

What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question our whole life is our answer. There is no neutrality. The answer has to be given not only in the words of the Church, but in a life which follows the way Christ went, and so - in Paul's words - bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, manifests to the world his risen life, the life which is life indeed.¹

What do you think Newbigin means by the “universality” of Christ?

Why do we believe in Christ’s Universality? What about his person and Work make it so?

For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself a ransom for all-- this was attested at the right time. 1 Tim.2:5-7

Read WCF 8:1-2. What does it mean that Christ is described as our mediator.

A. A. Hodge: “As it respects God, it is absolutely necessary, in order to reconciliation, that the Mediator should propitiate the just displeasure of God by expiating the guilt of sin, and that he should supplicate in our behalf, and that he should actually introduce our persons and services to the acceptance of the Father. As it respects men, it is absolutely necessary that the Mediator should reveal to them the truth concerning God and their relations to him, and the conditions of acceptable service; that he should persuade and enable them to receive and obey the truth so revealed; and that he should so direct and sustain them, and so control all the outward influences to which they are subjected, that their deliverance from sin and from the powers of an evil world shall be perfected.”

Notice how the confession treats Christology. What is the relationship between the "person" and "work" of Christ. See then how section 1 relates to section 2.

Why then does the "person" of Christ lead the confession to acknowledge the exclusive claims that Christ is "the only Mediator between God and man."

How does Christ execute the office of Mediator? What “offices” does he satisfy in order to reconcile humanity to God? C.f .Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 43

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

Question 44

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his
once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of his people;
and in making continual intercession for them.

Question 45

Q How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A Christ executeth the office of a king,
in calling out of the world a people to himself,
and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them;
in bestowing saving grace upon his elect,
rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins,

¹ J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Witnesses to the World* 1987.

preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings,
restraining and overcoming all their enemies,
and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good;
and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel.

Read 8: 3-4. Note that the various perfections of Christ are part of his equipment for his mediatorial task; as the Assembly says, “to the end, that...him might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety.” Note how many of the biblical texts substantiate this:

Heb. 7:26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Acts 10:37 “that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Heb. 7:22 by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. 23 Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.

Note also that, despite his perfections, Christ did not take his Mediatorship upon himself, but was called to it.

Heb. 5:4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Eph.1:4, "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...

"The business of man's salvation was transacted upon covenant terms between the Father and the Son from all eternity... What grace was that which was given us in Christ before the world began, but this grace of redemption which was from everlasting thus contrived and designed for us, in that way which hath been here opened?" (John Flavel, p.61)

Read 8:5-8. 1. The Assembly observes that Jesus “hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father”. This can only be done through substitution. So Romans 5:19: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.”

Therefore, the confession uses Biblical language when saying that Christ was "made under the law." (section 4, Gal.4:4) What does this mean?

We who are rightly born under the law are now justified NOT "by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." (Gal.2:16) This is because Christ, who is not rightly born under the law was for our sake born under the law and in submission to its terms of contract that he for us he IS justified by the works of the law. This then is the meaning of Paul's proclamation, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"-- that our status as a "life" with God is based on Christ's status as under the law before God. Again, this is the meaning of Paul's exclaim, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." (Gal.3:13)

What is the present global and cultural context for us talking about the universality of Christ? How should we respond? Is there a way to both embrace pluralism and the need for mutually beneficial dialogue with people of other religions, while at the same time affirming the universality of Christ and the claim, “*I am the way the truth and life, not man comes to the father except by me.*” [note common and special revelation]

As Nietzsche foresaw, the operation of Descartes' "critical principle" which has dominated the "modern" era, has by logical necessity destroyed itself and removed the possibility of certain knowledge. The "post-modernists" have been those who have most explicitly drawn this conclusion, but the belief that ultimate truth is unknowable, and that everyone is entitled to an opinion, has become one of the unquestioned assumptions of our culture. It is, of course, a self-contradictory belief, since one cannot assert that ultimate reality is unknowable without knowing what ultimate reality is. But this belief is overwhelmingly pervasive, and because the Church has lived so long in a cozy domestication with the "modern" worldview, it is inevitable that the same assumption seeps into the life of the Church. "Tolerance" becomes the supreme virtue and "doctrine" becomes a slightly suspect word.²

² J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Pluralism in the Church* (1993)