



# Westminster Theological Seminary

Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118  
887-5511

Moans

January 10, 1980

Dr. Donald McGavran  
Fuller Theological Seminary  
135 N. Oakland Avenue  
Pasadena, California 91101

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Pardon this brief note in reply to your full and helpful letter of January 3rd. I am in the middle of a January winter term course on Update in World Missions and do not want to let it wait any longer. The course has been an exciting one. We have fifty (!) students taking it, the largest elective course I have ever taught here. I sense the Lord is doing a new thing on our campus and am both humbled and exuberant. It has been a long time coming. There is a new concern for world missions I have not sensed here before. Students are meeting weekly in prayer for the world. I talk to at least three new students a week about overseas ministry. This week has been almost completely a focus on "hidden peoples" with special emphasis on Islam. What will God do?

Thank you for your frankness in sharing with me on these matters. I agree with you on the urgency of the question you place such great emphasis on. I struggle with how to do that at Fuller and not sound like a pontificator on the one hand and a simplist on the other. I am continually hesitant about the whole thing. But I am committed. And I count on the prayer support of men of God like yourself. I pray the Lord will give me not a Spirit of fear but of Love and joy and a sound mind.

Cordially in Christ,  
Harvie  
Harvie M. Conn



Graduate Schools of  
THEOLOGY  
PSYCHOLOGY  
WORLD MISSION



# Fuller Theological Seminary

School of World Mission

January 3, 1980

*Harvie M. Conn*

Dr. Harvie M. Conn  
WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
Chestnut Hill, PA. 19118

Dear Dr. Conn:

I have been reading the material you have sent me relative to THE NEW DIALOGUE THEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY.

I am a little afraid that the main issue is getting covered up in the adiphora. Anthropolgy is the science which deals with the origin and development of mankind, especially in our case of his cultural development.

Theology has no argument with the facts of anthropology. If 40 million Americans drink 79 gallons of whisky apiece each year - well that is a fact. No argument. If Los Angeles has seven thousand massage parlours, that is one of the cultural facts of life here. If the Mizos cultivate upland rice instead of wetland rice, well, that is just the way it is.

The dialogue is at a different level. Where do we discover what Christians ought to do in regard to human relationships? How do Christians answer the absolute questions as to God, man, sin, salvation, guilt, redemption? All the thousands of varieties of men (from Secularists and Positivists to Animists and Buddhists) have their own ideas on these subjects...their own answer to these questions. What does Christian theology say to these answers? Does it say, "O.K., that is evidently true for you? This is what used to be true for the Hebrews in 1200 B.C.; but, of course, it is no longer true for Western man today."

I find it helpful to cast the dialogue in terms which you would use in speaking to American pagans, secularists and materialists. If you talk about what ought to be done in Taiwan, Thailand, Zaire, or Brazil, you run the grave risk of answering more out of western guilt than Christian authority. I counsel you to test your answers by trying them out on the injustice, racism, lust and laziness which you see around about you every day in American cultures. All these things in America could be anthropologically justified. "That is their life style. If they like it, that is all that matters. We must accept people as they are. If in a lovely county north of here 13,000 hippies live together without benefit of marriage or clergy, well, they are very kindly folk...and who knows maybe that is better than marrying and fighting all your life. We must not be dogmatic. Anthropology has taught us that all cultures are equal. No one culture is right for all peoples."

It is here that the real issue lies. Has God spoken? Or is the Bible simply what the Hebrews at various stages of their culture thought God said. And if God has spoken, was He Poor Fellow, so culture bound that He had to use words and ideas which are meaningless to all succeeding generations? His words fit one small segment of humanity in the year 756 B.C., but scarcely today, in American culture, in any culture!

ARTHUR F. GLASSER  
Dean  
and Associate Professor of  
Theology of Mission  
and East Asian Studies

E. THOMAS BREWSTER  
ELIZABETH S. BREWSTER  
Assistant Professors  
(Part-Time) of Language  
and Culture Learning

DEAN S. GILLILAND  
Director, Cross-Cultural  
Studies Program and  
Assistant Professor of  
Contextualized Theology  
and African Studies

PAUL G. HIEBERT  
Professor of Anthropology  
and South Asian Studies

CHARLES H. KRAFT  
Professor of Missionary  
Anthropology and  
African Studies

DONALD A. MCGAVRAN  
Dean Emeritus  
and Senior Professor  
of Mission, Church Growth  
and South Asian Studies

ALVIN MARTIN  
Director  
In-Service Program

J. EDWIN ORR  
Professor (Part-Time)  
History of Awakenings  
and Dynamic of Missions

C. PETER WAGNER  
Professor of  
Church Growth

January 3, 1980

Dr. Harvie M. Conn - page 2

I do not wish to imply that the problem is simple. It is not. It is complex. Yet somewhere you must answer the question: Has the Bible authority for today? If so, are its clear teachings superior to those laid out by Confucius, Buddha, Krishna, Aristotle, and Mao? Does that mean that some cultures are superior to other cultures - or more exactly that the closer any culture comes to the Biblical pattern the more superior it is to those who do not? Is Reformed Presbyterian culture superior to that of the Medieval Church before Luther? Or was that really just as good as Reformed Presbyterian Culture? In which *case*, god-talk is just god-talk. In The Clash of Christianity with Cultures on page 46 ff, I attempted to speak to the question by separating out four kinds of Christianity, according to the amount of non-biblical stuff in each. And my chapter on a high view of culture speaks plainly to the unquestioned insights concerning human nature and the customs and thought patterns of men in the tens of thousands of pieces of the mosaic.

We answer these questions in an age which has studied anthropology as a religion and as a result has relativized all Christian Truth. That is the heart of the matter. The Dialogue must speak to that issue, and not in mealy mouthed ambiguities, either.

As ever your comrade in the discipling of panta ta ethne (Tomans 1:5, 16:26, etc., etc.,

Donald McGavran



DMG/fj



# Westminster Theological Seminary

Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118  
887-5511

Harvey M.  
Cunn

December 11, 1979

Dr. Donald McGavran  
Fuller Theological Seminary  
135 N. Oakland Avenue  
Pasadena, California 91101

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Thank you so much for your kind and lengthy letter of November 13. I have read it several times and profited from it greatly...as always. As I re-read it, I find myself increasingly frustrated by the coming assignment. There are too many things to cover in too short a time to cover even well. And I am no anthropologist to even begin. My anthropology I've learned by bits and spurts and jerks. My theology is in much better shape. Anyway, I count on the prayers of brothers like yourself in my preparations. And I forge ahead as I have time and opportunity.

Thank you so much for the clarification you provide regarding your comments on culture in The Clash. Perhaps my frustrations may be more over the language than used to detail what you intend to say. At the same time, I continue to wish some metaphor could be found by which you could also stress the web or organism idea, and give this also some prominence. I note that Chuck Kraft has also drawn attention to this same statement with some criticism at several points in his recent book.

I am sending under separate cover a copy of the NAE address and also some lecture notes of a few years back on the Theology of Missions. Please remember the NAE talk has never been circulated since. I have found a number of statements needed correcting to be totally fair to people. And I therefore found it wiser to withdraw the piece from circulation. I would not want it quoted anywhere as my last pronouncement,

The lecture materials may be of some interest to you because in them I tried to show the contextual character of Scripture while, at the same

page two.

time, guarding its integrity as the Word of God. I believe in the humanity of the Bible but fear, in current discussions, some of the presumptions that seem to lie behind people's usage of that term. Again, these lectures are just that. They are not intended for circulation on any level outside the classroom one. Too much work needs to be done on them for further progress. And I have just not had the time. Being a staff of one in Missions inhibits what you can do.

Thank you for the essay by Livingston. I appreciated it very much. It was most helpful in precisely these areas. You have no doubt seen the essay by Kumar on Culture and the Old Testament in the Stott-Goote volume, Gospel and Culture. I urged John Stott to see to radical editing on that piece. But little in a really substantive way was done, I fear. When I knew that, I urged him to consider not printing it or at least adding a strong demurral. I feared and still do it will not help the Lausanne reputation for biblical integrity. And, further, it will be of almost no help in discussing this whole question of the Bible and culture. The essay by Marshall and the one by Nicholls are much more useful for our purposes. At least its influence does not, I believe, appear in the Willowbank Report on Gospel and Culture.

I must confess not to having read any of Carl Henry's massive four volumes. I know I must. But I retreat from things that big. And often I find them oriented to topics not discussed in these Mission areas. Henry is not at home in anthropology and this has shown in the past to me in some of his published reviews. Note his response to Taber in the first issue of The Gospel in Context (Vol. 1, No. 1). I do not think his comments were that knowledgeable, and therefore he lost a valuable argument he was seeking to make. In any case, I must begin. And I shall start with chapter 3 of the fourth volume.

Again, my appreciation for all your kind advice and comments. From someone whom I know is so busy they are even more appreciated.

Cordially in Christ,  
Hauri  
Harvie M. Conn



*Harvey Conn*

November 13, 1979

Dr. Harvie M. Conn  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
Chestnut Hill  
Philadelphia, PA. 19118

Dear Harvie:

Your good letters of June 7th and September 7th have been before me for some time and (getting out from under the load of the preparation of a couple of book manuscripts) I am finally getting to them. You have a wonderful opportunity in your Church Growth Lectures 1980 to define a reasonable accommodation to culture and to combine that with an unshakeable adherence to Scripture.

A large part of the problem (and one which you will have to speak to) is whether the Bible is a witness to revelation or is revelation. Is it intelligible communication? Does the Bible say what God has revealed, or does it say what men in those far off times thought after they had been touched in some way by God? If you come down that it is revelation, then how much - if any - was the essential message warped by the language in which it was voiced, and by the culture through which it passed? I hope you will come through loud and clear at that point. Henry in his four volumes speaks to this forcefully; but many Evangelicals are very fuzzy on the question. Most of the advocates of cultural adaptation whom I know hesitate to say that the words of Scripture are revelation. They use various phrases to define these words, but avoid the thought that they are revelation. That makes it easier to advocate adaptation.

Believe me, the issues to which you will be speaking are much bigger than the view of any one man, or of this School of Missions. I trust that in your lectures you will not let yourself be jockeyed into the position of debating with men. Do, I beg of you, debate with concepts. This idea is false. That is true. This is biblibal, that is not. I send you a copy of a letter from Robertson McQuilkin. Please remember that while he quotes Kraft, the issue is much bigger than one man. Most anthropologists are saying similar things.

Henry's Volume IV of GOD, REBELATION AND AUTHORITY, Chapter 3, speaks precisely to this issue. Be sure to read it.

McQuilkin is mistakes that in The Clash I am speaking to the Church. I am not. I am speaking to the Evangelicals who say they believe in an inerrant Bible but wipe out all authority with a "cultural hermeneutic". They interpret baptism as an initiating rite which happened to be with water, since that was so plentiful!! in AD 30-50 in Palestine. Purely cultural. Any initiating rite meaningful to the people of culture X would do equally well!!

Evangelicals who hold that position are, in fact, flaming liberals. No one should be deceived.

COPY

November 13, 1979

Dr. Harvie Conn - page 2

Let me comment on a few sections of your letters of June 7th and September 7th.

a) I quite agree that "sin has cultural depths we have yet to plumb." And further, that all cultural components, when parts of carnal man, are tinged with that carnality. Yes, of course. But, just the same, one prominent element of culture in India is working barefoot in rice fields. I hold that that component of culture comes into the Church practically unchanged. It is almost neutral. To be sure, ardent Christians would (since they hold the body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit) probably clean their feet more than animists; and take the thorns out of the field more carefully, lest they hurt their feet; but most of barefootness would come in unchanged. That is all I mean by neutral elements. The barefoot component of culture can be accepted. The Bible says nothing about it. With polygamy and lying and idol worship and drinking liquor and on and on, the case is otherwise. They are certainly not neutral in any sense.

b) Please do not be put off by my idea of culture as "an aggregate of isolatable components". Of course culture is not like a pile of stones. It is a web, a tennis net, an organism. But we can look at individual knots in the web - like barefeet in rice paddies, or taking off shoes on going into church. In the latter case, we take off shoes because they are dirty with road dirt. Hindus take them off because they are made of leather, cow hide. The latter reason we reject. The former we judge to be of some weight.

c) Yes, please send me a copy of the address you gave to the NAE two or three years ago. As we converse, I would like to see it.

d) Yes, it is too bad that the Taiwan government is so strict about Mandarin. Missionaries have to choose between offending the government and possibly being sent home, and learning the language of 3/4th of the people. I ran across the same thing in India, where the whole pressure from the people was to learn standard Hindi (the language of the nation) when what the people in my district spoke was Chhattisgarhi. All our missionaries learned Hindi, but those of us who evangelized in the villages also learned Chhattisgarhi. It is hard to convince missionaries that they should learn a second language. Actually, it is not too difficult; but it does take time.

Adaptation of all sorts has to be done in the face not only of biblical authority, but of thorny judgments as to the best use of time, and the probable movement of history. The argument that everyone speaks Hindi (or Mandarin) has a degree of truth to it. All this has a bearing on adaptation to culture. Some adaptations are not matters of biblical authority at all. They are matters of common sense, and human pride, and failure to qualify one's statements enough.

Take polygamy. Before Kraft was a member of our faculty, we put out a whole issue of Church Growth Bulletin defending the position that if a man had honorably, according to pre-Christian custom, taken a second wife, he would properly be baptized with his two wives, provided he agreed to follow monogamy from then on. That decision is a long day's march from the position that polygamy should be made a condition for eldership in African churches, and also from the position "never

C  
O  
P  
Y



November 13, 1979

Dr. Harvie M. Conn - page 3

baptize a polygamist". Yet biblical authority is not the issue in the matter at all. Common sense is, and respect for womanhood, and justice to the young men who will be left without wives by any polygamous system. These are the issues.

So much of the adaptation to culture is based on the argument that biblical directives are heavily colored by culture. The well worn text here is women covering their heads. That simply meant in that culture, they say that women should be modest.

Hence, and here is the big leap, all biblical statements ~~should~~ be understood as cultural expressions and can be understood only when we take that culture into account and understand it well. I hold that Christians should not take the big leap. Most biblical directives are God's directives for all time. God revealed in the language and concepts of that time exactly what He intended for our time. When He directs us to forgive our enemies, he is commanding that for all men in all ages.

One time I had my class list twenty of the most important biblical statements they could think of - really essential Christian truth. Then I said, "You men know a great deal about the culture of those days, how many of the twenty essential truths are heavily colored by that culture and would be untrue in today's American culture? Very few of the career missionaries and mature ministers in that class checked even one of their twenty.

The device, Harvie, of saying "There is, of course, supracultural truth. I am not talking about that." and then going on to talk exclusively about cultural adaptation, is too slick.

What needs to be said clearly is that the heart of all essential doctrines passes unchanged from culture to culture. Some matters on the periphery do change and were intended by God according to His revelation in the Bible, to change. "In Christ is no male, no female, no slave nor free" as biblical authority for holding that God intended for all temporary cultural customs about slaves obeying their masters and women covering their heads in church, to be interpreted and cultural.

I enclose the copy of a lecture I gave last year = at least the pertinent pages of it.

I also enclose a thoughtful paper by the professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, and my comment on it.

In preparing your lectures, my friend, take the high ground.

As ever sincerely yours in Christ,

Donald McGavran

DMG/fj  
encs.

C  
O  
P  
Y



October 26, 1979

*Dr. Harvie Conn*

Dr. Harvie Conn  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
Chestnut Hill  
Philadelphia, PA. 19118

Dear Dr. Conn:

In continuation of our correspondence, let me thank you for your letter of a few weeks ago and say that I shall be writing you one of these days, taking up the points in your past correspondence.

Today, however, I am simply forwarding a copy of Milligan Missiogram for the Fall, 1979, which has just come to my desk from a fellow professor of missions much interested in the ways in which a pluralistic society ought to bend to the Lordship of Christ. He writes,

"I am amazed at the way in which your lecture written in the fall of 1973 speaks to the issues we are talking about today; and takes the position which we conservative evangelicals take or at least should take."

So I send it on to you, trusting that as you explore the field, this will be of value to you.

Most cordially yours,

Donald McGavran

DMG/fj  
enc.

C  
O  
P  
Y



## WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118 • (215) 887-5511

September 7, 1979

Dr. Donald McGavran  
Fuller Theological Seminary  
School of World Mission  
135 N. Oakland Avenue  
Pasadena, California 91101

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Thank you for your courtesy in sending to me a copy of your letter of June 25 to Dr. Poetsch and your personal letter of August 7. Probably you'll be back from Brazil by now. I returned only two weeks ago from a six weeks trip to Korea and Taiwan for the summer. What a contrast in realities and methodologies. I was one of the speakers at the Missionary Fellowship conference held there among evangelicals once a year on the island. I regret that Allen Swanson was in the states at the time. But we did hear of a number of exciting projects. I was especially excited in hearing of the work of Etne Beahr, JEM missionary working among the Hakka. He has developed a fascinating set of Bible studies, accompanied by songs to be memorized, charts to be learned, etc, all deeply oriented to the Chinese context. Some of it is featured in one of the latest issues of the Taiwan Church Growth Bulletin. I hope you'll be able to say something about it in the Church Growth Bulletin. I look forward with keen interest to seeing what results come from it for the growth of the church among the Hakka.

While there, I read Dorothy Raber's new book. I must admit to disappointment over it. Her job, as I see it, was <sup>partly</sup> to analyze what has been said in the past about church growth on Taiwan (using Fuller research), and find out why, after lots of study, there was still little fruit. I don't feel at all she accomplished much if anything of that purpose. Too general conclusions, I feel.

page two.

I was convinced after spending  $5\frac{1}{2}$  weeks there in Taiwan that a key question for church growth is the whole complex of questions revolving around language policies of missions ~~that~~ relating to Mandarin or Taiwanese. Government sensitivities, I deeply fear, will make it difficult for missionaries to raise that topic with anything like the degree of openness which it demands. Raber hardly touches on it in the thesis, except, as I remember, in a veiled manner. How, in the name of Christian stewardship alone, can missionaries (I was told by one observer, 80% of them) continue to learn Mandarin when 80% (rough) of the islanders use Taiwanese? The answer to that question is, I'm convinced, where politics starts to touch on evangelism. Romans 13 becomes, through misexegesis, a roadblock to creative strategy. The government encourages the use of Mandarin. Rom 13 says, Obey the government. So we learn Mandarin and restrict our ministries to a small segment of the population. Young people all know Mandarin, the missionary replies. So we learn Mandarin for the future. "Are young people the change agents in a Chinese culture?" I ask. "They will be one day," is the answer. "Church planning for the golden one day, and thenow is forever lost." Frightening. Here, I submit, is one place where we cannot, for the sake of discipling, too radically isolate perfecting from discipling, evangelism from a question as socio-political as what language to learn. The wall breaks down there.

I fear Taiwan had derailed me from responding to your comments on contextualization. Or maybe this all is one more sample of that topic's importance for evangelization.

Anyway, I'll hold off until I receive that welcome letter you promised for this month or next. The Lord keep you in good health and continuing to help and challenge us all.

Cordially in Christ

*Harve*  
Harve M. Conn



*Harvie Conn*

August 7, 1979

Dr. Harvie Conn  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
Chestnut Hill  
Philadelphia, PA. 19118

My dear Dr. Conn:

On the eve of getting off for a few weeks in Brazil to study the cause for the amazing inability of the Conservative Evangelical missions there to break through into substantial church growth, I drop you a hasty line on the subject we are conversing about - the biblical limits of contextualization.

In 1977 I penned the sentences on enclosure XX. As I was reviewing this writing, I remembered seeing an article by Bruce Demarest, systematic theologian in the Conservative Baptist seminary in Denver. It is a beautiful illustration of what I have said.

We need to think of contextualization not primarily in the light of adjusting the Christian message to cultures about which we know little, and where mistakes in contextualization will not seriously damage the Christian Faith.

We need to think our way through that contextualization about which we know a great deal, and where mistakes will seriously damage the Christian Faith. The effort is to bring it into line with rationalistic naturalism. Modern man believes that it is utterly impossible for God to intervene in the complex of laws which He has set up (or the Big Bang originated). Consequently anything in the Bible which sets forth a miracle (an intervention) such as the Virgin Birth, or the Resurrection, or that God foreknew the crucifixion and had been preparing for it from the beginning of time must be contextualized, i.e. stated in forms which naturalistic man can accept. These accounts of a supernatural God and supernatural actions must be understood as myths. They are not to be taken as literal truths, but as the best that men of that time could understand; statements which fit that culture but must be reinterpreted in this.

I enclose a Xerox of Demarist's article YYY which in the area of Christology abundantly illustrated my contention. I shall be writing you in September or October in answer to your thoughtful letter of June. Believe me, you are addressing yourself to an issue of profound importance.

OM Christ,

DMG/fj encs.

Bond|d McGavran

march that I moved from the side and joined the marchers as they walked out of the city and crossed the bridge over the Alabama River. This was simply an expression of personal feeling, and I do not regret it. But it was really a very little thing.

Q: What do you see as upcoming issues in which Christians should be involved?

A: To speak of "upcoming issues" would require me to indulge in prophecy, and this I am not qualified for. I think, however, that the kind of issues you have in mind are here already. I believe that Christians should be involved in the great social issues that the Bible so clearly stresses—issues relating to poverty, hunger, morality, justice, and peace. In other words, things that have to do with all aspects of human welfare.

Q: What do you consider the most important part of your life?

A: My forty-one years as headmaster of The Stony Brook School. As its first headmaster I had

the privilege, beginning in 1922, of working out and endeavoring to practice in a new school an integrated philosophy of Christian education based on certain principles. These are: that a Christian school must have a faculty made up of Christian believers; that a Christian school must seek to relate all of learning to the Christian faith; that a Christian school must accept the principle that all truth is God's truth; and that a Christian school must strive for excellence to the glory of God. My years at Stony Brook enabled me to think and work along those lines; in this I had the indispensable help of a number of gifted and devoted teachers, responsive students, and understanding trustees. Since my retirement in 1963, Stony Brook has made great strides not only academically but also in the spirit of love and concern that pervades the school community. For all this and for the privilege of being a Christian teacher for so many years, I thank God. □

16  
"His Land"  
develops into  
a book arguing that  
the gospels & Epistles  
are essentially  
missionary, essentially  
evangelistic, and  
God revealed His  
non-negotiable  
positions (which the  
fund "stress")  
& which  
Demarest in  
this expands.  
see p. 787

# Six Modern Christologies: Doing Away with The God-Man

YYY

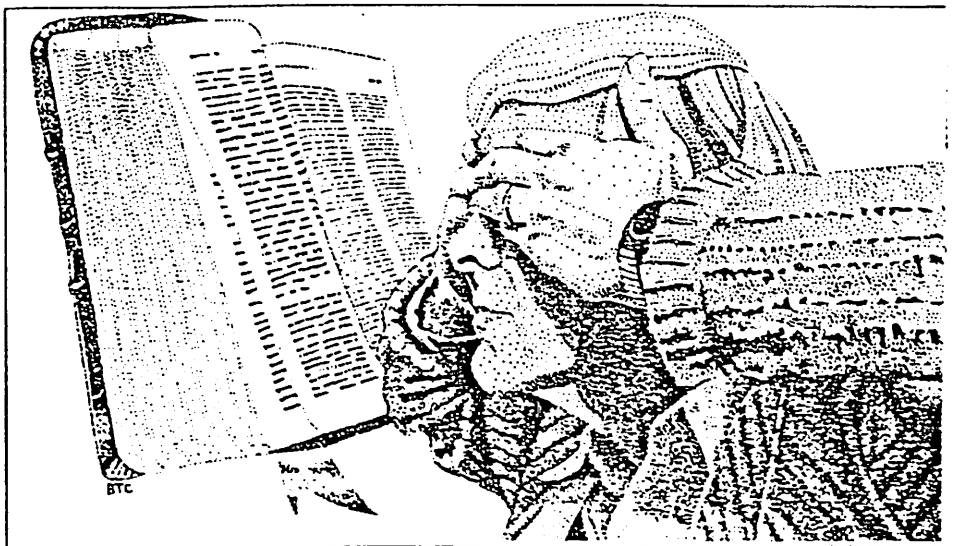
BRUCE A. DEMAREST

The supernatural Christ of the creeds has been relegated to the dustbin of superstition.

**A**MID THE sweeping changes in recent theology, one landmark stands superficially intact: Christendom acknowledges Jesus as its fundamental datum. No little confusion exists, however, about Jesus' identity and character. How should naturalistic, modern man interpret the first-century itinerant prophet? Dietrich Bonhoeffer during his Nazi imprisonment put it this way: "What is bothering me incessantly is the question . . . who Christ really is, for us today."

Jesus himself posed this question to his followers near Caesarea Philippi: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). Numerous views on this were advanced; Peter alone perceived that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16).

From Pentecost to comparatively recent times,



**SIX MODERN  
CHRISTOLOGIES:  
DOING AWAY WITH  
THE GOD-MAN**

*Opting for an  
impoverished  
Christ.*

Peter's confession of Christ was upheld as the church's standard of orthodoxy. The councils of Nicea (A.D. 325) and Chalcedon (A.D. 451) affirmed Christ's full deity and humanity cojoined in the God-Man. The great pillars of Christendom—Augustine, Aquinas, the Protestant Reformers—and the principal confessions of Protestantism all came down on the side of the received Christology.

**T**HE EIGHTEENTH century, however, brought a frontal assault on orthodox doctrine. Renaissance humanism in philosophy and science invited theologians to accept only those phenomena they could observe in nature. Following the theological Enlightenment, the supernatural Christ of the creeds and confessions was relegated to the dustbin of superstition and ignorance. The traditional concept of "true God, true man" was deemed an absurdity. Since then, modern Christologies have emerged that tend to produce an impoverished Christ. We will assess six of them here.

① *The mythical approach.* This began in the nineteenth century with the idealism of Kant and Hegel. Assuming the *a priori* impossibility of the supernatural, theologians in this tradition insisted that the New Testament Christ existed merely as an idea or ideal in the minds of Jesus' disciples. This gave way to a more sophisticated approach. Imposed upon the simple carpenter of Nazareth, assert the followers of Bultmann, are mythical accounts of a preexistent deity who became incarnate, overcame demons, rose from the dead, and who will return to earth to subdue evil powers. "Modern men take it for granted," said Bultmann, "that the course of nature and history . . . is nowhere interrupted by the intervention of supernatural powers."

Oxford scholar John Macquarrie freely employs the myth motif to assess Jesus Christ. He argues that the biblical writers sought to express Jesus' divinity by transposing aspects of his history into the framework of Greek mythology. He holds that the Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism, transfiguration, resurrection, and ascension "are partly historical, partly legendary, partly mythical."

Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufman likewise insists that Christ's preexistence, incarnation, virgin birth, and atoning work are "fantastic mythological notions." Embedded in the myth, however, is the truth that God was profoundly present with the man Jesus.

While the older rationalists sought to eliminate the deity of Christ by exegetical means, today's naturalists do so by regarding the New Testament

documents as mythical. Evangelicals, however, approach Scripture with no anti-supernaturalist illusions. The Lord who created the universe by the word of his power also became man in Jesus of Nazareth. No room exists in Scripture or history for those who exclude God from a mechanically conceived universe. Contemporary psychic and occult phenomena confirm that the cozy, predictable world of the closed system is open to challenge.

② *The existentialist approach.* This view tries to interpret the alleged myths in Scripture in terms of human possibilities and decisions. For example, Bultmann argues that to speculate about Jesus' deity is improper, but to focus on "self-examination and radical consideration of the nature of one's own existence" is legitimate for modern man.

John Knox likewise insists that myth is a vehicle to express the concrete meaning of our existence. The traditional concepts of Christ's "humanity" and "divinity" answer "not to ideas or thoughts about him, but to the church's experience of him." In a similar vein, R. M. Grant feels that the essence of Christology is not Christ but human existence. Titles that ascribe deity to Jesus—"Alpha and Omega," "Lord," "King"—simply express his unusual dignity. When the New Testament alludes to Christ as God, argues Grant, it upholds "the supreme meaningfulness of Christ in relation to human existence."

J. A. T. Robinson's viewpoint is similar. The myths surrounding the man Jesus must be expounded in terms of the new realities of human experience. The myth of the resurrection signifies for Robinson the new possibility of life in the spirit, and the myth of the ascension asserts "Christ's ascendancy in all the processes . . . that shape the lives of groups and individuals." The bishop's banality emerges when he demythologizes the parousia myth to "You ain't seen nothing yet."

To reduce the objective reality of God down to mere aids for self-understanding allows man to be the measure of all things. Evangelicals do not deny that Christ helps us to understand ourselves better. What they do dispute is that Jesus Christ can be adequately represented solely in terms of human experience.

③ *The dialectical approach.* This postulates that everything is contrary to something else, that no statement can be considered apart from its opposite. Since every theological statement is partial, divine truths cannot be captured in a single, timelessly valid, propositional statement. Tillich defined the dialectical method as "the way of seeking for truth . . . from different points of view,"

*Modern Christology  
= "wrongly  
contextualized  
biblical teaching  
about Christ"*

*Contextualize?  
Yes*

*Wrongly  
contextualize?  
No*

*Bruce A. Demarest is  
associate professor of  
systematic theology  
at Conservative  
Baptist Theological  
Seminary, Denver,  
Colorado.*





through a 'Yes' and 'No,' until a 'Yes' has been reached which is hardened in the fire of many 'No's' and which unites the elements of truth promoted in the discussion."

Karl Barth used the dialectical method to speak of the infinite and ineffable God who transcends rational comprehension. In *Romans*, Barth declares that finite man cannot know anything of the infinite world; therefore Jesus as the Christ can be comprehended only as "Problem" or "Paradox."

In his earlier dogmatic work, *Christliche Dogmatik*, Barth developed more systematically his understanding of "God and man in the Person of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ." He writes: "To eliminate the word 'and' and speak of 'God-man,' or he who would make out of Jesus Christ one name Jesus-Christ, is to depart from dialectical theology." Because Jesus Christ is the revelation of the majestic and terrible God, the union of God and man in human flesh is a logical impossibility. So Barth explains this impossibility, not by a static creed but by an irreconcilable dialectic, with ineffable deity on one side and ordinary humanity on the other.

Emil Brunner also insists that theology must be dialectical to portray the true paradox of the gospel. Only patently contradictory statements express the paradox that God became man in Christ. He sees the doctrine of the Two Natures and of the Trinity as "logical absurdities . . . [that] express the inconceivable miracle of revelation."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Vincent Taylor also make use of the dialectical method. "It might be thought," states Taylor, an English Methodist, "that in using restraint in speaking of the deity of Christ, we are robbing Him of his true deity; but so far from doing this, we are enhancing it."

close scrutiny of Jesus' deeds would be a return to the biblical perspective.

Oscar Cullmann typifies this viewpoint: "When it is asked in the New Testament 'Who is Christ?', the question never means exclusively, or even primarily, 'What is his nature?', but first of all, 'What is his function?'" More pointedly, Cullmann declares that "Jesus himself is what he does."

In a similar vein Norman Pittenger argues that the central question of Christology can only be "What was God *doing* in Christ?" Theologians have spent too much time focusing on Jesus' "natures." We are on safer ground, Pittenger asserts, in claiming that Jesus' "divinity" corresponds to "God's *act* in the manhood of the one who dwelt

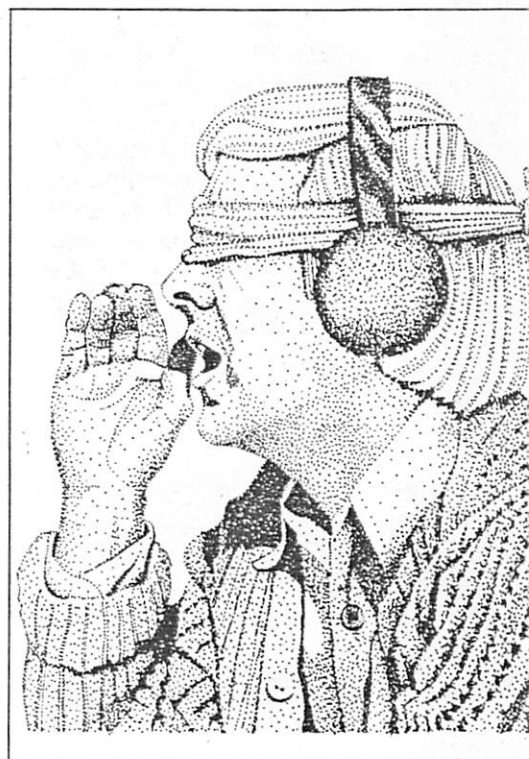
in Palestine." Later the church coined the phrase "diety of Christ" to express its belief that Jesus was the special vehicle of God's activity.

In *The Human Face of God*, J. A. T. Robinson readily identifies with the functional way of representing reality: "The Christ is the one who does what God does, who represents him. He stands in the place of God, speaking and acting for him. The issue is not where he comes from or what he is made of. He is not a divine or semi-divine being who comes from the other side. He is a human raised up from among his brethren to be the instrument of God's decisive work." Robinson maintains that this view of Christ is faithful to the dynamic Hebraic concept of God. Functionally Jesus was "divine," but essentially he was not.

Those who hold that "God is what he does" admit that they know nothing about the nature of the Being who acts. Who is this *Otherness*? One of God's greatest acts was his self-disclosure through the Incarnate Word.

⑤ *The humanitarian approach.* According to this view, Christ's significance lies in his concern for man's plight and anguish in the world.

In an attempt to reinterpret faith for a secular age, Bonhoeffer portrayed Christ as the model humanitarian—"the man for others"—transcendent only in his relationship with humanity. By replacing the unanswerable question "How can Christ be both man and God?" with the relevant human question "Who is he?", Bonhoeffer shifts the focus of Christology to the world and to Christ's being there for us.



**Although the humanitarian emphasis incorporates valid insights, it amounts to upholding Jesus as nothing more than a mere man whom God indwelt in an unusual way.**

**T**HE RATIONALIST views the doctrine of the human-divine Christ as a logical impossibility. But the dialectician prefers to hold in tension the "antithetic" concepts of humanity and deity in Christ. Orthodoxy, however, insists that the special revelation of God is consistent and coherent rather than contradictory. Through analogies meaningful to human beings, God communicates truthful, noncontradictory knowledge as he himself perceives it. Since Scripture faithfully reflects God's knowledge, we can know truly what God has disclosed concerning his Son.

④ *The functional approach.* This view claims that Christ can be known only indirectly through the effects of his work. Functionalists insist that "action" is more important than "being." Thus contemporary liberal theology is more concerned with the events in Jesus' life than with his *person*;

SIX MODERN  
CHRISTOLOGIES:  
DOING AWAY WITH  
THE GOD-MAN

*Opting for an  
impoverished  
Christ.*

M. M. Thomas, former chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, develops Bonhoeffer's concept of "the man for others." Negating the biblical concepts of sin, personal conversion, and the wrath of God, but stressing his secular relevance, Thomas characterizes Jesus as "the New Adam," "bearer of the New Humanity," and "the New Creation." Christ represents the new stage in the natural evolution of man; he is the ideal of what man can and shall become in the utopian progress toward the new order of creation. To follow Jesus in a broken world means to join him in transforming the oppressive power structures that impede the realization of man's full humanity. Thomas's caricature of Jesus lends itself to Marxist doctrines of man and society— notions that have become prominent in Thomas's radical religious humanism.

**B**LACK theology's left wing develops this humanitarian emphasis in a similar radical direction. Emerging black theologians represent Jesus as "the Liberator," "the Emancipator," or "the black Messiah" who struggles against the so-called white racist power structure. In an essay entitled "Jesus the Liberator," James Johnson, Jr., argues that Christians should stop speculating about the person of Christ and unite around Jesus' teaching—that manifesto of liberation uttered in language "extreme, extravagant, explosive as hand grenades which are tossed into the crowds." Albert Cleage, a spokesman for black theology, insists that "Jesus was a revolutionary black leader, a Zealot, seeking to lead a black nation to freedom."

Although the humanitarian emphasis incorporates valid insights, it amounts to upholding Jesus as nothing more than a mere man whom God indwelt in an unusual way. But the humanitarian model is inadequate for the One the church proclaims as Savior. To qualify as Redeemer of mankind, Jesus must be not only a man, but authentically God. As Athanasius put it, nothing *created* can unite the creature with the Creator.

⑥ *The evolutionary approach.* The evolutionist envisages a world in continual flux and development. Process theology builds on this idea of the new coming from the old. In our constantly changing world, lower "levels" of the natural order are ascending to the level of spirit. Process theology's ultimate reality is not substance, but the dynamic, energizing process itself.

Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin adapted the modern evolutionary vision of the universe in the form of a unique Christ-centered

metaphysic. Teilhard's theory of complexity consciousness postulates that matter relentlessly presses toward higher consciousness levels. The end product of evolutionary gestation would be a super-organism embracing material and immaterial forms in a union of common consciousness whose center is called the "Omega-point."

Theologically, the goal of this development is the Christification of the cosmos. By a brilliant synthesis of scientific and Christian perspectives, Teilhard concludes that the Omega of science and the Christ of the Bible, as two centers of cosmic convergence, *coincide*. Since humanity and the cosmos collectively will be perfected in the whole Christ, the Lord who assumed an evolved body is simultaneously the author, the product, and the goal of the evolutionary process.

In his book *Christology*, a thoroughly eclectic thinker, J. A. T. Robinson, weaves process concepts into his formulation of the person of Christ: "This insistence on Jesus being a genuine product of the process, with all the prehistory of man in his genes, is, I believe, one of the distinctive presuppositions of a twentieth-century Christology. . . . To be a member of the species *homo sapiens* includes having genes and chromosomes shaped and transmitted by millions of years of evolution. No one can just *become* a man out of the blue: a genuine man (as opposed to a replica) can only come out of the process, not into it." Thus Jesus was not a special creation of God from the heavenly realm, but a man born, bred, and evolved through nature and history.

In pure-blooded form, process theology bows before the idol of scientific evolutionism. Since Jesus is simply a product of the cosmic process, his preexistence, Incarnation, and divinity are exposed to radical reinterpretation.

At the heart of the modern views of Christ is the post-Enlightenment revolt against biblical supernaturalism. John Knox articulated the shift in outlook when he said, "It is impossible, by definition, that God should become a man." Yet a plain reading of Scripture confirms that at the foundation of the Christian faith is a supernaturalism which refuses to be boxed in by scientific naturalism.

Further, contemporary theology insists that Christ is beyond the reach of human knowing. Since the concepts of "being," "essence," and "nature" have been appropriated from Greek philosophy, the traditional two natures category of Chalcedon must be abandoned; no relationship between the Father and the Son can be established on the ontological level.

In response, evangelicals claim that the triune God who acts and who may be existentially encountered is also the God who *is*. We can know



Christ both as *Subject* and as *Object*, and possess both practical and theoretical knowledge of God. Unless we have objective knowledge of God, the idea of God lacks all meaning. Unless we can talk cognitively of the God who is there—that is, make statements about Christ's transcendence, preexistence, and Incarnation—no criteria exist to distinguish Jesus from any other man. Knowing something concrete about Jesus is indispensable to knowing *him*.

**L**ET US return briefly to Peter's encounter with Jesus at Caesarea Philippi. In response to Simon's forthright confession of Jesus as the Anointed Messiah and Son of God, Jesus said, "You did not learn this from mortal man; it was revealed to you by my heavenly Father" (Matt. 16:17, NEB). Our Lord's <sup>declaration</sup> ~~retort~~ proves that we can responsibly confess Christ only on the basis of special revelation. From the biblical perspective, the person of Jesus Christ is a spiritual mystery (I Tim. 3:16). Finite and sinful man cannot of himself unfold the profound reality that God became man in Jesus of Nazareth. Any attempt to explain the mystery of Jesus Christ apart from Scripture will be doomed to failure.

Kant precipitated current developments by suggesting that revelation was inimical to a critical philosophy of religion. When theologians thereafter began to assert that portions of the Bible were factually erroneous, the loss of the biblical Christ inevitably followed.

From a careful reading of Scripture, Christians conclude that Jesus Christ is coequal with the Father in being, purpose, and action, and that he became man at the Incarnation without for a moment ceasing to be God. Assertions about Christ's essence and nature are inherent in the biblical revelation. John's Gospel repeatedly identifies Jesus with the self-existent "I AM" of the Old Testament (John 8:24 *et al.*). Jesus' bold declarations "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) and "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38) imply an ontological unity with the Father.

Paul, who spoke much of the existential character of Christ's saving benefits, plainly taught that in Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:10). Paul's majestic hymn of Christ's humiliation and exaltation (Phil. 2:6-11) and his statement that Christ "became poor" (II Cor. 8:9) point to his preexistent, essential unity with God the Father. Similarly the Epistle to the Hebrews, which thoroughly stresses our Lord's humanity (Heb. 2:11, 14, 17), asserts also his deity in both functional and ontological categories: "He reflects the glory of God, and bears the very stamp

of his nature, upholding the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).

Jesus Christ, the eternally changeless and timelessly relevant Person, should not be relativized to accommodate the ebb and flow of modern secular thought. We must reject the liberal assumption that modern perspectives are an advance over those of the past. Jesus' response to the contemporary critic might prove similar to his retort to the Pharisees: "You have no idea where I came from or where I am going. You judge by human standards" (John 8:14, NIV). Those who depreciate special revelation and depend upon their own insights have an imperfect understanding of our Lord's heavenly origin and his earthly task.

Norman Pittenger, an eminently modern scholar, insists that "whether we like it or not, things are different nowadays." Evangelicals, in contrast, confidently stand with their early Christian brethren who proclaimed their Lord's humanity, deity, and redemptive work by the acrostic IXΘΥΣ—"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." □

**Jesus Christ, the eternally changeless and timelessly relevant Person, should not be relativized to accommodate the ebb and flow of modern secular thought.**

## Winter Green

*The deep black leaves of holly,  
the stiff exclaiming pine—  
Winter green*

*which pricks my fingers stickily,  
mysteriously.*

*Why, Lord of Life, this severest vestige  
of earth's warm life  
left to us in winter?*

*Do you disapprove the raucous spring,  
the rush of summer,  
the soft greens growing where they will?*

*Does winter's sluggish cold  
demand the suitable demeanor  
and show its rasping winter-life as warning?*

*No, Resurrection Lord, No!*

*It is to show the secret hardihood.*

*To those who have the gift of life  
there is no law of season:*

*tough curls and rays of green  
offer hymns of praise to God  
Who never leaves us desolate.*

JANICE SCHUH OKULSKI





# Westminster Theological Seminary

Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19118  
887-5511

Mr J  
Mr Paul & Howard  
to Com<sup>2</sup> Hoke, DM

May 11, 1979

Dr. Donald McGavran  
Fuller Seminary  
135 N. Oakland  
Pasadena, California 91101

Dear Dr. McGavran,

Thank you for your kind letter of May 8. I shall take the advice of the Committee and elect for the general topic, "The New Dialogue: Theology and Anthropology." I do it with much fear and trembling. My knowledge of anthropology is what I have picked up from reading your work there at Fuller and my studies in graduate school. I sincerely hope I shall not shoot from the lip on much of this. I shall also be bold to ask for your cooperation and that of other staff members in the preparation of the lectures. I do want to interact in the lectures with some of the materials (Chuck has benefited us all from in his new book. Knowing the conservative -evangelical community, I fear its usefulness will be sadly diminished because of some positions he may be taking about Scripture. I hope to defuse that danger somewhat while, at the same time, disagreeing as gracefully as I can on some issues.

I appreciate also your deep concern to keep these lectures constantly interacting with the three billion outside of Christ. I shall make every effort to do that. And again I shall need your interaction to keep my orientation in that direction.

I am also deeply concerned in selecting this topic with the model for theological education that dominates our training and thinking. Anthropology says many things to me. One of the things it does say is repeated so loudly in Chuck's book --orientation to felt needs. I think that this question must be faced by our educational institutions realistically and

Donald McGavran - page two.

with a view to change. I suspect many of our theological seminaries will be threatened by Chuck's focus and tend to fear the dialogue because of their own "hidden agenda." I see contextualization as a real contributing factor here. Anthropology says, Contextualize, to me. The theological model says, Repeat. Church growth, says, Remember the lost. The theological model says, Prepare men for existing churches. This too I want to deal with.

How do you get all of this into four lectures will be my agony for the next year.

Thank you again and my personal regards to your colleagues there.

Cordially in Christ,

Harvie  
Harvie M. Conn



Graduate Schools of  
THEOLOGY  
PSYCHOLOGY  
WORLD MISSION



# Fuller Theological Seminary

School of World Mission

May 7, 1979

ARTHUR F. GLASSER  
Dean

and Associate Professor of  
Theology of Mission  
and East Asian Studies

DONALD A. MCGAVRAN  
Dean Emeritus

and Senior Professor of  
Mission, Church Growth  
and South Asian Studies

ALAN R. TIPPETT

Senior Professor of Anthropology  
and Oceanic Studies

DEAN S. GILLILAND

Interim Director of Cross Cultural  
Studies Program and Assistant  
Professor of Contextualized  
Theology and Afr.

PAUL G. HIEBERT

Associate Professor of  
Anthropology and  
South Asian Studies

FREDERIC HOLLAND

Adjunct Professor of  
Theological Education  
by Extension

CHARLES H. KRAFT

Professor of Anthropology and  
African Studies

ALVIN MARTIN  
Director

In-Service Program

J. EDWIN ORR

Professor (Part-time) of  
History of Awakenings  
and Dynamic of Missions

GLENN J. SCHWARTZ

Assistant to the Dean and  
International Student Advisor

C. PETER WAGNER

Associate Professor of  
Church Growth

RALPH D. WINTER

Adjunct Professor of  
the Historical Development  
of the Christian Movement

Dr. Harvie Conn  
Westminster Theological Seminary  
Chestnut Hill  
Philadelphia, Pa. 19118

Dear Dr. Conn: (Copy to Dr. C. Peter Wagner)

I am delighted that you have kindly agreed to deliver the Church Growth Lectures in 1980, and shall look forward to hearing you and reading the lectures in published form, too.

The May 2nd, 1979 meeting of our Committee here has come down heavily for the first topic you suggested, THE NEW DIALOGUE: THEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY. It is truly the cockpit of action these days. You will have a good time writing to it and will be speaking to a nationwide - and indeed a world wide audience. I have written to many of the past lecturers, pointing out that this lectureship gives a man a chance to speak to a very large audience. The published lectures will be - if they stick to Church Growth - read around the world.

I am sure you are aware of the danger inherent in a topic which in itself does not require you to say anything about evangelism or church growth or the propagation of the Gospel. One could lecture on theology and anthropology without reference to the three billion (shortly to be four billion) who have yet to believe. Were this topic to be written to by IRM writers, one would never suspect that increase of Christians and churches was part of the dialogue. Indeed, dialogue often means precisely 'no church growth'.

Knowing something of the tensions between theology and anthropology in regard to cross cultural evangelism, and the inevitable transformation of life and culture which Christianity always brings and which anthropology has traditionally resisted. I have been playing with some sub-topics which would keep the Church Growth Lectures focussed on Church Growth. You, of course would not phrase them this way; but I hope you will speak to the red hot issues which these phrasings require.

- I. Theology says: GOD HAS REVEALED A WAY FOR ALL MEN  
Anthropology says: ALL CULTURES ARE EQUAL AND MADE BY MEN.
- II. Theology says: THE CHURCH SHOULD MULTIPLY AND IS ONE CHURCH.  
Anthropology says: THE CHURCH SHOULD NOT MULTIPLY. IF IT DOES IT SHOULD BE MULTI\_FORM.
- III. Theology says: THE ARE LOST  
Anthropology says: THEY ARE WONDERFUL PEOPLE.

May 8, 1979

Dr. Harvie Conn - page 2

IV. Theology Says: RIGHT IS WHAT GOD HAS REVEALED: REVELATION  
Anthropology says: RIGHT IS WHAT EACH CULTURE DECREES; CONSENSUS.

Harvie, it is in this area that the debate rages. Robertson Mcquilkin has written to this issue pertinently. Henry deals with it effectively. My little book The Class of Christianity and Cultures, written eight years ago, speaks to this topic. Thought has moved on a bit since then. I shall be keen to hear you develop the dialogue.

As ever yours in Christ,