

# Introduction to a Discussion

By Charles Scriven

To Euro-American eyes, Christianity may appear to be losing ground, but it is actually growing. Faith in Christ is surging in Africa and Asia, and continuing to flourish in Central and South America. This means that *Euro-American* Christianity is losing ground, or at least losing its monopoly on the gospel: Western interpretations of Christ no longer have—or at least cannot continue to have—the dominant place.

What complicates matters further is this: In the West, at least, the postmodern sensibility, with its critique of arrogance, is casting doubt on every claim to final truth. As this sensibility gains strength, people who think they know it all, or exhibit certitude about the things that matter most, seem not only ignorant but also dangerous.

How, then, shall we understand the assertion—made, according to Acts, by Peter—that there is salvation “in no one else” but the risen Jesus? Christians have echoed this assertion down the years. In leading the theological resistance to Hitler, Karl Barth, the most influential theologian of the twentieth century, wrote that the church could acknowledge no source of its proclamation “apart from and besides”  
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SALVATION

THROUGH

JESUS

CHRIST

Christ the Light of  
the World

Jesus Christ, Salvation, and  
the New Diversity

The Meaning of Salvation  
in African Context

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# SPECTRUM

Jesus Christ, the "one Word of God."

If you consider all this to be true, what does it mean? And who, among the widening variety of Christian interpreters, has the authority to say?

Once Adventists could quote the Gospel Commission—"Go...and make disciples of all nations"—without fretting about anything but logistics. Now, amid the new diversity, we must ask what sense this makes. What, today, does our passion for worldwide witness actually mean?

From day one, as Matthew 28 says, "some doubted." To the ones who first heard the Gospel Commission, the questions were difficult; from the start the difficulty was acknowledged. We may perhaps infer, then, a blessing upon those who now read such passages as Matthew 28:16–20, Acts 4:10–12, and Romans 10:9–17, and feel hesitant or insecure.

How, indeed, shall we interpret Christ in light of the new diversity? How shall we proclaim the gospel amid the sheer tumult of variety around us—variety of hair and skin and gender, to be sure, but also of politics, culture, and religion?

Consider these facts: In New Testament perspective, Jesus is pivotal for salvation; consciousness of religious pluralism—pluralism as a reality and pluralism as an attitude of respect for others—is growing; post-modern doubt is undermining claims to universally valid moral or religious truth. Consider, too, that Western authority over the interpretation of Christian texts is on the wane.

Now ask: Do Christian assertions regarding salvation through Christ still hold, and if so why? If Christ remains the key, how shall we meet postmodern objections to religious certitude? And if we succeed in that, how, amid diverse expressions of Christian faith, shall we assure the authenticity of the Church's thought and practice? Furthermore, what is the relevance and validity, if any, of "contextualization" in witness? If the Gospel Commission holds for today, in other words, may the Church's message be shaped to accommodate cultural differences? If so, how can that gospel's authenticity be preserved?

Salvation through Christ belongs to the heart of Adventism. Those are the questions, or some of them, that the new diversity poses to us all.

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