

SIGHTINGS ON THE THEOLOGICAL RADAR

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The word “radar” stands for ra(dio) d(etecting) a(nd) r(anging).” A radar system transmits radio waves and then receives and measures the waves that reflect back from far away objects (like jets or storms) in order to detect their direction, distance, and incoming speed. A “radar scope” is that part of a radar system that visually displays the reflected radio waves which the radar receiver has detected. Imagine if a similar device existed that might detect all “incoming” theological controversies. Within American evangelicalism today, which topics would loom large on this imaginary theological radar scope? Of course, no such device exists. We can, however, survey the state of evangelical theology and then select some of these “incoming” issues for evaluation. These issues are: religious pluralism, open theism, so-called gender-neutral translations, and gender roles in the church.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

When discussing religious pluralism today, I am not treating the topic of religious tolerance nor inter-faith dialogue. These would certainly be topics worthy of discussion, but today I am dealing with the theological concept often referred to as “universalism.” The topic has increasingly asserted itself within theological debates probably

- o due to the shrinking of the world in this modern age of technological advance,
- o due to the influx into America of a growing number of people from non-Christian religious backgrounds,
- o due to the increasing interactions between Westerners and Muslims of the Middle-East,
- o and due to the uneasiness that post-moderns have with the exclusive claims of religion, especially of biblical Christianity.

I am discussing, then, religious pluralism, or “universalism,” or inclusivism—as opposed to traditional, Christian “exclusivism,” “particularism,” or “absolutism.”

Imagine how much nicer it would be, how much more pleasant it would be, if we could “just all get along,” and if we, in the tradition of Mercea Eleade, could simply study the religions of the world in order to find the truths that they all teach. If only Jesus were a savior, and not the Savior, then we could refrain from being judgmental when it comes to other religions of the world. W. Gary Phillips predicts that “the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ—as both the ontological and epistemological basis for salvation—may become a watershed issue among evangelicals.”¹

After all, even the Muslims could appeal, and even rarely have appealed, to the Quran for a basis in religious pluralism:²

“Those who believe [i.e., “Muslims”], the Jews, the Christians and the Sabaeans—whosoever believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds, they shall have their reward from their Lord, shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they come to grief” (Quran II, 62, cf. V, 69). And We have sent down to you the Book in truth, confirming the Book that existed already before it and protecting it. . . . For each one of you [several communities] We have appointed a Law and a Way of Conduct [while the essence of religion is identical]. If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but [He has not done so] that He may test you in what He has given you; *so compete in goodness*. To God shall you all return and He will tell you [the Truth] about what you have been disputing” (V, 48).

If the Muslims, can make an appeal for religious pluralism, then surely, Christians should be able to as well.

Chester Gillis, not an evangelical, has radically rewritten his Christology so that he makes room for religious pluralism. His Christology “does not rely upon convoluted or esoteric theories of Christology designed to preserve Christian hegemony concerning salvation. Yet, it does not seek to diminish the importance of Christ in Christianity.”³ For Gillis, “Christ continues to be normative for the Christian believer. That is, Christ is the way of salvation for the Christian believer. However, he is not the way of salvation for those who do not express faith in him but who follow the path of another figure and/or religion.”⁴ His Christology “is an attempt to avoid the arrogance to which Christianity is inclined via its Christology.”⁵ “It is not an attempt to undermine

¹ W. Gary Phillips, “Evangelicals and Pluralism: Current Options,” pp. 174-189, in *Proceedings of the Wheaton Theology Conference: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism: An Evangelical Analysis and Response* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College, 1992), p. 186. Phillips provides a handy summary of the views and arguments pro/con. He writes as an opponent of religious pluralism. John Sanders and Clark Pinnock are the leading evangelical proponents of the view.

² All Quranic quotations are taken from Fazlur Rahman, “A Muslim Response,” pp. 68-79 in *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978).

³ Chester Gillis, *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology* (Louvain: Peeters Press/Eerdmans, 1993), p. 98.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵ *Ibid.*

the faith of believing Christians, who should continue to look to Christ and his teachings as their path to salvation.”⁶

Leonard Swidler in his book, *After the Absolute*, refers to this process of placing theological claims within their proper context as the “deabsolutizing” of truth. Swidler, is thankful to see theology moving away from a classical conception of absolute truth toward the contemporary interpretations which see epistemology as relational, or relative, in nature.⁷ Stanley Sawartha in his book, *One Christ, Many Religions*, sees theology moving away from a “monoscriptura” hermeneutic (which is merely Eurocentric, with its singular emphasis on the Christian Bible) to a “multiscriptural hermeneutic” (which also takes into account Indian truths, Asian truths, etc.).⁸

Is such a relativistic approach to the truth claims of Scripture even possible, let alone desirable? Emilio Antonio Nunez, a leading Latin American evangelical, in his article on “Universalism,” in the Walvoord festschrift writes that “to deny the exclusiveness of the gospel is to ignore the clear testimony of Christ and His apostles, and to open the door to universalism. The gospel is inclusive in that it embraces without exception all who receive it by faith, and it is *exclusive* because it omits from its blessings all who reject it.”⁹

Religious pluralism, with its multiple ways of salvation, is based on the deductive arguments of the love and justice of God. Religious pluralists argue that God, who is a God of love, would never eternally condemn those who have never heard the gospel message. Besides, how could a just God hold such people accountable for their sins when they had not heard of His forgiveness? Surely, if they believe the better parts of their non-Christian religions, if they accept the limited light that they have, then God is bound by the laws of fairness to forgive them apart from Christ. These arguments are based, however, on the faulty premises of human conceptualizations of divine love and justice. Nunez notes this “anthropocentricity” of universalism, and by analogy religious pluralism.¹⁰

Nunez also notes the selective use of Scripture by those who champion universalism. Universalists emphasize the saving *desire* of God, but 1 Timothy 2:4¹¹ must be understood in light of 1:16,¹² and 2 Peter 3:9¹³ must be understood in light of 3:7.¹⁴ Universalists emphasize the saving *provision* of God, but 2 Corinthians 5:19¹⁵ must be understood in light of 5:20-21,¹⁶ and both halves of 2 Peter 2:1¹⁷ must be taken into account. Yes, Titus 2:11;¹⁸ Hebrews 2:9;¹⁹ and 1 John 2:2²⁰ are all true, but they must be understood in light of John 3:18²¹ and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ As quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

⁸ As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁹ Emilio Antonio Nunez, “Universalism,” pp. 169-188, in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, Donald K. Campbell, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), pp. 169-170. Dr. Nunez is my paternal grandfather. I quote numbers of evangelical theologians in this paper/presentation, and obviously I do not agree with them all in every regard. Nevertheless, it is interesting that as soon as theological error appears on the radar screen, it seems that some evangelicals are ready to respond with correctives. Yet, why the seeming silence of fundamentalist theologians? Probably because so few have the time or resources to write—a state of affairs that is undesirable.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹¹ **1 Timothy 2:4** Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

¹² **1 Timothy 1:16** Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

¹³ **2 Peter 3:9** ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

¹⁴ **2 Peter 3:7** But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

¹⁵ **2 Corinthians 5:19** To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

¹⁶ **2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:1** ²⁰Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. ²¹For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

¹⁷ **2 Peter 2:1** But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

¹⁸ **Titus 2:11** For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

¹⁹ **Hebrews 2:9** But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

²⁰ **1 John 2:2** And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

²¹ **John 3:18** He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

8:24.²² Universalists also appeal to the saving *promise* of God, but Ephesians 1:10²³ must be understood in light of 2:2-3,²⁴ and 8-9,²⁵ and Philippians 2:9-11²⁶ must be understood in light of 1:28;²⁷ 2:15;²⁸ 3:18-19.²⁹

Nunez' point is that an anthropocentric theology results in pluralism, but "when *all* that God says in His Word is accepted without regeneration, universalism *cannot* be sustained."³⁰ The whole debate hinges on one's source of authority—do we trust the Scriptures or do we trust our own modern sensitivities?

- John 14:6 = Christ is *the* Way
- Acts 4:12 = Salvation is found in *no other*
- Galatians 1:6-7 = *no other* gospel
- 1 Timothy 2:5 = there is *only one* Mediator, even as there is only one God

In light of the exclusivity of the Christian gospel, John Stott explains that "the true universalism of the Bible is the call to universal evangelism in obedience to Christ's universal commission."³¹ Nunez observes, that "the greatest danger today is found not in the organizations that openly declare themselves to be universalist but in those theological systems and ecclesiastical movements which deny, overlook, or do not emphasize as they should the singularity of the gospel of Christ."³²

Oh, and before we think that the Quran is really all that favorable toward religious pluralism, remember that Islam holds that "it is incumbent upon all people to believe in all divine messages." It may sound fair enough, but then the Islamic apologetic continues: This means that "if Muhammed and his followers believe in all prophets, all people must also and equally believe in him [i.e., Muhammed]. Disbelief in him would be equivalent to disbelief in all, for this would arbitrarily upset the line of prophetic succession."³³ So, it turns out, Islam, too, is not as inclusive in its outlook as a pluralistic post-modern might have hoped.

As Fazlur Rahman, a Muslim scholar, admits, "So far as Islam is concerned, it recognized Jesus and his divine mission from the time of its birth. However, it criticized, sometimes severely, the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Jesus, and, consequently, rejected trinitarianism. Christians have mostly taken this to be a rejection of Christianity itself. The Qur'an assigns to Jesus the position of a prophet, God's Word and Divine Spirit, but withholds—for reasons that are not arbitrary or fortuitous but rooted deeply in its very conception of the God-human relationship—assent to the divinity of Jesus or, indeed, of anybody else."³⁴

In summary: True or false? 2+2=4. It is either true or it is false; there is no possibility for a pluralism of answers to the question. Again, true or false? Jesus Christ is the God-Man and only Savior. Again, the claim is either true or false; there is simply no room for religious pluralism in answering this question—a question at the very heart of biblical Christianity. The question must find its answer in the authoritative Word of God.

OPEN THEISM or FREEWILL THEISM

²² **John 8:24** I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins.

²³ **Ephesians 1:10** That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him:

²⁴ **Ephesians 2:2-3** ²Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

²⁵ **Ephesians 2:8-9** ⁸ For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹ Not of works, lest any man should boast.

²⁶ **Philippians 2:9-11** ⁹ Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: ¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; ¹¹ And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

²⁷ **Philippians 1:28** ²⁸ And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

²⁸ **Philippians 2:15** That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

²⁹ **Philippians 3:18-19** ¹⁸ (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹ Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

³¹ As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 183.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁴ Rahman, "A Muslim Response," p. 75.

The standard defense of the position appears in the book on *The Openness of God* (IVP) written by David Basinger, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, and William Hasker. Basinger, in his sequel, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, answers his critics and more precisely states the case for open theism.³⁵ Basinger begins by maintaining that God has granted significant moral freedom of choice to human beings; he then re-examines the doctrines of immutability, impassibility, foreknowledge, divine omniscience, theodicy, and petitionary prayer. The God of Christianity desires a “responsive relationship” with humanity. Thus, since God desires that we exercise meaningful choice, the possibility of pervasive divine intervention, they [i.e., the freewill theists] conclude must be ruled out.”³⁶

“Since freewill theists believe that *God has chosen to create a world in which humans have been granted the power to exercise persuasive, morally significant freedom of choice (and thus action) and that God cannot unilaterally ensure that humans exercising free choice will make the decisions he would have them make (and thus act as he would have them act)*, freewill theists conclude that *God does not exercise unilateral control over many important aspects of what occurs in our earthly realm.*” Thus, God is a “risk-taker.”³⁷ God’s self-restraint is a moral self-limitation. God has the capacity to control, but He chooses not to control.

Basinger sees God’s omniscience limited to present knowledge—that is, “God’s knowledge is limited to everything that is (or has been) actual and to what follows deterministically from it.”³⁸ Basinger denies “that God possesses infallible knowledge of any future state of affairs that includes free human decision-making as a causal component. God, as the ultimate psychoanalyst or behaviorist, can with great accuracy predict what individuals will freely decide to do in the future in many cases.” God may be able to predict who will be elected president of the USA in 2012, but He cannot know infallibly who will be elected president in 2012.³⁹ This means, by the way, that there are things that God cannot know because it is *now* true or false that, for example, Hillary Clinton (☺), will be elected president in 2012.⁴⁰ After acknowledging Isaiah 46:9-10,⁴¹ Basinger limits the clear forcefulness of the verses by writing, “The whole Scripture—produces a portrait of a God who not only interacts with His creation—responding to experiences, attempting to bring about His desired goals—who changes his mind, modifies plans, on the basis of information he did not possess at the time his plans were originally formulated.”⁴²

Open theism, like religious pluralism, reeks of anthropocentrism. Basinger baldly states that God is obligated to prevent all preventable suffering, obligated to recompense innocent sufferers, obligated to ensure that our lives (on the whole) are worth living, obligated to “maximize the quality of life for each individual.”⁴³ Such obligation would minimize God’s general goodness for He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust—not because He is obligated to sinful humanity, but because He has chosen to do so out of His goodness that He might declare His great mercy and grace, that He might provide a season for repentance for sinners, and that He might demonstrate His awesome power to control the world and its weather.

Basinger surmises that theological determinists cannot maintain that petitionary prayer is efficacious, since according to theological determinism God will do whatever He wills—whether or not we ask Him to or not—so

³⁵ David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996); see also David Basinger, *Divine Power in Process Theism: A Philosophical Critique* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988)—the book that indicated Basinger’s future theological direction. Evangelicals have responded to Basinger’s freewill theism: (1) John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003); (2) Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000). Both of these critiques contain extensive criticisms of open theism. For a comparative analysis see James K. Beiby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, Gregory A. Boyd (of Bethel College for open theism), David Hunt (for simple foreknowledge), William Lane Craig (for middle knowledge), and Paul Helm (for Augustinian-Calvinist view), contributors (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

³⁶ Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, pp. 33-35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ **Isaiah 46:9-10** ⁹ Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 82. Basinger thinks that “this world in fact contains no excess evil and thus retain belief in the existence of God” (p. 104).

prayer is meaningless.⁴⁴ Freewill theism, on the other hand, can maintain that “divine activity is at times dependent on our freely offered petitions. It becomes conceptually possible to maintain, for instance, that God guides a leader or soothes a troubled mind because we have utilized our God-given power of choice to request that he do so.”⁴⁵ So, freewill theism offers a more efficacious view of prayer? Maybe, maybe not! Basinger also must admit that there are many prayers for assistance that God would like to answer, but He simply cannot because humans exercise meaningful freewill and interfere with His prayer answering ability.⁴⁶ Basinger is guilty of wishful thinking. He wants prayer to be more meaningful on the human side, but in so doing he makes prayer less meaningful on the divine side. Humans can convince God to do something that He might not have otherwise done, but then, in turn, many times God cannot do things in answer to prayer because He is thwarted by human free will. Fascinating, according to open theism, human freewill can always thwart and frustrate the grace of God. According to open theism, the plight of humanity is not nearly so awful as traditionally held, but nor is the grace of God nearly so great.

On the other hand, according to theological determinism God commands us to pray, so in faith, we pray—submitting to the authority of His Word. As we pray we seek to pray according to His will—again, submitting to His authority in our daily lives. As we pray, in submissive faith, God changes us in addition to answering our requests in accordance with His will. This means that His will is accomplished in the life of the person praying and in the outcomes of the prayers.

Open theism makes problematic the Christian experience when it comes to determining God’s will, since God’s directives, according to open theism, in fact often change over time. Open theism makes predictive prophecy problematic (but see Isaiah 42:8-9;⁴⁷ and consider detailed prophecies like Daniel 11). This problem extends both to predictive prophecy on a grand scale and to God’s knowledge of the very days and words of our lives:

- Psalm 139:16 NASB (updated edition): “Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained *for me*, when as yet there was not one of them;”
- Psalm 139:4 NASB (updated edition): “Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all.”

Open theism, or freewill theism, treats far too lightly the plain meaning of verses like Ephesians 1:11: “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” The verse says, “all things.” Besides, open theism impugns biblical hope, biblical inerrancy, and the very trustworthiness of God. God knows all things, actual and possible.

Theological determinism with unqualified omniscience is confirmed by verses like Jeremiah 23:22, “But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.” God knows all things actual and possible.

The implications of open theism are so unorthodox, that Wayne Grudem writing a chapter on “Why, When, and for What Should We Draw New Boundaries?” contends that evangelical groups must write and enforce doctrinal statements or position papers against open theism. He provides several reasons for his “drawing new boundaries” recommendation: (1) False teaching harms the church; (2) If false teaching is not stopped, it spreads and does more and more damage; (3) If false teaching is not stopped, we will waste time and energy in endless controversies rather than doing valuable “kingdom work;” and (4) Jesus and the New Testament authors hold church leaders responsible for silencing false teaching within the church.⁴⁸ Grudem, an evangelical, reminds us of the importance of up-to-date doctrinal standards and the importance of setting theological limits or boundaries.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 106

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁷ **Isaiah 42:8-9** ⁸ *I am* the LORD: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. ⁹ Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. [e.g., C. S. Lewis’ analogy of the passing parade].

⁴⁸ Wayne Grudem, “Why, When, and for What Should We Draw New Boundaries?” pp. 339-370, in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

NIVI/TNIV

Nancy Hardesty, a feminist theologian, laments the fact that “a woman reading an English Bible finds the words *man* or *men* more than four thousand times!” She also bemoans the traditional translations of Titus 2:11;⁴⁹ 1 Timothy 2:4;⁵⁰ and 4:10;⁵¹ concluding that “frankly, God does not offer much hope for me as a woman!”⁵² She asks her female readers, “Does it bother you to be called [in the New Testament] ‘brethren’?”⁵³ Feminist thinking like this has made some evangelicals more gender-sensitive, and it has impacted Bible translation work. The first major gender-neutral translation was the NRSV (1990). Then, the CEV (1995) came along and later the NCV and NLT.

Now, it is true that the Greek word *anthropos* means “human” or “person,” whereas the word *aner* means “man” as in a person who is “masculine” or “male.” Also, the Greek word *tis* means “someone” or “anyone,” and *teknon* means “child” (not “son”). Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:17⁵⁴ means “anyone” (*tis*). Matthew 21:28⁵⁵ means “child” (*teknon*). Titus 2:11; 1 Timothy 2:4; and 4:10 mean “people” (*anthropos*).

The NIVI was a gender-neutral translation that was made available in a pilot program for people (not men ☺) in Great Britain a few years ago (1996). A firestorm controversy erupted over its release, and Zondervan ultimately promised that it would not release a gender-neutral translation like it here in America. Now, a few years later, the TNIV has been modified, with its more controversial translation decisions cleaned up, and it has been released here in America (1999). It is advertised not as a new edition of the NIV but as a new “rendition” (because of the controversy preceding its publication). The translation attempts to minimize unnecessary masculinity and to refer the references to Jews plotting to kill Jesus back to the Pharisees (not to the entire Jewish population). It remains to be seen if American evangelicalism will be pleased with the TNIV when they make decisions at the cash registers of Christian bookstores. Just a reminder: the NIV NT came out in 1973, the NIV OT in 1978, and the revised NIV in 1984.

Even mildly gender-neutral translations produce some interesting problems. Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem have edited the definitive work on these issues as they analyzed the NIVI.⁵⁶ Perhaps the most subtle changes occur when the translators attempt to eliminate the “generic *he*” which harks back to masculine pronouns. For example, the NIV of Matthew 16:24-26 reads:

²⁴ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself [masculine pronoun in the Greek = *e`auto . n*], and take up his [*αυτου /*, etc.] cross, and follow me. ²⁵ For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. ²⁶ For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

But the NIVI reads “Then Jesus said to his disciples, “*Those* who would come after me must deny *themselves* and take up *their* cross and follow me.”⁵⁷ The problem may seem miniscule compared to the problems of religious pluralism and open theism. Nevertheless, it is a problem because God’s Word inerrantly records Jesus words as “himself” and “his.” To change the “generic *he*” in these verses (1) changes the focus in mid-thought from the singular to the plural, (2) makes the call to sacrificial discipleship a plea to the group and not the individual, (3) produces the unwarranted dilemma: “Do we then all share in the same cross (singular)?”

Another example occurs in John 14:23, where the NIV reads: “Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” The translation, apparently contained four unnecessary references to “he” and to “him.” The NIVI renders it with the words “those” and “them.” Now, again, this might not appear to be “all that big of a deal,” but Jesus spoke

⁴⁹ **Titus 2:11** For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

⁵⁰ **1 Timothy 2:4** Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

⁵¹ **1 Timothy 4:10** For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

⁵² Nancy A. Hardesty, *Inclusive Language in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), p. 80.

⁵³ She must assume that her readers are annoyed by the NT terminology since she also thinks that it is “a bit alien to be called sons of God” (Ibid., pp. 90, 84).

⁵⁴ **2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

⁵⁵ **Matthew 21:28** But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.

⁵⁶ Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem, eds., *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Word* (Nashville: Broadman, 2000).

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 111-112, 117 for the full treatment.

in the singular here. What the NIVI puts forward *here* is the idea of the presence of God in a plurality of His people. True, this is a biblical doctrine (see Ephesians 2:22⁵⁸), but that is not the issue. What is at stake is the exact meaning of John 14:23. Jesus taught the presence of God the Father and God the Son in the individual believer, a real source of comfort.⁵⁹

Or take the instance of Revelation 3:20. The NIV renders it “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” However, the NIVI renders the “anyone” and “him” and “he” as “you.” This might seem to be even more direct, and probably an evangelist or two might prefer this translation to the original Greek, but the use of “you” could be taken as a reference to the entire church!

Another problematic instance appears in the NIVI of Acts 1:21 where the Greek (*aner*) for “man, male” is rendered as “those.”⁶⁰ This translation minimizes the role of masculine/male leadership. Other examples appear in the NIVI rendering of Luke 5:18; Proverbs 3:12; 13:1 with words like “parent” and “children” instead of “father” and “son.”

Poythress and Grudem observe that the fundamental problem of the controversy of the NIVI was not the journal articles (like the famous “Stealth” one from the *World* magazine), not the reporting of the controversy in *Christianity Today* (which took a decidedly pro-Zondervan stance), not the process of developing translational rules of good practice, not the issue of who was and who was not invited to the Colorado Springs meetings by Dr. James Dobson to draft a document concerning good translational procedure. “Rather, the entire problem was caused by the fundamental *fact* underneath it all: the people who controlled the NIV were making changes in it that significantly distorted the meaning of the Word of God.”⁶¹

Again, the issue at stake is authority—the authority of God’s Word. Which is more authoritative? God’s Word with all of its 4000 male pronouns, or postmodern feminist critiques.

GENDER ROLES IN THE CHURCH

We have come a long way from Dorothy Harrison Pentecost’s classic on *The Pastor’s Wife and the Church*.⁶² Now we read, and hopefully not too much, of the latest feminist critique and diatribe against paternalistic forms of church government. For example, Denise Landner Carmody writes “To understand the new scholarly study of the Goddess and the new witchcraft, one must appreciate the need for self-affirmation that many women feel nowadays.”⁶³ We immediately note the anthropocentrism, or actually, the gynaiocentrism, in her comments. She refers to the opening lines of the play, *Womanspirit Rising*, where the actor, no actress, no person playing a part, says, “I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely.”⁶⁴ Carmody desires the new mixing of Christianity and the Goddess religion because it provides women with a better role model, with better rituals, with greater self-esteem, with more attention to the feminine body.

Now it is true that Jesus calls on both men and women to hear His Word and to obey it. God commands mutual submission in the Church: “and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). It is also true that the Spirit gives gifts to all true believers, male and female, as He wills. All have been baptized into Christ, all have been lavished by His love. All have received the Holy Spirit. But it is also true that verses like 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; and 1 Peter 3:1-6 are in the Bible! Gretchen Gaebelein Hull acknowledges this, but then goes on to insinuate that the verses are too

⁵⁸ Ephesians 2:22 (NIV) And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

⁵⁹ For a similar collective vs. individual translation issue cf. the translations of the NIV and NIVI at John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

⁶⁰ The NIV reads: “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,”

⁶¹ Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Controversy*, pp. 27-28?

⁶² (Chicago: Moody, 1964).

⁶³ Denise Landner Carmody, *Feminism and Christianity: A Two-Way Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

hard to understand and, that as difficult verses, they should not be taken as authoritatively informative in the present debate concerning gender roles in the church and home.⁶⁵

Again, I see the problem a one of authority. John W. Robins concurs in his assessment entitled *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries, Part One: Feminism, the Most Serious Error*.⁶⁶ He writes, “The demand for the ordination of women, as rebellious as it is in itself, is a symptom of a much more serious malady. The ordination of women might disfigure the church, but the disease of which it is a symptom will kill her unless it is quickly diagnosed and treated. That disease. . . is the rejection of Bblical authority.”⁶⁷ Yes, the egalitarians appeal to Scripture—especially to their Magna Carta for female liberation—Galatians 3:28.⁶⁸ But they twist the obvious meaning of the verse, which, by the way, refers to our unity in the Body of Christ, to our equal spiritual position in Him, but the verse in no way abrogates the differences of gender distinctions and role functions. The proponents of biblical complementarity, on the other hand, seek to analyze all the relevant texts of Scripture, for a doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it accurately summarizes all that the Bible has to say about it.⁶⁹

For sake of time, I will look at two controversial passages, even if they are hard to understand. These passages are 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:22-12.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 reads, “³⁴ Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. ³⁵ And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” Now we remember that in chapter 11:5⁷⁰ that women were permitted to prophecy, so they were permitted to speak! There does seem to be a growing trend, at least in the Midwest, to prohibit women from saying anything in church. Well, if 14:34 does not mean absolute silence, then, what does it mean? We also notice that this was not merely a commandment for the Corinthians alone as if they were in some peculiar situation with overly aggressive women. Paul uses, by the direction of the Holy Spirit, the plural word “churches.” It was an injunction for all the churches. In those days, during the church services, prophecies might be uttered. They were to be spontaneous, personally-given revelations from the Holy Spirit. There was, of course, the possibility of error in that a believer might have incorrectly thought that he had received a revelation when in fact he had not, or he may have incorrectly communicated it to the other believers. This meant that every prophecy needed to be judged, or tested, to see if it were true (14:29-30).⁷¹ This magisterial role and responsibility was reserved for men alone, and the entire procedure was to be done in an orderly fashion. 1 Corinthians 14, therefore, teaches that women were not allowed to judge the prophecies. Otherwise, they would be judging men, and especially problematic, judging their husbands. The testing of the prophecies and their teachings was a role reserved for the men. Both men and women could prophecy, but only the men could test the prophecies—otherwise the church service would encourage wives to critique their own husbands in front of the church! This kind of authority, the responsibility and power to give direction to another in the assembly, is reserved for the men (see also 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17).

1 Timothy 2:9-12 is another controversial passage.⁷² 1 Timothy 2:12 uses the present infinitive “to teach” and it carries the idea of “being a teacher.” In 1 Timothy 2:12, we see that women are not merely permitted to learn—they are commanded to learn. This was an “advancement” over rabbinic Judaism which forbade the

⁶⁵ Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1987), pp. 187ff.

⁶⁶ (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ **Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

⁶⁹ The benchmark work on biblical complementarity is: John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991). See also: John MacArthur, jr., *Different by Design: Discovering God's Will for Today's Man and Woman* (no place: Victor Books, 1994).

⁷⁰ **1 Corinthians 11:5** But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

⁷¹ **1 Corinthians 14:29-30** ²⁹ Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. ³⁰ If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

⁷² **1 Timothy 2:9-12** ⁹ In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; ¹⁰ But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. ¹¹ Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. ¹² But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

instruction of women in the Scripture. The women, Paul instructed, were to be submissive by not usurping authority, and they were to keep quiet by not teaching. The women are forbidden to have authority over the men. Again, I think that this stems from the teachings for the home. It would be chaotic to have men lead in the home, but once in the church to have their wives lead them. The injunctions in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy are not conditioned by culture, by the way, nor are they necessitated by the fall, but they are rooted in the original creation of humanity when the world was still “very good.” Women are not to teach authoritatively in the church. The principle would also extend to the prohibition for teaching men in a solo capacity.

After the Auca Indians martyred Elisabeth Eliot’s husband and the other missionary men there in Ecuador, she did not then step into the role of church teacher in the absence of any missionary men who could speak the language. Every week, she taught one of the Auca men the sermon for the week, and he in turn, then, taught it to the people. We can learn from her example.

- There is a place for women to ask questions (in Q & A sessions—see Acts 17:2-4⁷³).
- There is a place for women to teach (in non-authoritarian settings and if teaching a man to do so in cooperation and submission to her own husband—see Acts 18:24-26⁷⁴).
- There is a place for women to pray (see Acts 1:13-14;⁷⁵ but not in a leadership/pastoral way see 1 Timothy 2:8⁷⁶ with the word *aner*).

The authority/leadership in the church, the divinely called, spirit-equipped, gifted men who take *primary* responsibility in the church for teaching and equipping others are to be men, not women. I realize that this straightforward declaration offends the sensitive minds of many postmodern Christians, but it is Biblical. Besides, there are still plenty of secondary leadership and service opportunities available within the local church for men and women, opportunities beyond that of ordained leadership. Manhood and womanhood is better preserved, better nurtured, more fulfilling and more fruitful when we follow God’s authority, His design for the church and home; yes, more fulfilling than following any other order established by man, or humanity for that matter ☺! We should take note that the gifts given by the Spirit, like that of teaching (Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:28) are regulated by the Spirit. As an aside, I also note that minimizing the complementary differences between men and women results in a confusion of sexual identity and ultimately results in a homosexualization of society, and I think that we are seeing the results of this today.

John Piper writes, “If I were to put my fingers on one devastating sin today, it would not be the so-called women’s movement, but the lack of spiritual leadership by men at home and in the church.”⁷⁷ He also writes, “The spiritual aimlessness and weakness and lethargy and loss of nerve among men is the major issue, not the upsurge of interest in women’s ministries.”⁷⁸ “The realities of headship and submission in marriage have their counterparts in the church.”⁷⁹ May we commit ourselves today to fulfill our divinely mandated gender roles. May we submit to God’s authority, and not seek so-called liberation according to the mantras of postmodernism. Evangelicalism, and now Fundamentalism, is facing a crisis of authority.⁸⁰

⁷³ **Acts 17:2-4** ² And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³ Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. ⁴ And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

⁷⁴ **Acts 18:24-26** ²⁴ And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶ And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

⁷⁵ **Acts 1:13-14** ¹³ And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son of Alphaeus*, and Simon *Zelotes*, and Judas *the brother of James*. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

⁷⁶ **1 Timothy 2:8** I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

⁷⁷ John Piper, *What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible* (Westbrook, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 49.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁰ See John H. Armstrong, ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996).