

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: Exposition of Romans

Number: 122

Text: Romans 10:1-13; John 14:6; Acts 4:8-12; I John 5:11-12

Date: July 20, 2008 (am)

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## THE JUDGMENT OF GOD: A MOST INCONVENIENT TRUTH (PART IV)

We are told in Jude 3 that as Christians, we bear the responsibility to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. Every generation of Christians down through the centuries have had to face challenges and theological errors that threatened the Faith. It has been recently noted that of the many doctrinal challenges facing the Church today, the most critical may be opposition to the traditional, Biblical view of God and the doctrine of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Noted sociologist James Davidson Hunter very acutely identified this developing situation on the campuses of a large number of Christian colleges over two decades ago. The exclusivism and finality of the claims of Christianity is perceived to be arrogant. To claim that the Christian Faith is the one absolutely true faith now creates discomfort for many Christians. “The emotional, not to mention intellectual, hostility this would engender for non-Christians is predictable. Yet without this particularity, there is no orthodoxy (historically understood). In the face of intense religious and cultural pluralism in the past century, the pressures to deny Christianity’s exclusive claims to truth have been fantastic. Intensive cultural pluralism, one of the hallmarks of the modern world order, has, at least in the United States, institutionalized an ethic of toleration and civility. To be sure, the net effect of theological liberalism in the past century and a half has been the repudiation of the exclusivism of the Bible (as the only true religious authority), and of faith in Jesus Christ (as the only means of eternal salvation). Yet by contrast, the heritage of Evangelicalism in the past century has been one of continuity with historic Christianity along these lines—a stout defense of these principles. Along with the defense of the Bible, this posture has largely defined the character of conservative Protestantism in America. Once more, however, shifts in the Evangelical theological view of salvation are discernible.”<sup>2</sup> Not too long ago, the book by Boston College philosophy professor Peter Kreeft, titled Ecumenical Jihad: Ecumenism and the Culture War (Ignatius Press, 1996) burst on the scene. Kreeft has become a very popular author with many Evangelicals. His books are highly recommended by Memoria Press and The Classical Teacher: Materials, Methods, and Motivation for Classical Education, which is aimed at Christian schools.

In the first half of the book Kreeft aptly describes the state of moral decay in our world today (Kreeft is not the first person to call our attention to this state of affairs<sup>3</sup>) and issues a call to arms to engage in the culture wars that are engulfing all of humanity. Kreeft contends that this can only be done by enlisting *all* of the world’s great religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). This type of co-belligerence, you might remember, was what galvanized the now famous (or infamous, depending on your perspective) ECT document.<sup>4</sup> Kreeft, however, has moved beyond simply calling Catholics and Evangelicals to lay aside their differences and join ranks to fight the fiends of secular humanism--Kreeft beckons us to embrace the other world religions as allies in this great battle. Let me say, at this point, that the trouble with ECT and Kreeft and their desire to enlist Evangelicals in “co-belligerence” is that, in both cases, Evangelicals are implicitly called upon to sacrifice theological distinctives in

the process. In the case of ECT, “sola fide” was laid aside and, as we will see with Kreeft, the doctrines of God, Christ, and salvation, end up being eviscerated of any meaningful Biblical content.

Peter Kreeft is in his own right something of an enigma. He was raised and nurtured in the Christian Reformed Church and even taught philosophy at Calvin College before converting to Roman Catholicism. He is a gifted writer, which I think accounts for his popularity among many within the rank and file of Evangelicalism. The book carries the glowing endorsement of two very high profile Evangelicals: Chuck Colson and J. I. Packer (both of whom also signed the ECT document). Well then, the book can’t be all that bad, can it? Yes, it can, and here is why.

## I. UNIVERSALISTIC INCLUSIVISM

This is the view that says that God will save everyone on the basis of the work of Christ—but (and this is the key) they will be saved regardless of whether or not they actually come to personal faith in Christ in this life. In other words, there is salvation for people both now and after death – (postmortem). Kreeft advocates, in a way that advances the position of Vatican II and Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner,<sup>5</sup> that the world religions are not outside the scope of God’s saving activities. The way that Kreeft goes about defending this thesis is very unique. He *claims* to have had an OBE (out of body experience) while he was surfing off the East coast of the United States during a hurricane (this says something about the man’s lack of common sense!). Suddenly, he tells us, he was overwhelmed by a huge wave and was sure he was going to drown--the next thing he knew he was surfing through a bright light onto the shore of what he calls a heavenly beach with sand that was golden bright. Kreeft noticed a man with a surf board walking toward him who bore a striking resemblance to the pictures of Confucius that Kreeft had seen in various books. Well, lo and behold, guess who it was? That’s right, it was Confucius! Kreeft had a long and interesting conversation with the Chinese philosopher before discovering that his heavenly beach party was also attended by Buddha, Muhammad, and Moses (all of whom engage Kreeft in heady theological discussion). As it turns out, Kreeft ends up being scolded by this celestial quartet for his arrogant Christian exclusiveness. Kreeft’s dialogue with Muhammad in particular is most revealing. We are told that despite Muhammad’s categorical rejection of the claims of Christ, the Islamic prophet enjoys everlasting life, because *after* death he at once recognized Jesus as his Savior and worshiped Him. Kreeft has Muhammad saying, “I hope most of my pious followers will follow this last step of my pilgrimage as well. If they cannot do it on earth, they may still do so in Heaven, as I did” (p. 105). Where does the Bible sanction such a belief? It does not--rather the Scriptures emphatically teach the very opposite (cf. Hebrews 2:3; 3:12-13; 4:1-7; 6:6; and especially 9:27). There is no *second chance* for repentance after death.

Are we actually to believe that Kreeft went to heaven and there found the likes of Confucius, Buddha, and especially Muhammad?<sup>6</sup> Kreeft is not content to simply argue his case based on the Biblical and theological evidence. He attempts to sanction his position by a direct appeal to a heavenly experience. In the final analysis, this is no different than the absurd claim made by Betty Eadie in her runaway best seller, Embraced by the Light.<sup>7</sup> She too claims an OBE and a trip to heaven. Since neither Eadie nor Kreeft can substantiate their “special revelations” from Scripture, who are we to believe? Both are advocating another gospel and, as such, come under an Apostolic anathema (Galatians 1:8). (To be continued.)

**CONCLUSION:** W. G. T. Shedd correctly pointed out that all forms of Universalism have very slender exegetical basis. Kreeft's book is a classic example. The overwhelming Biblical data opposing Universalism is an embarrassment to those who seek to establish a clear Scriptural case for their beliefs and so defenders of Universalism have to resort to appealing to human feeling and emotion or, like Kreeft, to personal experience and the like. There are various forms of Universalism. Some, like the one Kreeft is promoting, want to claim that the work of Christ secures salvation explicitly for everyone regardless of whether or not they embrace the Gospel in this life because they will have an opportunity to do so after death. Hebrews 9:27 and Jesus' words in John 5:28-29 says otherwise. Lurking behind all forms of Universalism is a distorted understanding of a number of critically important doctrines. The organic nature of Christian belief is obvious says Shedd. "The denial of endless punishment is usually associated with the denial of those tenets which are logically and closely connected with it—such as original sin, vicarious atonement, and regeneration. Of these, vicarious atonement is the most incompatible of any with universal salvation; because the latter doctrine, as has been observed, implies that suffering for sin is remedial only, while the former implies that it is retributive. Suffering that is merely educational does not require a vicarious atonement in order to release from it. But suffering that is judicial and punitive can be released from the transgressor, only by being inflicted upon a substitute. He, therefore, who denies personal penalty must, logically, deny vicarious penalty. If the sinner himself is not obliged by justice to suffer in order to satisfy the law he has violated, then, certainly, no one needs suffer for him for this purpose."<sup>8</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> P. R. House and G. A. Thornbury, Who Will Be Saved? Defending the Biblical Understanding of God, Salvation & Evangelism (Crossway, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> J. D. Hunter, Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation (Univ. of Chicago, 1987) p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> To mention only a couple of recent works: James D. Hunter of the University of Virginia authored Culture Wars (Harper, 1991) and Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture Wars (1994); Michael Scott Horton wrote an excellent volume on the subject, Beyond Culture Wars (Moody, 1994); Christianity Today devoted two issues to this theme (March 6, 1995) and (June 19, 1995). In other words, Kreeft is not telling us something that we don't already know.

<sup>4</sup> ECT stands for Evangelicals and Catholics Together and was issued in the spring of 1993. For analysis see the Pastor's Perspective, Vol. II, No.1, 2, and 7, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Rahner (1904-1984), who was very influential at Vatican II, advocated the concept of "the anonymous Christian," that is, there are people who are really "Christians" but don't know it. They may be out and out pagans or devout followers of some other religion, but this does not disqualify them from really being "Christian;" cf. his Theological Investigation, V (Helicon Press, 1966), chapters 5, 6, & 7. Rahner came under severe criticism from noted Catholic theologian Hans Von Balthasar for reducing the church's missionary vision. Rahner chose to ignore criticisms from the right and paid attention only to the left-wing party in the Roman Catholic Church; cf. I. Puthiadam, "Christian Faith and the Life in a World of Religious Pluralism," Concilium 135 (1980).

<sup>6</sup> I single out Muhammad simply because he is the only one of the three that came into contact with some form of Christianity and the New Testament. For an insightful analysis of Islam and Muhammad see Robert Morey, The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion (Harvest House, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the Pastor's Perspective, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1994. It is interesting to note that Eadie claims that "Jesus" personally told her that *all* religions are "very precious and important in Jesus' sight." The Apostle Paul strongly disagreed with this particular "Jesus" (cf. Acts 17:22-31; Galatians 1:6-9; Colossians 2:18; II Corinthians 11:4).

<sup>8</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, The Doctrine of Endless Punishment (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1977) p.5.