CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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EXCURSUS: CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM (Part X)

Evangelicalism, in the assessment of Carl Raschle, is in a state of crisis because it is being confronted with "an intellectual challenge of a magnitude it has never before confronted."[1] And just what is this foreboding thing? Simply put (but difficult to define precisely) it is "Post-modernity." Aschle, as the title of his book makes clear, contends that the Church at large must embrace this state of affairs. But this kind of "chicken little" response to the changing tides engulfing our culture is nothing new. A similar alarm was sounded at the turn of the eighteenth century by Friedrich Schleiermacher. Sinclair Ferguson recently observed along these lines that, "In his own way, Schleiermacher had patented and branded a 'seeker sensitive' theology that (he certainly believed) made the gospel relevant to his contemporaries – 'the cultured despisers of religion' who, under the spell of the Enlightenment, had given up on the possibility that Christian doctrine could be true. For them the knowledge of God was no longer attainable. Kant's critique of reason had limited it to the knowledge of the phenomenal realm; access to the noumenal was barred. Schleiermacher, refusing to believe that all was lost, turned things on their head, stressing that the essence of true Christian faith was the feeling or sense of absolute dependence upon God."[2] The most alarming development over the last few years centers around the proposals of this group that also fondly refers to itself as "Post-Modern evangelicals" or "Post-Conservative Evangelicals." The term "Post-Conservative" was first coined by erstwhile Evangelical Arminian Roger Olson in the pages of *The Christian Century*.[3] Critics like Millard Erickson described this as the new "Evangelical Left," and has taken umbrage with how Olson has responded to his critics.[4] Olson, in mirroring the Post-Liberal Yale school theologians like the late Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, wants very much for Evangelicalism to escape what he calls the Old Princeton's hegemony with its stifling scholastic methodology. In particular, Olson complains that the Old Princeton placed way too much emphasis on such doctrines as penal substitutionary atonement and Biblical inerrancy. These supposedly distinctive trademarks of genuine Evangelicalism need to be abandoned.[5] As we shall see, this has struck a very responsive cord in what goes by the name "The Emergent Conversation." The late Robert Webber, one of the individuals who openly celebrated the developments identified with the "Evangelical Mega-Shift," sees the rise of the Postmodern evangelicals as the next step in this mega-shift, calling it "a new evangelical awakening."[6] Another highly influential figure (also with direct links to the Evangelical Mega-Shift) was the late Stanley Grenz. Grenz was, in many ways, the most prominent figure in the group, and his writings continued to provide the theological and philosophical identity for the movement. Grenz argues that the break between the modern and post-modern worlds may rival in historical significance the shift from the Middle Ages to modernity. "Fundamentally," he argues, "post-modernism is an intellectual orientation that is critical and seeks to move beyond the philosophical tenets of the Enlightenment, which lie at the foundation of the now dying modern mindset." As such, the new intellectual era calls for "nothing less than a rebirth of theological reflection among evangelicals."[7]

I. GOD AND TIME (2 Peter 3:8, 9)

The renderings of verse 9 include these: (1) "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but

everyone to come to repentance" (NIV); (2) "The 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" (KJV); (3) "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (ASV); (4) "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (NASB); (5) "It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance" (NEB); (6) "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (RSV). For our purposes there is little to be concerned about beyond the rendering of the last clause, almost uniformly rendered as that "all" should come to repentance (The NIV has "everyone" for the almost uniform "all" and the RSV refers to "reaching" (repentance). It seems clear that the Lord according to the apostle is intensely interested in the ones identified as "all" coming to, or reaching, a state, or condition, defined as repentance. There is, however, according to the translators' renderings a slight difference in the intensity of the Lord's interest. In three of the renderings above, the Lord does not "wish" (the NIV has "wanting") anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. In two of them, He is not willing for anyone to perish. In one He does not want anyone to perish. In other words He does not wish, want, or will that any perish, but that all (undefined at this point in the paper) come to repentance.

What is involved in these statistics is ultimately a disagreement over the meaning of the Greek word BOULOMAI, a Greek word that is usually considered a strong word meaning <u>to will</u>, or <u>to purpose</u>, especially when used of God (Matt. 11:27; Luke 22:42; I Cor. 12:11). The other common word meaning to <u>wish</u>, ethelō, was usually considered the weaker word, but in the New Testament the distinction common in classical Greek does not appear to many interpreters to still be observed. And, in fact, in the opinion of many scholars, does not have as strong a sense as it had in classical times. I am not, however, totally convinced, and it is clear that the word may still express the divine will, as it does here. But let us turn to the defining problem. Just what is meant by the apostle when he says in verse 9, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." There is a difference of opinion over the meaning of the "anyone," and the "everyone" in the verse. And the solution of this problem throws light upon the theological position of the author, the Apostle Peter. Let us consider the problem and the major solutions offered.

A. **<u>First,</u>** Arminians generally interpret the "anyone" and the "everyone" of verse 9 to be words that refer to all individuals without exception. But pay careful attention to the words of the text. Peter says the Lord, whose promise to return, either to execute judgment upon the world or to deliver his ancient people from the predicted time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), is not slow in fulfilling his promises, or perhaps his specific promise to return, but is engaged in a different purpose in the present age. The scoffers may scoff, but the Lord has a different saving plan in mind. He is exercising longsuffering for his readers and others, because He is engaged in the accomplishment of the salvation of all the "beloved," for whom He is so concerned (cf. vv. 1, 8, 14, 17). It is clear from the text that the "beloved" ones for whom the apostle is so concerned, are believers. In verse 9, Peter says that the Lord is "patient with you" (NIV), or <u>longsuffering toward you</u>, as the original text has it. And he adds, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." There are some things to discuss here. First, is the rendering of the Greek verb in the clause, "not wanting anyone to perish," correct? I have already touched upon the two Greek words meaning <u>to wish</u> and <u>to will</u> generally. Unfortunately for an easy decision they have, it is thought, some overlaps in meaning. It has been generally thought that THEL□ essentially means <u>to wish</u> and is the weaker of the two words. My classical Greek teachers used to say this. The other

Greek word, BOULOMAI was said to be a bit stronger and meant to will, and to purpose. But unfortunately for doctrinal precision, the two verbs may have some overlap in meaning. Accuracy in translation depends upon analysis of context, where there is often as everyone knows, interpretive conflict, *BOULOMAI* is still regarded as the stronger word and, while some feel it may from time to time have the force of *THEL*□, to wish, I still think its most common sense is to will, or to purpose. Therefore, I would render verse nine's clause where the word occurs as not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance rather than as the word is rendered in the NIV, "not wanting anyone to perish." "Wanting" cannot compare with "willing" in the expression of a divine purpose, a divine intention to fulfill a goal, to complete a divinely designed task. It is difficult for a believer in a sovereign majestic deity to think of Him as "wanting" to accomplish a serious task, one that only a God can accomplish, with the implicit possibility that He may not be able to be successful. One is able to think of a child "wanting" an ice cream cone, but difficult to conceive of a mighty sovereign God "wanting" to accomplish something well within His power. Peter's verb, BOULOMAI, is better rendered by the verb to will than to want, and it is suitable to express a royal purpose and design, the purpose of a being who "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (cf. Eph. 1:11). Shrenk sums up the sense of the Greek verb BOULOMAI, is better rendered by the verb to will than to want, and it is suitable to express a royal purpose and design, the purpose of a being who "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (cf. Eph. 1:11). Shrenk sums up the sense of the Greek verb BOULOMAI here in this way, "Similarly in 2 Peter 3:9 the word expresses the divine will to save."[8]

II THE IMPORTANT PARTICULARS

Now, for some important points. *First,* who is the "you" of verse nine, whom the Lord does not will to perish? The answer to the question is easy and clear. The "you" are identified four times (vv. 1, 8, 14, 17) in the context as "beloved." The term beloved in the Greek text is a verbal adjective, perhaps suggesting that the one to whom it applies is the object of love, in this case derived by the early believers from their sense of being the objects of the Father's love, for He had used this term of His Son at His baptism and transfiguration (Matt. 3:17; 17:5).[9] He does not will that His beloved ones perish. His beloved ones who belong to Him are related to Him as sons and daughters. There is no slackness, or hesitation, in him. He is simply longsuffering toward his saints and diligent in gathering His sheep into the fold, unwilling to lose a one of them.

Second, we must identify the individuals referred to by the word anyone (Gr., *TINAS*) in verse nine. It clearly, as interpreters agree, does not refer to the same word in the original language, *TINES* (translated by the word "some" in the NIV, used earlier in the verse but in a different case), which refers to those who have a certain understanding of slowness. The "any," or "anyone," of verse 9 is used in contrast to the *PANTAS*, translated by "everyone" in the verse, that is, everyone of the "you" mentioned earlier in the verse. Bauckham has it right, "*TINAS* ('any') does not take up *TINES* ('some people') in v. 9a, but contrasts with *PANTAS* ('all'): God desires all, without exception, to repent and escape damnation. But *PANTAS* ("all") is clearly limited by humas ('you')."[10] In other words, when Peter writes, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance," the "anyone" and the everyone," or "all," refer to those who belong to the "you," that is, the believing body, the "beloved" ones. The apostle is not speaking of the scoffers, or of all generally, but of all particularly, all of the "beloved" ones.

Third, we must have a brief further discussion of the words "not wanting," the rendering of the Greek words ME BOULOMENOS (NIV, "not wanting"). Having been trained in classical Greek, I find it difficult to forget that this verb is a rather strong verb, and its common meaning was not to wish or to want, but to will or to purpose. In New Testament times, THELŌ, or ETHELŌ, has almost crowded it out. BOULOMAI, however, still has significant strength.

According to Schrenk,[11] it is used of apostolic authority and, further, it is a term that emphasizes the apostolic authority. It may emphasize the will of God, and in Hebrews 6:17 it is used to express the eternal purpose of God. This raises questions about its rendering in 2 Peter 3:9 in the NIV as "not wanting anyone to perish," a weak rendering even suggesting that the sovereign God of heaven is not able to carry out His will. I much prefer "not willing that any should perish," as the KJV has it, or "it is not his will for any to be lost," which is the translation of the New English Bible. The resultant meaning is that Peter's statement is that God is not willing that any of the elect shall perish, noted above.

CONCLUSION: John Owen, who has thought and written about the nature and intent of the atonement about as much as anyone, has said this about 2 Peter 3:9 in his seventeenth century English: "That indefinite and general expressions are to be interpreted in an answerable proportion to the things whereof they are affirmed, is a rule in the opening of the Scripture. See, then, of whom the apostle is here speaking. 'The Lord,' saith he, 'is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish.' Will not common sense teach us that <u>us</u> is to be repeated in both the following clauses, to make them up complete and full,--namely, 'Not willing that any of <u>us</u> should perish;, but that all of <u>us</u> should come to repentance?' Now, who are these of whom the apostle speaks, to whom he writes? Such as had received 'great and precious promises,' chap. i. 4, whom he calls 'beloved,' chap. iii. 1, whom he opposeth to the 'scoffers' of the 'last days,' verse 3; to whom the Lord hath respect in the disposal of these days; who are said to be 'elect,' Matt. Xxiv. 22. Now, truly, to argue that because God would have none of those to perish, but all of them to come to repentance, therefore he hath the same will and mind towards all and every one in the world (even those to whom he never makes known his will, nor ever calls to repentance, if they never once hear of his way of salvation), comes not much short of extreme madness and folly. Neither is it of any weight to the contrary that they were not all elect to whom Peter wrote: for in the judgment of charity he esteemed them so, desiring them 'to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure,' chap. I 10; even as he expressly calleth those to whom he wrote his former epistle, 'elect,' chap. i. 2, and a 'chosen generation,' as well as a 'purchased people,' chap. ii. 9 . . . The text is clear, that it is all and only the elect whom he would not have to perish."[12]

ENDNOTES

[1] Carl Raschle, <u>the Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity</u> (Zondervan, 2004) p. 1.

[2] Sinclair Ferguson in <u>Justified In Christ</u> ed. K. Scott Oliphint. (Christian Focus Publication. 2007) p. IX.

[3] "Post-Conservatives Greet The Postmodern Age," The Christian Century 112 (May 3, 1995). Olson in a recent exchange with Mike Horton, declared that he never claimed that he was a "postconservative" evangelical saying, "I did not 'spearhead' post-conservative evangelicalism, nor did I announce it as a 'program.' In my descriptive article in Christian Century where I coined that term ('postconservative evangelicalism') I merely set out to describe a new mood among certain evangelicals. I said that it is not a movement (let alone a 'program'). And nowhere did I identify myself as postconservative; in fact I included some cautionary notes at the end of the article. I gladly admit that I have some sympathies with this new mood of evangelical theology that is dissatisfied with maintenance of the status quo as evangelicalism theology's main task. But I have not promoted any 'postconservative evangelical program.' I have simply sought to bring this new mood to public attention and gain some understanding for it. When I wrote that postconservative evangelicals are not necessarily committed to the Chalcedonian formula of Christology I did not mean that they have anything less than a high Christology of Christ as human and divine; I only meant that they are not necessarily committed to the technical language and concepts of the doctrine of the hypostatic union. There are other ways to express a high Christology and some postconservative theologians have attempted to do it without in any way denying Christ's full and true deity and humanity." See "The Nature & Future of Evangelicalism: A Dialogue between Michael Horton & Roger Olson," http://www.modernreformation.org/mhro03dial.htm.

[4] M. Erickson, <u>The Evangelical Left</u> (Baker 2000), and his chapter "On Flying In Theological Fog" in <u>Reclaiming The Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation In Postmodern Times</u> eds. Millard Erickson, Paul K. Joss Helseth, Justin Taylor (Crossway, 2004). We gladly acknowledge our debt to this particular book that served to stimulate our own.

[5] Olson has displayed an intense dislike for Reformed theology in general and Old Princeton in particular. In his most recent book, <u>Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities</u> (IVP, 2006), Olson takes umbrage with Warfield's review of his contemporary, the noted Methodist theologian John Miley, which appears in the *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield II*, ed. J. Meeter (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973) pp. 308-320. Olson calls this "a lengthy attack" (26) and elsewhere a "caustic attack" (278),declaring that Warfield's criticisms "were stated in such an extreme way as to raise questions about Warfield's own generosity of interpretation and treatment of fellow Christians. Many twentieth century Calvinists know little about Arminianism except what they read in nineteenth-century Calvinist theologians Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield. Both were vitriolic critics who could not

bring themselves to see any good in Arminianism. And they blamed it for every possible evil consequence they could see it possibly having" (26).

[6] Robert Webber, The Younger Evangelicals (Baker 2002). Webber's earlier work Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Post-modern World (Beker, 1999) serves as a primer for many Post-modern evangelicals.

[7] As cited in The Challenge of Post-modernism: An Evangelical Engagement ed. D. S. Dockery (Baker, 1995), p. 78.

[8] G. Schrenk, in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament I, ed. G. Kittel (Eerdmans, 1964) p. 632.

[9] The rendering of the term agapamos by "dear friends" in the NIV is, in my opinion, a very dull and flat rendering that misses the essence of the apostle's term, which is that the individuals so addressed are the objects and recipients of divine love.

[10] Bauckham, op. cit., p. 313.

[11] Schrenk, TDNT, 1, 632-33.

[12] William H. Goold, ed., The Works of John Owen (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), X. 348-49. The language is perhaps a bit stilted, but the sense is eminently plain and pointed. Owen in these sentences assumes that 1 and 2 Peter are written to the same general body of people. I owe the substance of this analysis of this important text to my former professor of theology, the Late S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.