and his work. Thus all men of all times who believe the promise, and thereby are blessed, live from the work of Christ—even though this actually first took place on Golgotha. The work of salvation is, however, based on God's eternal will to save; and its significance therefore transcends time.[69]

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Genesis*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, trans. George V. Schick, vol. 4 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 315.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 211.

We might say, then, that the axiomatic issue for Luther is not the location of souls before and after Christ, but rather the spiritual condition of souls before and after faith. Outside of faith in Christ (or in the promise of Christ) a person is held captive by sin, death, and the devil. But the descent means that Christ defeats the power of hell – even before the actual event occurs – so that all who trust in his promise never need to fear death's embrace. Althaus states, "The Christian holds fast to the word when he dies, and it gives him the certainty that he will be awakened out of death."[70] Yet how does Luther envision the state of souls after death?

Based on the words of Christ to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), Luther says that believers now rest in paradise which is the same as "the bosom of Christ."[71] He also calls this paradisal state 'heaven,' but not in the eschatological sense:

> There heaven and Paradise are the same thing, except that as yet there is rest and peace among the saints, but not the kingdom. Christ is in heaven or Paradise to direct, judge, and rule His church, to send angels to minister to His church, to distribute gifts to men, to exalt the humble, etc. For He is always working and does not rest as do the saints who sleep.[72]

Thus, this state is not yet the beatific vision because Christ is still at work in the world while the saints sleep. Moreover, by 'rest' or 'sleep' Luther often seems to mean a literal connotation, which is a theological position known as 'soul sleep.'[73] For instance, Luther asserts, "There is a great difference between the sleeping saints and the ruling Christ. The former sleep and do not know what is going on."[74] However, he

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[70] Ibid., 412.
[71] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 313, 316.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Lutheran orthodoxy rejected this view early on. See, Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, Third Edition. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899), 635-636. Zwingli and Calvin also opposed this view. See, Zwingli, *Selected Works*, 252-256; and Calvin, *Psychopannychia*.
[74] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 313-314.

does not insist that this view be held as dogma, and after expressing this opinion in a letter to his friend Nicholas von Amsdorf he concludes, "Who knows how God deals with the departed souls?"[75] It is also for this reason that Luther is not always consistent in his statements on the matter. For example, in one place he seems to imply that souls maintain a certain level of consciousness:

> There is a difference between the sleep or rest of this life and that of the future life. For toward night a person who has become exhausted by his daily labor in this life enters into his chamber in peace, as it were, to sleep there; and during this night he enjoys rest and has no knowledge whatever of any evil caused either by fire or by murder. But the soul does not sleep in the same manner. It is awake. It experiences visions and the discourses of the angels and of God.[76]

Nevertheless, despite his inconsistent statements on the matter, Philip Secker insists:

> There can be no denying that Luther frequently and throughout the course of his life as a Reformer referred to death as sleep. Indeed this may well have been the characteristic way in which he referred to death.[77]

It is also because of Luther's frequent use of this description of death that leads Althaus to conclude that the notion of soul sleep "is Luther's definitive statement about the condition of the departed."[78]

That said, returning to the issue at hand we discover that for Luther the "simplest meaning" of Christ's descent into hell is that Christ "rescues those that are His."[79] But when he speaks in a profound and subtle manner Luther means that through his death and resurrection Christ defeated sin, death, and the devil and that through faith a person is freed "from hell's jaws" as Christ brings "us again into the

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[75] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Letters I*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 48 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 361.

[76] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 313.

[77] Philip J Secker, "Martin Luther's Views on the State of the Dead," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38, no. 7 (July 1967): 423. Secker notes more than one hundred references where Luther refers to death as sleep; see, fn. 6.

[78] Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 413. For more on the discussion of Luther's view on the condition of souls after death, see, Trevor O'Reggio, "A Re-Examination of Luther's View on the State of the Dead," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (2011): 154-170.

[79] Bente, "Historical Introductions."

Father's favor and grace."[80] Thus the doctrine of Christ's descent means that not one

person of faith, including Old Testament figures, ever spend one moment in the

torments of hell. Yet neither do they go immediately into the beatific vision as he

appears to hold that, in some sense, all souls remain asleep between the time of death

and the general resurrection at which time "all will have to stand before the judgment

seat."[81] So in his own way, Luther teaches the continuation of the intermediate state

as the faithful 'rest' in the bosom of Christ.

John Calvin

While Calvin upholds the *descensus* article in the Apostles' Creed he also

clearly opposes the idea of an actual journey into hell. In particular, he calls the

medieval scholastic conception of the afterlife "childish" and a "fable," as these

theologians "imagined" the place "of the Patriarchs who died under the law . . . to be

a subterraneous cavern, to which they gave the name of *Limbus*."[82] On the contrary,

Calvin says the biblical notion of 'the bosom of Abraham' is a more appropriate

concept, but that one should not inquire about the nature of this state since "the

dimension of the soul is not the same as that of the body."[83] Yet he is certain that

unlike the medieval notion of the *limbus patrum*, the bosom of Abraham was not a

place in which the fathers were held 'captive' or from which they needed to be

freed.[84] As François Wendel says:

> For Calvin, the affirmation that the Christ had really gone down into hell after
> his death belonged to the domain of fables; the descent into hell ought to be
> regarded simply as an image for the sufferings endured by Christ on the cross
> and of his death in the flesh.[85]

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[80] Paul Timothy McCain, W. H. T Dau, and F Bente, eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006), 402.
[81] Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 316.
[82] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317.
[83] Ibid., 612-613.
[84] Ibid.
[85] François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1997), 82-83.

Calvin asserts that there is no reason to think that Christ freed souls who are under condemnation,[86] or that Christ suffered after death when death for a righteous person means the end of bodily suffering and rest for the soul.[87] "In his view," says Emerson, "the descent happens on the cross as Jesus experiences the full separation from the Father due to bearing the weight of sin, expressed in the cry of dereliction."[88] Therefore, Calvin holds that it is the 'hellish' events of the crucifixion – endured by Christ in both body and soul – to which the article in the Apostles' Creed refers.[89] For Calvin, says Keith Johnson, "the descent thus signifies the moment on the cross when Christ willingly bears the full burden of human sin and its consequences."[90] So similar to Bullinger, Calvin argues that the *descensus* article describes Christ's suffering on the cross rather than an actual visitation to the place of the dead.

Having said this, Calvin does affirm the notion that the gospel was made known among the dead, saying that "Christ illumined them by the power of his Spirit."[91] And his support for this affirmation is 1 Peter 3:19, about which he writes:

> The purport of the context is, that believers who had died before that time were partakers of the same grace with ourselves: for he celebrates the power of Christ's death, in that he penetrated even to the dead, pious souls obtaining an immediate view of that visitation for which they had anxiously waited; while, on the other hand, the reprobate were more clearly convinced that they were completely excluded from salvation. Although the passage in Peter is not perfectly definite, we must not interpret as if he made no distinction between the righteous and the wicked: he only means to intimate, that the death of Christ was made known to both.[92]

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[86] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317.
[87] Ibid., 612-613.
[88] Matthew Y. Emerson, "'He Descended to the Dead': The Burial of Christ and the Eschatological Character of the Atonement," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 19, no. 1 (2015): 120.
[89] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317-318.
[90] Keith Johnson, "He Descended into Hell," *Christian Reflections: A Series in Faith and Ethics* 50, no. Spring (2014): 27–34.
[91] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317.
[92] Ibid., 318.

Of course, by 'visitation' Calvin means only that they received the good news of Christ 'by the power of the Spirit,' and he argues that while Scripture teaches that Christ is now present with the righteous in paradise, paradise is not yet heaven. For while the atonement makes the soul "capable of beatific glory," Scripture suspends this event until the consummation.[93] In this way, the bosom of Abraham is transformed into paradise but even this "abode of blessed spirits" constitutes an intermediate state:[94]

> Since Scripture uniformly enjoins us to look with expectation to the advent of Christ, and delays the crown of glory till that period, let us be contented with the limits divinely prescribed to us—viz. that the souls of the righteous, after their warfare is ended, obtain blessed rest where in joy they wait for the fruition of promised glory, and that thus the final result is suspended till Christ the Redeemer appear.[95]

In like manner, "There can be no doubt that the reprobate have the same doom as that which Jude assigns to the devils, they are 'reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day' (Jude 6)."[96]

Thus, similar to Luther, the crux for Calvin is not so much whether Christ descended into the place of torment or only to the bosom of Abraham, but that Jesus overcame sin, death, and hell. And even though Calvin interprets the *descensus* article as referring only to Christ's sufferings on the cross, he does affirm that the gospel was made known among the dead through the illumination of the Spirit whereby the righteous rejoiced and the wicked were further convinced of their damnation. Nevertheless, both the righteous and the unrighteous alike must wait for the second coming of Christ before experiencing either the beatific vision or eternal condemnation. In the end, Calvin still interprets Christ's descent as a victorious defeat of sin and death, affirming that "by engaging with the power of the devil, the fear of

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[93] Ibid., 612-613.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 613.
[96] Ibid.

death, and the pains of hell, he gained the victory, and achieved a triumph, so that we now fear not in death those things which our Prince has destroyed."[97]

Concluding Thoughts

From this brief assessment of Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin we find that while they diverge from the patristic views in some ways, they nonetheless maintain the 'unconditionally essential' rules that Christ died an actual death upon the cross and that the *descensus* signifies his completed and proclaimed victory over sin, death, and the devil. With regard to the 'conditionally essential' rules, all three use the usual theological grammar – e.g., "He descended to those below" (Zwingli);[98] Christ "appears before hell, . . . He beats the devil and puts him to flight" (Luther);[99] and "he penetrated even to the dead" (Calvin).[100] Nevertheless, even though they understand the descent as an ontological reality they do not view it in terms of Christ actually traveling in soul or body to the abode of the dead. Instead, the distinction for them appears to be less about location and more about one's relation towards God – e.g., Christ "rescues those that are His" (Luther);[101] distinguished as "the souls of the faithful" and those who "were scornful" (Zwingli);[102] or between the "pious souls" and "the reprobate" (Calvin).[103] Hence, for these reformers the phrase 'bosom of Abraham' seems to function more as a metaphor indicating those who await their salvation in Christ.

What we can say for sure, however, is that Zwingli teaches that the faithful experience the beatific vision in heaven immediately after death and "shall one day

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[97] Ibid., 319.
[98] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 245.
[99] Bente, "Historical Introductions."
[100] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317.
[101] Bente, "Historical Introductions."
[102] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 271, 245.
[103] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 317.

enjoy everlasting bliss there also in the body,"[104] while Luther says that the saints are in heaven with Christ but remain 'asleep' until the Day of Judgment. Of the three, only Calvin perpetuates the bosom of Abraham saying that all 'pious souls' must await Christ's return.

Considering our survey of the early church treatments and of Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin it should be evident that the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell is a rich theological resource for our discussion of the unevangelized. For the point is not that Christ descended to save a few people from a certain place at a certain time, but that through his descent Jesus secured salvation for many people from all places and all times. In other words, the prospective salvation of those who die after Christ depends just as much on the descent into hell as did the prospective salvation of those who died before Christ. As Emerson concludes:

> The common thread here, for those who affirm and for those who deny the descent [i.e., denial of an actual visitation, not denial of the doctrine itself], is that in Jesus' burial, he defeats the last enemy, which is death (1 Cor 15:26), and crushes Satan's head. Death is swallowed up in death. Jesus thus accomplishes what will happen on the Day of the Lord: the defeat of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the grave. Indeed, his Passion is the Day of the Lord. The burial of Christ is an eschatological act in its defeat of Hades, both accomplishing that victory and anticipating its culmination at Jesus' return. . . . His burial can thus be affirmed by all traditions as eschatologically salvific because it gains the victory over God's enemies.[105]

So with the doctrinal rules and theological grammar of the *descensus* now in hand, we will attempt to apply this doctrine to our prospective *fides ex auditu* approach to the problem of the unevangelized.

The Limbo of the Just: Conceptual Dilemmas

Let us recall D'Costa's application of the *descensus* doctrine and our initial concerns. First, D'Costa holds to the teaching which says that Christ descended in his

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[104] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 246.
[105] Emerson, "'He Descended to the Dead,'" 123.

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soul to the place of the righteous (conceived of as 'the limbo of the just') and not to the place of torment.[106] From this position he notes the long tradition which includes righteous Gentiles as being among those who received salvation when Christ descended, and he suggests that perhaps there were some who, at that time, still required purification in purgatory – for instance, "the good thief in Luke 23:43."[107] If so, then in a similar way and for similar reasons perhaps good non-Christians might also receive the benefits of the descent (*fides ex auditu*) and, if requiring further purification, entrance into purgatory. D'Costa states:

> Conceptually, it is very likely that some of the just, after their encounter with Christ and his church in the analogical space of the limbo of the just, will require purification, and then they, like their Christian brothers and sisters, may enter the Christological fires of purgatory.[108]

But there is a problem with the notion of an analogical space of the limbo of the just.

As we have seen, D'Costa relies on the theological concept *limbus patrum* for his application of the *descensus* doctrine. Yet this concept poses an immediate problem for his theory as the tradition teaches that Christ emptied the limbo of the just in his descent. So even if the limbo of the just once included good Gentiles who died with no knowledge of the promise of Christ, this particular objective state is no longer populated after Christ's descent thereby removing any possibility that a good non-Christian might now benefit from this particular realm. Moreover, because purgatory has replaced the limbo of the just as an intermediate state, and because purgatory is only for those who die in faith, D'Costa's theological frame seems to provide no equivalent objective state for unevangelized persons after Christ.

To be sure, D'Costa acknowledges these difficulties, and to push through this impasse he proposes an analogical application of the limbo of the just.[109] He writes:

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[106] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 166.
[107] Ibid., 176.
[108] Ibid., 177.
[109] See, Ibid., 174, 189.

> Clearly, the limbo of the just will not persist and is temporary, but it will continue to analogically operate in teaching that the just are never lost and await the Lord's coming after their death, just as do Christians.[110]

In short, while the limbo of the just may not itself be a perduring reality this conceptual element of Christ's descent indicates that the salvation of the just, perhaps even from among the unevangelized, will continue to obtain until the return of Christ. D'Costa concludes:

> If we understand this solution to operate between the objective reality that the limbo of the just is empty now and the subjective reality that there are many who subjectively still exist in the state of those who entered the limbo of the just, this doctrine [*descensus*] provides a sound solution to the problem we have been investigating.[111]

Nevertheless, while it may be the case that certain individuals today subjectively exist in the same state as those who entered the limbo of the just before Christ's descent, the fact remains that there is now no objective reality in which this event can actually occur. Based on the logic of the limbo of the just we can perhaps suggest that certain non-Christians might hear and receive the gospel after death, but if the limbo of the just is empty and purgatory is only for those who already have explicit faith in Christ then *where* does this encounter occur? There is now no objective *fides ex auditu* solution (i.e., theological concept) which corresponds to Christ's descent to the limbo of the just. After the descent limbo is empty and purgatory is exclusive to Christians – there is nothing between.

Responding to D'Costa's proposal, Catholic theologian Edward Oakes also notes this issue with the limbo of the just, and states, "I hold that one cannot claim, with D'Costa, that the traditional *limbus patrum* . . . has any meaning after Christ's descent."[112] One reason, says Oakes, is because "whatever its internal merits,

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[110] Ibid., 178.

[111] Ibid., 179.

[112] Edward T. Oakes, "*Descensus* and Development: A Response to Recent Rejoinders," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 13, no. 1 (January 2011): 21.

D'Costa's solution certainly represents a rupture with the tradition, as he himself admits."[113] Although we ought to point out that in this same article Oakes says he agrees with D'Costa and DiNoia that, "contrary to all standard concepts of purgatory, . . . this realm of the dead also applies to non-Christians."[114] So perhaps faithfulness to tradition is not his real concern. Indeed, we might recall D'Costa's objection to Oakes' assertion that Christ descended all the way into hell so that he might suffer the torments of hell on our behalf (following Hans Urs von Balthasar).[115] D'Costa argues that this position represents not only a rupture with tradition, "but corrupts a true doctrine," contradicts "previous magisterial teachings," and "teaches novel doctrines."[116] That said, if we bracket out Oakes' questionable reliance on tradition and his 'novel' interpretation of the atonement, then his argument that Christ's descent was not limited to the limbo of the just bears some interesting points to consider.

For instance, he states, "I see the underworld as less differentiated at the moment of Christ's descent, and as only taking on its more settled 'departments' (purgatory and hell) *after* Christ's departure from that underworld."[117] From this position he argues that because Christ overcame the torments of hell in his descent ('hell' viewed in more general terms), "purgatory can *now* be seen as applying to non-Christians."[118] His point is that because "the *eternal* and *irrevocable* place of divine reprobation" came to exist only after Christ's descent, all who now live in the state of

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[113] Ibid., 20.; citing, Gavin D'Costa, "The Descent into Hell as a Solution for the Problem of the Fate of Unevangelized Non-Christians: Balthasar's Hell, the Limbo of the Fathers and Purgatory," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 2 (April 2009): 162.
[114] Oakes, "*Descensus* and Development," 21.
[115] See, D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 201-210.
[116] Ibid., 206.
[117] Oakes, "*Descensus* and Development," 20. Oakes credits this view to Joseph Ratzinger, see, 20-21.
[118] Ibid., 21.

those who were saved in the descent may also receive the benefits of Christ's saving work.[119] Except that in the case of non-Christians, they will not go straight to heaven but will spend time in purgatory, which "is essentially a transitional stage on the way to heaven."[120] Nonetheless, in the end Oakes' proposal suffers from the same internal dilemma as D'Costa's and DiNoia's theories. That is, purgatory, the process of purification, can only occur *through Christ* and is therefore only for those who are already *in Christ* – i.e., those who are part of the communion of saints.[121]

Having said this, and notwithstanding the concerns mentioned above, perhaps Oakes' recommendation for a 'less differentiated' understanding of the 'underworld' before Christ's descent is a helpful cue for how we might begin working towards a resolution. For this construal of the place of the dead moves the conversation back to a view of hades that comes closer to the early church treatments of the *descensus*. And, for similar reasons, his claim that the "more settled 'departments' (purgatory and hell)" came "*after* Christ's departure from the underworld" may be a step in the right direction as well.[122] Yet as I will explain in a moment, a Reformation approach will interpret the timing and nature of these 'departments' differently. So, keeping all these things in mind, we will now seek to identify an alternative theological framework for our application of the *descensus* doctrine.

Reframing the Discussion

The word 'hades' is a transliteration of the Greek term ᾅδης. As such, the teaching of Christ's descent refers not to the eternal place of condemnation but to the intermediate place of all the dead.[123] Thus, as Biesbrouck points out, the early church

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[119] Ibid., 23; emphasis original.
[120] Ibid.
[121] For example, see, *Catechism of the Catholic Church with Modifications From the Editio Typica* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 1474-75.
[122] Oakes, "*Descensus* and Development," 20.
[123] See, Matt 10:28; 11:23; Lk 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27; Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14.

fathers held that "even those who were members of the covenant were believed to be detained in Hades, as this was the realm of the dead, where all the deceased 'lived' their shadowy 'existence.'"[124] It is important to keep this understanding in mind, because in the *descensus* article in the Apostles' Creed the word 'hades' is often eclipsed by the English word 'hell.' The reason for this change is because the English version of the phrase, 'He descended into hell,' derives from the Western tradition and is a translation of one of three Latin versions of the Creed. As Alyssa Pitstick explains:

> Some say, *descendit ad inferna*, others, *ad infernos* or *ad inferos*. . . .
> All three words, *inferna*, *infernos*, and *inferos*, refer in their stems to something *lower* or *below*. . . . These root meanings give rise to derivative connotations of *the dead*, *the underworld*, or *hell*, the three words variously used in English translations of this creedal article.[125]

Hence, within the context of the *descensus* article the word 'hell' is still meant as a general reference to the place of all the dead.[126]

That said, the term 'hell' can still sometimes cause confusion in the discussion as it is also used to translate the biblical Greek terms gehenna (γέεννα), the place of eternal condemnation,[127] and tartarus (ταρταρώσας), the intermediate place of fallen angels.[128] And yet these distinctions are significant because Christ did not descend into the hell of eternal condemnation; "otherwise," as Oakes rightly states, "the resurrection would make no sense."[129] Nor did he descend into the hell of fallen angels, for "God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell

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[124] Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam*," 117.

[125] Pitstick, *Light in Darkness,* 12.

[126] Ibid., 12-13.

[127] Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 15, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6. Also implied in Rev 20:14.

[128] 2 Peter 2:4. Also implied in Jude 6. Also see Donald Bloesch's summary description, "Descent into Hell," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., Baker reference library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 313.

[129] Oakes, "*Descensus* and Development," 23.

[tartarus] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment" (2 Pet 2:4).

Therefore, we can agree with Oakes when he asserts that Christ did not descend into "the *eternal* and *irrevocable* place of divine reprobation," (gehenna) which did not exist during the time of the descent.[130] But when he concludes that the hell of eternal condemnation "came into existence after Christ's departure from the underworld at his resurrection,"[131] we might argue instead that the scriptural evidence indicates that *this hell* will not come into existence, or will not be populated, until the time of the general resurrection. For example, Reformed theologian Geerhardus Vos points out:

> In the New Testament . . . Gehenna occurs in Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,15,47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6. In all of these it designates the place of eternal punishment of the wicked, *generally in connection with the final judgment*. It is associated with fire as the source of torment. *Both body and soul are cast into it*. This is not to be explained on the principle that the New Testament speaks metaphorically of the state after death in terms of the body; *it presupposes the resurrection*.[132]

With this in mind, I would suggest that rather than speak primarily in conceptual or analogous terms, we might instead seek to situate the theoretical into the concrete; or rather, allow the conceptual to flow naturally out of the concrete. The hope here is that if we allow chronological order and temporal space to delimit the conversation, then perhaps an application of the doctrine of descent within this mode of thought will give rise to an objective space in time that is conducive to the salvation of unevangelized individuals who are subjectively in the same state as those who benefited from Christ's descent. And the first step in working out this alternative approach is to substitute the theological concept of 'the limbo of the just' with the

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.; original italisized.
[132] Walter A. Elwell, "Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology," *Bible Study Tools*, last modified 2018, accessed February 14, 2018, http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/gehenna/.

biblical notion of 'the bosom of Abraham' – a suggestion that is consistent with Reformation theology.[133] For while the limbo of the just teaches that this intermediate space is empty after Christ's descent, the same does not apply to the bosom of Abraham.

Le Goff explains that for the early church fathers in the Western tradition, such as "Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory," there "is an earthly paradise as well as a celestial paradise, and the latter . . . is the same thing as the bosom of Abraham."[134] In other words, unlike the medieval concept of the limbo of the just, many of the early fathers do not envision the bosom of Abraham as a place emptied by Christ but as a place which Christ transformed into paradise. As Ludwig Ott writes:

> Many of the older Fathers (St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, St. Hilary, St. Ambrose) assume a state of waiting between death and resurrection, in which the just indeed receive reward and the evil punishment, but do not yet achieve the final blessedness of Heaven or the final condemnation of hell.[135]

To this extent, our survey of early church treatments of the *descensus* doctrine confirm that this is indeed a common position of the fathers. But perhaps more substantial support for our Reformation approach is with the discussion of the intermediate state by Calvin. We may recall that, based on Scripture, he insists that both the "souls of the righteous" and of "the reprobate" must wait for the day of judgment; the former in the bosom of Abraham and the latter in "chains under darkness."[136]

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[133] Richard Muller says, "The *limbus patrum* is explicitly rejected in the orthodox Protestant treatment of the descent into hell." See, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 178. We might also point out that the concept of the limbo of the just is not dogma in Catholic theology, and only the biblical term 'Abraham's bosom' is used in the Catechism. See, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 179-180.

[134] Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 98.

[135] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 476.

[136] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 613.

Thus, from an eschatological perspective, if both gehenna and heaven are not yet populated with people, then we might tentatively suggest that hades, the intermediate and universal place of the dead, in some sense still exists after the descent and will remain the one objective realm of all the dead until the time of the consummation. In this way, and in light of the early church and Reformation material, we might also suggest that what changed for the souls in hades after Christ's descent was not their location *per se*, but the reality of Christ. That is to say, for the wicked and rebellious hades became *like* hell (e.g., the rich man in Luke 16) while for those who received Christ it became *like* heaven (i.e., paradise; Luke 23:43); and yet, all souls are still *in hades*. Hence, Christ's descent brought about a fundamental rather than comprehensive change to the place of the dead so that the objective space and subjective purpose of hades continue to exist and operate even after his descent. This means that even though the bosom of Abraham was transformed into paradise, *this state* is not yet the beatific vision. For while Christ makes souls "capable of beatific glory," says Calvin, "Scripture uniformly enjoins us to . . . wait for the fruition of promised glory."[137] At most, we might agree with Tertullian that martyrs go immediately into the heavenly throne room (based on Rev 6:9-11). But even this state, located "under the altar," is a temporary abode in which these souls await God's final justice (v. 9-11).

Our second step in reframing the discussion concerns the doctrine of purgatory. It is good that DiNoia and D'Costa speak of purgatory as meeting the need for further purification and transformation *because of sin*, rather than as meeting the need for further punishment and satisfaction *for sin*.[138] In the eyes of the reformers,

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[137] Ibid., 612-613.
[138] For instance, see, DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 105; D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 177.

the idea that punishment for sins was not fully satisfied in Christ is perhaps the most

unacceptable element of the doctrine of purgatory. As Calvin declares:

> We are bound, therefore, to raise our voice to its highest pitch, and cry aloud
> that purgatory is a deadly device of Satan; that it makes void the cross of
> Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines
> and overthrows our faith. For what is this purgatory but the satisfaction for sin
> paid after death by the souls of the dead? . . . But if it is perfectly clear . . . that
> the blood of Christ is the only satisfaction, expiation, and cleansing for the
> sins of believers, what remains but to hold that purgatory is mere blasphemy,
> horrid blasphemy against Christ?[139]

In contrast, the Lutheran position is not against the theological concept of purgatory

per se – i.e., the need for further purification after faith in Christ – but rather against

the idea that further punishment or satisfaction for sins is necessary. For instance,

using the fathers and early church councils as support, the *Augsburg Confession*

states, "If some of them mention purgatory, they interpret it neither as payment for

eternal punishment nor as satisfaction, but as purification of imperfect souls."[140]

To this extent, D'Costa's proposal depends upon a revised understanding of

the doctrine of purgatory which appears to favor a purification emphasis rather than

focus on the notion of satisfaction. Specifically, he follows the interpretation proposed

by Joseph Ratzinger (later as Pope Benedict XVI), who speaks of the purgatorial fires

in a Christological rather than punitive way – it is the "gaze" of Christ which

purges.[141] Ratzinger suggests:

> The purification involved does not happen through some *thing*, but through
> the transforming power of the Lord himself, whose burning flame cuts free our
> closed-off heart, melting it, and pouring it into a new mold to make it fit for
> the living organism of his body.[142]

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[139] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 415.

[140] McCain, Dau, and Bente, *Concordia*, 182.

[141] D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions*, 191-194; also see, Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death, and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, 2nd ed., (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 218-233; and Benedict XVI (2007), "*Spe Salvi*," 47, accessed December 2, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi_en.html.

[142] Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death, and Eternal Life*, 229.

Moreover, Ratzinger seems to move away from a satisfaction model of purgatory to something more akin to a sanctification model:

> Purgatory is not, as Tertullian thought, some kind of supra-worldly concentration camp where man is forced to undergo punishment in a more or less arbitrary fashion. Rather is it the inwardly necessary process of transformation in which a person becomes capable of Christ, capable of God and thus capable of unity with the whole communion of saints. . . . *It does not replace grace by work, but allows the former to achieve its full victory precisely as grace. What actually saves is the full assent of faith.*[143]

This reinterpretation of purgatory is intriguing to several Protestants scholars. For instance, Justin Barnard claims that when it is viewed as the opportunity for "lapsable" Christians to continue the process of purification after death, then "a doctrine of purgatory is useful for Protestant Christians who take seriously sanctification as a process."[144]

Jerry Walls agrees, and he uses a similar version of purgatory to argue for the possibility of repentance after death (not as a second chance), and he asserts that sanctification models like Barnard's are indeed beneficial to Protestant theology:

> Protestants can affirm sanctification models of the doctrine without in any way contradicting their theology, and may find that it makes better sense of how the remains of sin are purged than the typical Protestant account that it happens instantly and immediately at or after death.[145]

Walls therefore suggests that a Protestant version of purgatory might be feasible after all, as it helps explain how Christians continue moving towards full sanctification after death through the work of the Spirit in communion with the church. Nevertheless, as regards our proposal here, this solution only works in reference to those who die within the process of sanctification; i.e., those who are already epistemologically related to Christ. This means that when it comes to the question of

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[143] Ibid., 230-231; emphasis added.

[144] Justin Barnard, "Purgatory and the Dilemma of Sanctification," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (July 2007): 312.

[145] Jerry Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 90. Walls provides a helpful overview of the history of the doctrine of purgatory and of Reformation objections to this doctrine, see, 9-57.

the unevangelized there still remains a theological chasm between here and there that cannot be crossed.

In other words, we must recall that purgatory is fundamentally Christological, and this process of purification necessitates not only the already existing indwelling work of the Spirit (bestowed only after repentance; Acts 2:38), but also a face-to-face encounter with Christ as Judge. As Ratzinger explains, "Purgatory is understood in a properly Christian way when it is grasped christologically, in terms of the Lord himself as the judging fire which transforms us and conforms us to his own glorified body."[146] Hence, as stated earlier, purgatory, the process which brings about full purification, can only occur through Christ and is therefore only for those who are already in Christ. So even though Walls argues "for a significant modification of the traditional view of purgatory, namely, that it should allow for postmortem conversion,"[147] the only way to do this is to de-Christologize purgatory which then renders the doctrine meaningless.

I recommend that instead of trying to transpose the concept of purgatory as a whole onto our proposal, we need only seek to draw from the doctrine those aspects which speak of it as *an intermediate state in which souls are prepared for Christ in anticipation of the beatific vision.* As Donald Bloesch asserts, "I believe that the restoration of hades as an intermediate state in which we wait and hope for Christ's salvation may speak to some of the concerns of those who embrace purgatory."[148] Hence, while the intermediate state is not yet the purifying encounter with Christ, it nonetheless allows the preparation for this encounter to continue after death. As, Ratzinger writes:

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[146] Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death, and Eternal Life*, 229.
[147] Walls, *Purgatory*, 225.
[148] Donald G. Bloesch, *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 152.

> In this doctrine, the Church held fast to one aspect of the idea of the intermediate state, insisting that, even if one's fundamental life-decision is finally decided and fixed in death, one's definitive destiny need not necessarily be reached straight away. It may be that the basic decision of a human being is covered over by layers of secondary decisions and needs to be dug free.[149]

From this perspective, the suggestion here is to view the bosom of Abraham (the subjective state of paradise-in-hades) as the intermediate space in which the Holy Spirit either begins or continues the work of sanctification for certain unevangelized individuals and Christians through the ministry of the church. Yet this intermediate state is not itself purgatory proper. On the contrary, purgatory, or rather purgation, is what will happen on the day when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, when "the fire will test what sort of work each one has done" (1 Cor 3:13b, 10-15). In this way purgatory retains its Christological and Christian nature, and because the suggestion is that this event occurs in the time of the general resurrection purgation is of the whole person, body and soul, and not of a disembodied soul.[150]

Moreover, if the bosom of Abraham/paradise is still in hades, then perhaps the unevangelized who are in the same subjective state as those who were saved in the descent will benefit from the church's continued ministry of the word, for it is reasonable to assume that the saving and sanctifying work begun by Christ in his descent will carry on until the day of judgment. For instance, Bloesch (an evangelical) writes:

> I believe there is a firm basis in both sacred Scripture and sacred tradition for affirming sheol-hades or the nether world of spirits as the interim state for the great majority of people who remain outside the circle of faith at the time of their death. The souls in hades await the final judgment, the great assize, and some may even look forward to possible deliverance. A number of residents of hades will take part in the judging of others. We are told in Matthew 12:38-42 that the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will rise at the judgment to judge Israel. Sheol-hades is a temporary abode, for it will be cast into the lake

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[149] Ratzinger, *Eschatology, Death, and Eternal Life*, 219.

[150] This point speaks directly to issues of personal identity and time in regard to the discussion of the intermediate state and purgatory. Walls provides a good overview of the debate; see, Walls, *Purgatory*, 93-122.

of fire after giving up its dead (Rev 20:13-14). The final and irrevocable separation of the just and the unjust has not yet occurred. Heaven and hell are still in the future—not only for us but also for the souls in hades.

Salvation is fixed at death for those who are in Christ, but the condemnation of those who have never known Christ is not yet decided at death. They are not necessarily eternally condemned, but they are not yet saved. I am teaching not a doctrine of a second chance but the universality of opportunity for salvation.[151]

Furthermore, we might also consider the suggestion by Biesbrouck, whose delineation of the issue offers a theological framework that provides further support for our proposal.

After noting the problem in D'Costa's theory regarding "the concept of the ongoing reality of the *limbus patrum* as a 'logical space' after Christ's descent," Biesbrouck (also an evangelical) writes:

Our own suggestion . . . is that between the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection at the Last Judgment, there is only one objective intermediate state, distinguished in two subjective states: the righteous and baptized in one, the unrighteous in another. The first, which includes non-Christians who during their lifetime were ontologically related to Christ, experience their state as 'Paradise', even if they are still awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. In that intermediate state, the souls of the faithful departed are in a dynamic relation with Christ and each other. If the souls of the Christian faithful in that intermediate state, proclaim Jesus some way or another, those who during their lives on earth never heard of Jesus, are now given the opportunity to recognize him whom they met in the least (Mt 25), as Jesus, their Christ and Saviour.[152]

To be sure, his suggestion appears to fit our current need quite well as it provides the necessary categories for working out our own proposal. Nevertheless, we need to make a few minor adjustments to his framework so that it better reflects the nature of this thesis.[153]

First, rather than categorize the two subjective states as 'the righteous and baptized in one, the unrighteous in another,' we will describe this distinction as 'the

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[151] Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 146.
[152] Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam*," 132.
[153] At the time of the writing of this thesis, Biesbrouck has not developed his proposal further.

elect' and 'the unpardonable.' This description allows for the possibility that 'the elect' state includes not only certain unevangelized and baptized people, but also unbaptized individuals who nevertheless die with faith in Christ – e.g., the penitent thief (Luke 23:39-43). Similarly, 'the unpardonable' state includes not only recusant evangelized and unevangelized people, but also baptized individuals who nevertheless die without faith in Christ. In this way, I simply mean to distinguish between those who receive the Holy Spirit's work of grace during their lifetime from those who reject it.

Second, Biesbrouck indicates that he would explain a non-Christian's ontological relation to Christ before death in reference to Matthew 25 – presumably following Stephen Bullivant's use of Matthew 25:31-46 to argue for the possible salvation of atheists.[154] While not discounting the potential merits of this approach, we will assume that this ontological relation obtains based on the proposal developed in the previous chapter – i.e., by the Holy Spirit's work of actual grace through the convicting use of the natural law. Also, for the sake of clarity, we will refer to this particular group of people as 'unevangelized' rather than as 'non-Christians.'[155]

Now with this new theological framework in place we are ready to move towards the completion of our Reformation approach, and we will do this by working through Augustine's prohibition against the possibility of posthumous salvation.

Augustine on Christ's Descent into Hell

In his work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (c. 393-394), Augustine considers the location of souls after death in reference to the parable of the rich man and

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[154] See, Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam*," 131. Also, Stephen Bullivant, "The Salvation of 'Jane' and the Problem of Ignorance," in *The Salvation of Atheists and Catholics Dogmatic Theology* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), 115-148.

[155] We defined 'unevangelized' as those who have never heard the gospel message during their lifetime, or who have only a partial or corrupted version of the gospel and no genuine opportunity to respond with faith before death, 20.

Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), and the phrase from Peter's sermon in Acts 2:24, "God raised him [Christ] up from the dead, having loosed the pangs of hell."[156] This latter verse leads Augustine to assert that because he has "not yet found the term 'lower world' [or 'hell'] applied to the place where the souls of the just are at rest," the term "hell" must refer only to the place of torment and not the abode of the blessed.[157] Therefore he reasons that because Scripture says that Christ 'loosed the pangs of hell,' we must conclude that he descended into the place of torment and not only to those in the "restful abode."[158] He states:

> It is believed, and not without reason, that the soul of Christ went to that very region where sinners are tormented in order to release from their suffering those who He decreed should be released according to the inscrutable ways of His justice.[159]

To be sure, Augustine affirms that all those in the torments of hell deserved this fate because they "have sinned through love of the flesh."[160] But God overcame this fate for some of them according to his sovereign will; for Christ

> did not disdain to visit this part of the world. He could not have been ignorant of the fact that some were to be delivered from there in accordance with the mysteries of God's justice, and there He went to deliver them.[161]

So in this early discussion of Christ's descent, Augustine supports the possibility of salvation after death for certain people based on 'the mysteries of God's justice.'

One thing we should note at this point, however, is that his reasoning is based on a lose translation of Acts 2:24. Augustine's quotation is from the *Vetus Latina*,[162] which reads "*solutis doloribus inferorum* [hell]," whereas the original Greek reads

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[156] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. John Hammond Taylor, vol. 2 (Newman Press, 1982), 224-228.
[157] Ibid., 225.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid., 227.
[161] Ibid.
[162] The *Vetus Latina* refers to Latin translations of Scripture preceding Jerome's translation; c. A.D. 405-406.

that God "loosed the pangs of *death*" (λύσας τὰς ὠδῖνας τοῦ θανάτου).[163] As we

will see, this interpretation effects the trajectory of his statements on the descent.

Some years later (414), in a letter to his fellow bishop Evodius of Uzalis,

Augustine reiterates his position and delineates it further, writing:

> The words that "the pains of hell were loosed" may be understood as referring
> not to the case of all, but only of some whom He judged worthy of that
> deliverance; so that neither is He supposed to have descended there in vain,
> without the purpose of bringing benefit to any of those who were there held in
> prison, nor is it a necessary inference that what divine mercy and justice
> granted to some must be supposed to have been granted to all.[164]

Once again, based on his reading of Acts 2:24, Augustine argues that Christ saved

certain people from the torments of hell in his descent, but he dismisses any notion

that this view leads necessarily to a universalist position. Indeed, the tone of the letter

is such that if not for his reading of Acts 2:24, he seems ready to deny that Christ

saved anyone at all from the place of torment during his descent. As Jeffrey

Trumbower explains:

> For Augustine, it would be fine to speak of a liberation from the bosom of
> Abraham, because that is where the righteous dead like Lazarus go, but hell is
> another matter. Unfortunately, scripture does not always say what Augustine
> would like. He admits that Christ at his descent rescued some in hell from
> their sorrows, those deemed worthy by his mysterious justice.[165]

Nevertheless, Scripture says nothing about the unevangelized since the time of Christ,

and on this point Augustine states definitively that no one can now be saved after

death. He argues that if it were possible for one who has never heard the gospel in this

life to have the opportunity to hear and believe in hell, this would lead to the "absurd

consequence" that "the gospel ought not to be preached on earth."[166] Hence, in

accordance with his divine mercy and mysterious justice Christ saved some from the

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[163] See, Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, vol. 2, 320n172.

[164] Augustine, "Letter 164," 2.5.

[165] Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 131-132.

[166] Augustine, "Letter 164," 4.13.

torments of hell during his descent, but he does not now save anyone from this fate, not even those who die before hearing the gospel.

Returning again to the subject only a few years later (417), Augustine modifies his understanding of the nature of hell so that he is able to reinterpret his view of Christ's descent. Previously, he distinguished between hell, the place of torment, and Abraham's bosom, the place of rest. But now he references Jesus' words to the thief on the cross, "This day you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), and states:

> It is not easy to find anywhere in the Scriptures the word hell used in a good sense. Thus, the question is often asked how we can reverently believe that the soul of the Lord Christ was in hell, if the word is not used in any sense but the penal one. A good response to this is that he descended there to rescue those who were to be rescued. Therefore, Blessed Peter says that he loosed the sorrows of hell in which it was "impossible that he should be held" (Acts 2:24).[167]

So far, his response is consistent with his previous statements. But then he asserts:

> Moreover, if we are to believe that there are two regions in hell, one for the suffering and one for the souls in repose, that is, both a place where the rich man was tormented and one where the poor man was comforted, who would dare to say that the Lord Jesus came to the penal parts of hell rather than only among those who rest in Abraham's bosom?[168]

With this new delineation he now adopts a general view of hell as the place of all the dead dividing it between "the penal parts" and the "state of living in happiness," and from this perspective he dismisses the notion that Christ saved anyone from the place of torment in his descent, saying that he only visited the righteous dead.[169] Alfeyev writes:

> Augustine offers the quite novel idea that after Christ's ascension from hell, any recollection of his sojourn there was eradicated. Therefore, the descent in Hades was a "one-time" event relevant only to those who were in hell at that time.[170]

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[167] Augustine, *Selected Writings*, trans. Mary T. Clark (London: SPCK, 1984), 405-406. Letter 187.
[168] Ibid.
[169] Ibid., 405-406.
[170] Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell*, 92.

One curious feature of this new position is that while he uses the same Latin translation of Acts 2:24, he makes no attempt to explain how Christ is said to have 'loosed the sorrows of hell' if he did not rescue anyone from the place of torment. Thus, for whatever reason, Augustine leaves this element of his argument wholly unaccounted for. In the end, this formulation stands as Augustine's definitive statement on the issue.

If Augustine's position on the fate of the unevangelized were merely *Augustine's view* on the matter, then perhaps there would be no pressing need for us to deal with his prohibition against posthumous repentance. This, however, is not the case:

> As Gregory the Great repeated Augustine's formulations about the impossibility of post-humous salvation for the unbaptized (Dial. 4.46, 59), and as subsequent Western theologians took their cues from these two, death truly became a firm and universally recognized boundary of salvation in the West.[171]

Thus, as the apparent source of this 'universally recognized' position in Western theology, it is imperative that we seek to provide a satisfying response to Augustine's objection.

A Closer Reading of Augustine's Argument

As noted above, it is in his second major treatment of the doctrine that Augustine makes his definitive statement against the possibility of posthumous salvation after Christ's descent. His line of reasoning on the issue centers on his objection to a popular notion at the time which said that Christ emptied "that place of punishment or imprisonment" when he descended.[172] The idea was that Christ did this

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[171] Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 140.
[172] Augustine, "Letter 164," 4.12.

"because the gospel was not published to the whole world in their lifetime, and they had sufficient excuse for not believing that which had never been proclaimed to them;

> but that thenceforth, men despising the gospel when it was in all nations fully published and spread abroad would be inexcusable, and therefore after the prison was then emptied there still remains a just judgment, in which those who are contumacious and unbelieving shall be punished even with eternal fire.[173]

Augustine responds by pointing out that what this position fails to recognize is the fact that the gospel is still not yet fully known in the world, which means that all those who die after the time of Christ without hearing the gospel also have this same excuse. Yet if one then attempts to resolve this dilemma by extending the possibility to those who die after Christ, "who can bear the contradictions both of reason and faith which must follow?"[174] He states:

> If, again, it be alleged that in hell those only believe to no purpose and in vain who refused to accept here on earth the gospel preached to them, but that believing will profit those who never despised a gospel which they never had it in their power to hear another still more absurd consequence is involved, namely, that forasmuch as all men shall certainly die, and ought to come to hell wholly free from the guilt of having despised the gospel; since otherwise it can be of no use to them to believe it when they come there, the gospel ought not to be preached on earth, a sentiment not less foolish than profane.[175]

Recalling his interpretation of 'hell' in the *descensus* as the place of torment, his reasoning here is rather straightforward. Augustine has no doubt that any person who finds themselves in hell after death will immediately accept the opportunity to escape this terrible fate. If then this opportunity is extended to those who die before hearing, dying is practically a guarantee of salvation for unevangelized people. And if this is so, then why should the church take the chance that an unevangelized person might refuse the gospel in this life and thus enter into eternal damnation, when they could

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[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid., 4.13.
[175] Ibid.

instead die in ignorance, experience torment for a short time, and then enter into eternal life?

From this perspective, if those who do not hear the gospel preached in life have the opportunity to hear and believe in hell, then the church on earth is at best irrelevant and at worst a potential hazard to unevangelized souls. As Ralph Turner states, Augustine held "the belief that if Christ had preached to all the souls in hell, it would have given sinners an unjust advantage over the faithful."[176] Moreover, Augustine refuses "to entertain the thought that the gospel was once preached, or is even to this hour being preached in hell in order to make men believe and be delivered from its pains, as if a Church had been established there as well as on earth."[177] He thinks it is absurd to believe that the church somehow also exists in the place of torment, and he concludes that the salvation that was once bestowed upon souls in hell during Christ's descent is no longer possible.

One thing to notice about Augustine's argument here is that the objection is not against posthumous salvation *per se*, for at this point he still states, "I do not doubt" that Christ "was . . . in hell, and that He conferred this benefit [salvation] on persons subjected to these pains."[178] Rather, his main concern at this point is with the idea that God grants salvation to people in hell *for the sole reason* that they did not have the opportunity to believe during their lifetime. As noted earlier, for Augustine Christ's salvific purpose in the descent was not due to people's inculpable ignorance, but to God's mysterious justice. It is also important to recognize that at the time of the writing of this letter much of Augustine's reasoning is done with the Pelagian controversy in mind. As Trumbower explains:

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[176] Ralph V. Turner, "*Descendit Ad Inferos*: Medieval Views on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 2 (April 1966): 178.
[177] Augustine, "Letter 164", 5.15.
[178] Ibid., 3.8.

> Many aspects of the Pelagian controversy played a decisive role in Augustine's rejection of posthumous salvation. For instance, Pelagius and his followers had a firm belief in human potential and human freedom to obey or reject God's demands and the teachings of Christ. Augustine feared that their interpretation of the Christian message might obviate the absolute necessity of Christ's salvific death in the economy of salvation.[179]

Indeed, Augustine seeks to deny the premise that Christ descended *because of* the unevangelized since the logical implication would be that he still does this for the unevangelized today. Yet he argues that this cannot be the case today because Christ is no longer in hell nor is the church there now.

What is interesting, however, is that Augustine does not then seek to demonstrate the superiority of his position by applying this same logical deduction to his own premise. For instance, his premise is:

> Seeing that plain scriptural testimonies make mention of hell and its pains, no reason can be alleged for believing that He who is the Saviour went there, except that He might save from its pains.[180]

In other words, the sole reason for the salvation of souls in hell during Christ's descent was "the inscrutable ways of His justice."[181] And yet, if we follow the logic through we might further reason that if some were saved during the descent in accordance with God's 'inscrutable ways,' then perhaps he will save individuals after the descent who are in the same subjective state as those who were saved during the descent. To be sure, Augustine's interpretation of hell along with his disdain for the notion that the church is now proclaiming the gospel there would make it difficult for him to draw this conclusion. It is also the case that he solves this problem eventually by claiming that the just were also in 'hell,' and that Christ went only to those who were at Abraham's side.[182] But doing so causes him to contradict his reading of Acts 2:24 since he no longer has any recourse for explaining how Christ is said to have

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179 Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 129-130.
180 Augustine, "Letter 164," 3.8.
181 Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 225.
182 Augustine, *Selected Writings*, 405-406.

'loosed the pangs of hell.' He also neglects his theological premise that Christ "could not have been ignorant of the fact that some were to be delivered from there [the pains of hell] in accordance with the mysteries of God's justice, and there He went to deliver them."[183] That said, perhaps there is still a way to affirm Augustine's premise and the possibility of posthumous salvation while maintaining an Augustinian trajectory.

Retaining an Augustinian Trajectory

Augustine develops his view of Christ's descent with at least two concerns in mind: 1) guarding against universalist-type notions of salvation, and 2) upholding the necessary role of Christ and the church in salvation. For even when he concedes in his initial treatments that Christ must have saved at least some souls from hell, he also asserts that it is not "a necessary inference that what divine mercy and justice granted to some must be supposed to have been granted to all."[184] And when others promote a universalistic view of salvation, Augustine argues that just as the ark was the only means of salvation in the days of Noah, so today God saves only through the church.[185] It is important to recall, then, that our Reformation approach also denies universalist options by maintaining an ecclesiocentric approach – i.e., the doctrinal rules that salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone and that faith comes from hearing the church's proclamation of the gospel. Thus, these two concerns are not at risk in our development of a posthumous solution to the problem of the unevangelized. What we will do, however, is reconsider Augustine's reading and subsequent logic of Acts 2:24.

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[183] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 227.
[184] Augustine, "Letter 164." 2.5.
[185] Ibid., Ch 5.

As noted above, Augustine's reading of Acts 2:24 is based on a Latin translation which states that with Christ's resurrection God 'loosed the pangs of *hell*,' whereas the original Greek reads that God 'loosed the pangs of *death*.' In itself, and as a kind of commentary, the Latin version is not a problem. But only if one views 'death' and 'hades' synonymously and does not confuse the term 'hell' as a reference to 'gehenna.' To this extent, even though Peter's sermon associates the phrase 'loosed the pangs of death' with the prophetic Psalm "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades" (Acts 2:27; Ps 16:10), Augustine appears to associate the Latin term in verse 24 with the Greek term 'gehenna.' That is to say, he cannot understand how it is possible that "the souls of the just" are in hell when, in light of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we know that they are in "peaceful retreat" at Abraham's side.[186] Thus, if hell "is not used in any sense but the penal one," and if the just where not actually in *that place*, then, according to Augustine's final statement, Christ went only to rescue those in the restful abode.[187]

The problem, however, is that it is indeed significant that Acts 2:24 does not say that Christ loosed the pangs of 'hell,' but rather that he loosed the pangs of 'death.' It is significant because the former, according to Augustine's interpretation, can only apply to certain individuals inhabiting a certain location (an interpretation that he ignores in his final statement), whereas the latter denotes an action which overcomes a circumstance that is common to all people. For as Paul says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23) – i.e., every person sins thus every person dies. So in Acts 2, when Peter declares that God, through Christ's death and resurrection, 'loosed the pangs of death,' this entails an act that was performed for the benefit of all people – even the

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[186] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 225.
[187] Augustine, *Selected Writings*, 405-406.

Gentiles. Indeed, concerning Peter's sermon as a whole, Craig Blomberg points out that "here appears the first hint in Acts that the disciples understand that the gospel will eventually go to Gentiles as well."[188] A 'hint' which is most evident in Peter's conclusion as he states, "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, *everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself*" (v. 39).

Yet Peter also specifies that Christ's liberating work requires a response: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Hence, perhaps a more appropriate gloss, as it relates to the *descensus*, is that Christ descended into the realm of all the dead (hades), and not only to the hell of torment (e.g., Augustine's first two statements) or only to the place of the just (e.g., Augustine's last statement), so that he might grant freedom from the penalty of sin to all those who were his, both Jew and Gentile. This then brings us to a contingent point. If salvation is through Christ alone by faith alone and faith comes from hearing – where 'hearing' is characterized by an act of repentance – then like those upon the earth so likewise those 'under the earth,' all had to turn in faith to the person of Christ to be saved.

In other words, the descent represents more than just the fulfillment of salvation for the Old Testament faithful who died before Christ, but like the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem the descent signifies a time of mass conversion. For instance, as we noted earlier Clement speculates that Christ preached to the Jews in hades while the apostles later preached to the Gentiles, and the reason he gives is "so that He should *bring to repentance* those belonging to the Hebrews, and they the Gentiles."[189] Similarly, Origen says that Christ, "when he became a soul, without the covering of

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[188] Craig L Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts Through Revelation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 27.
[189] Clement, *The Stromata*, 6.6; emphasis added.

the body, he dwelt among those souls which were without bodily covering, *converting such of them as were willing unto himself,* or those whom he saw, for reasons known to him alone, to be better adapted *to such a course*."[190] Trumbower explains, "Like Clement, Origen imagines Christ's sojourn in Hades to be quite similar to his sojourn on earth. Sinners are able to repent even after they are dead."[191] In short, just as the Jews and everyone else during the time of Jesus' ministry on the earth, so also the Jews and everyone else in hades during his descent – upon hearing the proclamation of the gospel souls had to place their faith in the name of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And because this is the way of salvation for all, it follows that conversion in hades – i.e., turning to the person of Jesus – was not only possible but necessary.

Yet in light of this alternative reading and application of Acts 2:24, how do we maintain an Augustinian trajectory in a way that still fits within our suggested theological framework for understanding the descent? The key for accomplishing this task lies with Augustine's initial assertion that Christ's salvation of those who, from a human perspective, were outside the promise of salvation, was done "in accordance with the mysteries of God's justice"[192] That is, the salvation of a person who dies before hearing the gospel does not rest on the fact that they are 'unevangelized,' but on the fact that they are among "those who [God] decreed should be released according to the inscrutable ways of His justice,"[193]; those "whom He judged worthy of that deliverance" according to his "divine mercy and justice."[194]

As it relates to our proposal for how God might prepare an unevangelized person through the Spirit's use of the natural law; those who died in a state of preparation for the gospel turned to Christ when he descended (i.e., the elect), while

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[190] Origin, *Contra Celsus*, 2.43; emphasis added.
[191] Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead*, 101.
[192] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 227.
[193] Ibid., 225.
[194] Augustine, "Letter 164," 2.5.

those who died unprepared rejected him (i.e., the unpardonable). We might even imagine that the Gentiles who died outside knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob yet who were prepared by the Spirit for receiving the gospel promise would have been drawn to and received by those at Abraham's side in hades. As Jesus declared after marveling at the faith of the Gentile centurion: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 8:11).[195] Likewise, perhaps those who rejected the Spirit's preparatory work in life would have despised or been denied the comfort afforded by this promise of redemption. In other words, just as on the earth so likewise under the earth, the proclamation of the gospel in hades became "a fragrance from death to death" to the "perishing," but to those who were "being saved" it was "a fragrance from life to life" (2 Cor 2:15-16). As John Damascene states:

> The soul [of Christ] when it was deified descended into Hades, in order that, just as the Sun of Righteousness rose for those upon the earth, so likewise He might bring light to those who sit under the earth in darkness and shadow of death: in order that just as He brought the message of peace to those upon the earth, and of release to the prisoners, and of sight to the blind, and became to those who believed the Author of everlasting salvation and to those who did not believe a reproach of their unbelief, so He might become the same to those in Hades.[196]

The suggestion here is that before Christ's descent 'the pangs' of death in hades were mutual, experienced by the elect and unpardonable alike. Yet these pangs imply not the torments of hell but the fact that atonement for sin had yet to be made and thus sin and death still reigned. That is, the bonds of death held fast to all who died until the time of Christ, for death could not overcome Christ "because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (v. 24b). Furthermore, recalling our suggestion that Christ's descent into hades caused a fundamental rather than comprehensive change

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[195] Also see, Mal 1:1; Lk 13:29.
[196] John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ed. Paul A Böer, trans. L Pullan and E.W. Watson ([S.I.]: Veritatis Splendor, 2012), 229-230.

so that there is still only one objective intermediate state with two subjective states, we might then say that in this sense the church is indeed in 'hell' and that just as on earth so also in hades Christians witness to the hope of resurrection in Christ. Moreover, if the church is in hades then the Holy Spirit is present there too, for if the beatific vision and glorification are delayed until the day of the Lord, then until that day the Spirit remains "the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it" (Eph 1:14). So even though Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, all who abide in the Spirit rest in the bosom of Christ (1 John 4:13), and while this state is not yet heaven it is still paradise because when viewed in this way, "paradise," says Augustine, refers to "any spiritual region, as it were, where the soul is in a happy state."[197]

In short, if hades remains the one objective intermediate state of the dead after the descent, and if a major characteristic of hades is that it provides certain individuals who die outside knowledge of Christ the opportunity to hear and respond to the proclamation of the gospel, then just as in hades before Christ so likewise in hades after Christ – those who die outside knowledge of Christ but who are nonetheless prepared by the Spirit for receiving the gospel will be drawn to and received by the church in paradise. As Biesbrouck suggests, "If the souls of the Christian faithful in that intermediate state, proclaim Jesus some way or another, those who during their lives on earth never heard of Jesus, are now given the opportunity to recognize him."[198] Or as Bloesch states:

> I believe it is more in keeping with the tradition of the church catholic to view the descent as opening the door to the salvation of those who are not yet in the family of God. Not all will believe when they hear the gospel for the first time, but it is not impermissible to surmise that many will come to faith in Christ.[199]

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[197] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 226.
[198] Biesbrouck, "*Extra Ecclesiam*," 132.
[199] Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 147.

To be sure, this possibility requires posthumous repentance, but maybe worries can be mitigated when we consider that the proposal here is that: 1) souls do not go immediately to heaven proper or hell proper after death, but to the one objective space called hades where they await the consummation; 2) unlike heaven and hell, or even 'the limbo of the just,' the opportunity to hear and receive the gospel with faith is not only permissible in hades but necessary (i.e., all had to turn to the person of Christ in his descent to be saved); 3) the church's proclamation of the gospel in hades is not efficacious for those who rejected Christ in life nor for all the unevangelized in general (the unpardonable), but only for those individuals who receive the Spirit's work of preparing grace during their lifetime (the elect).

It is especially with this last point that the proposal is able to maintain an Augustinian trajectory. For as stated earlier, this salvation is not based on the fact that they are unevangelized, but on the fact that it is "in accordance with the mysteries of God's justice."[200] Or as it relates to our Reformation approach, we might simply connect this trajectory to Zwingli, who states, "Nothing prevents God from choosing from among the heathen men to revere Him, to honor Him, and after death to be united to Him. For His election is free."[201] And as regards Augustine's concern that the notion of posthumous salvation leads to the logical conclusion that "the gospel ought not to be preached on earth," we might simply agree with him that such a conclusion is "absurd" and no "less foolish than profane."[202] Of course Augustine expresses this opinion in response to the idea that all unevangelized people are saved in hell, but we have already demonstrated in the previous chapter that, in itself, a

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[200] Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 227.

[201] Zwingli, *The Latin Works*, 201; Speaking of the influences on Zwingli's theology, W. P. Stephens says, "By his own testimony Augustine had a part in his development, and elements and emphases in Zwingli's theology can undoubtedly be found in his marginal notes as well as in his later use of the fathers." See, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 18.

[202] Augustine, "Letter 164," 4.13.

theological hope for the unevangelized does not lead necessarily to the derogation of Christian missions or to some form of universalism. As Bloesch asserts:

> Our hope is based not simply on Christ's descent into hell but also on his ascent into heaven and the outpouring of the Spirit on earth. The nether world of spirits is not outside the reach of God's grace, and this is why the intermediate state of the spiritually deprived and forsaken can be preached as part of the gospel—the good news that Christ has come to save the lost and that his grace is irresistible and invincible. Not even the gates of hell can impede its advance (Mt 16:18).[203]

Assuming, then, that our answer remains in the spirit of the Augustinian prohibition against posthumous salvation and also upholds the traditional teaching that one's fate is sealed at death, our development of a Reformation prospective *fides ex auditu* option is complete.

Conclusion

The goal of Part 3 of this thesis has been to fill two gaps in Lindbeck's prospective *fides ex auditu* theory in an effort to offer a Reformation solution to the question regarding the fate of the unevangelized. The first gap concerned his assertion that a strict cultural-linguistic point of view means that "adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience; rather they have different experiences."[204] The problem with this position in relation to a prospective theory is that it implies that unevangelized individuals will have little capacity for actually being able to receive or reject Christ upon hearing the gospel in death. And if despite their different cultural-linguistic experiences unevangelized persons were suddenly made able to understand and receive the gospel in the moment of death, then this brings into question continuity of personal identity.

To work out this problem we noted that when Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach "draws on specifically biblical considerations," he asserts that there are

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[203] Bloesch, *The Last Things*, 147-148.
[204] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 26.

"God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom" in other religions.[205] From this perspective, and in light of D'Costa's use of the *preparatio evangelica*, we used a creative extrapolation of Luther to suggest that God prepares unevangelized persons for the gospel through the convicting use of the natural law by the Holy Spirit, and we called this an act of "actual grace" whereby the soul "is directed to the attaining . . . of sanctifying grace."[206] This grace is not itself saving, but it does direct the individual towards salvation. Furthermore, although it is described as an internal grace, the proposal is not just another version of the "experiential-expressive" approach which Lindbeck argues against.[207] Rather, it suggests that the Spirit uses the particular cultural-linguistic environment to bring about this effect. Hence, our approach is in keeping with Lindbeck's insistence that "the humanly real . . . is not constructed from below upward or from the inner to the outer, but from the outer to the inner, and from above downward."[208]

The next gap in his theory, which we have covered in this chapter, concerns the need for a cultural-linguistic space and time after death in which certain unevangelized people can come to faith. In other words, even if they are prepared for the gospel they still need to gain "some familiarity with the determinate settings in which religious utterances acquire propositional force."[209] As regards the *fides ex auditu* solution, the determinate setting is the church and the church's proclamation of the gospel. The proposal then is that unevangelized individuals who are in the same subjective state as those who were saved in the descent will likewise have an opportunity to hear and receive the gospel after death. And what makes this possible

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[205] Ibid., 40-41.
[206] Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, 222.
[207] See, Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 16-28.
[208] Ibid., 48.
[209] Ibid., 54.

is the suggestion that hades still functions as the one objective intermediate place of all the dead (based on early church and Reformation material).

This proposal is worthy of consideration for the following reasons. First, it upholds the doctrinal principles of *solus Christus*, *sola fide*, and *fides ex auditu*. The possibility of salvation for an unevangelized person is founded on the assertion that, if this happens, it will only be through hearing the church's proclamation of the gospel. Therefore, this solution satisfies the Christological and ecclesiological requirements of salvation. Second, it explains how other religions can lead adherents towards ends that are different to Christianity, while at the same time allowing for the possibility that there is among them "God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom."[210] For by defining 'preparation for the gospel' as an act by the Holy Spirit rather than as certain things in a religion, the religion itself need not be judged according to the level of truth, beauty, and goodness it contains as viewed from a Christian perspective. In this way, Christians can appreciate the teachings of other religions on their own terms and yet still expect that God is working among adherents for the sake of salvation.

Third, it mitigates the Augustinian prohibition against posthumous salvation by affirming that the possibility is not due to the fact that they are unevangelized, but to the fact that, just as in the descent, some may yet be saved according to God's 'mysterious justice' (or what Luther calls 'irregular grace'). Fourth, it overcomes the difficulties related to the analogical use of the doctrine of Christ's descent into hell. That is, in order for this analogy to work the historical event and location of the descent must connect to something that is also objectively available after Christ. The theological concept of the limbo of the just cannot meet this need because this space is empty after the descent. Yet my proposal overcomes this problem by suggesting

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[210] Ibid., 41.

that hades, the general place of all the dead, still objectively exists and that the church will continue to proclaim the message of Christ in this place until the full number of the elect is reached.

Fifth, it keeps purgatory Christological and Christian by placing it during the time of the general resurrection, when "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess 4:16). It therefore suggests that until this day the Spirit will continue to preserve and sanctify the elect through the church's ministry of the word, and also "hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment" (2 Pet 2:9). Sixth, it upholds the urgency of the missionary task for reaching the unreached by pointing out that the prime motive of missions is rooted not in communal or personal views of the unevangelized, but in the active immutable presence of the Holy Spirit. Outside of faith a person is truly lost in sin and under the power of death and condemnation (Rom 6:20-23); thus, until the consummation the church must strive to proclaim the gospel in all the world so that "those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand" (Rom 15:21; Isa 52:15). Seventh, it makes the prospective *fides ex auditu* option theologically accessible as a Reformation approach by upholding the *evangel* and placing the possibility squarely in the sovereign will of God. For it is not related to a person's response to elements of truth outside the church, but to the Spirit's work of grace in the world to lead people to Christ through the church.

However, notwithstanding these strengths, I also recognize that the lack of critical engagement with the biblical text in support of the overall argument means that the proposal is not yet as theologically robust as it could be. For instance, with little question I accepted Luther's reading of Romans 2:14 in order to establish the concept of the 'people in the middle' as a kind of cornerstone for the discussion on natural law and grace. And although I mentioned that some Protestant scholars today

interpret Romans 2:14 as referring to Gentile Christians and then further suggested that the argument still works with this alternative reading, I did not also seek to prove this assertion.

In a similar way, in this last chapter, I have depended more upon the traditional teachings on the interim state between death and the consummation and less upon the biblical exegesis involved in working out these teachings. Indeed, a good example of this kind of biblical scholarship on the subject is found in Paul Williamson's book, *Death and the Afterlife*, in which he provides a careful study of the numerous Old and New Testament passages that support the notion that after death all souls must wait in an intermediate state until the resurrection.[211] Had I incorporated his study into my own, it would have substantially increased the biblical integrity of the current proposal.

Nevertheless, this weakness also indicates an appropriate direction for further study. As Lindbeck writes:

> It is there [the Bible] that the final court of appeal is to be found and external standards of distinguishing between good and evil and truth and falsity give way to internal ones. . . . Changes in landscape and worldview occur within believers' Scripture-dependent outlook, which, precisely because it is textually inscribed, remains basically unchanged.[212]

Although simple appeal to Scripture cannot provide definitive support for the possibility of salvation for unevangelized people, a deeper study of the relevant biblical passages could strengthen the case by showing ways in which the proposal is consistent with what the Bible says.

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[211] See, Paul R. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspective on Ultimate Questions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017), 31-62.
[212] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 135.

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