

Punt, Neal. *Unconditional Good News: Toward an Understanding of Biblical Universalism*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980. x + 169 pp. Paperback, \$6.95.

In this volume, Neal Punt attempts to provide a solution to the questions raised by "universalist texts" such as Rom 5:18 and 1 Cor 15:22, and many others. While various Bible passages seem to indicate that all human beings are saved, numerous other texts declare that many persons will be lost.

Punt rejects the limited atonement of Calvin, which cannot be harmonized with the rest of Scripture, especially the many passages which express the divine amazement at the stubborn refusal of man to accept the salvation that God has offered (e.g., Matt 23:37). How could God have that attitude if some were excluded from heaven by his own divine decision?

Punt cannot accept, either, the potential salvation taught by Lutherans and Arminians, who assert that salvation is dependent upon human decisions. For Punt, the NT refers to a salvation that is accomplished and settled, not dependent upon human will. Thus, while he denies the limited atonement of the Calvinists, he supports their particularism.

Punt asserts that the cause for our difficulties with the universalist texts is our insistence on stating that "all are lost except. . . ." He suggests the formula, "All are elect in Christ except those whom the Bible declares will be lost"; and he adds that the Bible clearly teaches that those exceptions are the people who did not "see fit to acknowledge God" (Rom 1:28). No one, therefore, can attribute his or her damnation to God, to the union of all of us with Adam in original sin, to the insufficiency of Christ's atonement, or even to the fact that the gospel was never presented to him or her (p. 30).

Certainly the effort to state positively the plan of salvation is appealing. Placing responsibility for one's eternal destiny on the individual rather than God fits in perfectly with the Bible thrust. It seems quite logical to believe that both fall and recovery are done federally by way of representation. As we fell in Adam, so we rise again in the Second Adam.

It seems difficult, however, to have both the cake of universalism and the frosting of particularism. The language of John 3:16, for example, does not seem to include an "except." The only factor of difference between those who receive eternal life and those who do not is "whosoever believes," thus recognizing the necessity of a human decision for salvation. The point which Punt does not sufficiently underline is the fact that election is in Christ, as head of the human family by his incarnation, his death, and his resurrection. This dimension of salvation has all the assurance of the Calvinist particularism. Election in Christ is an established

and secure fact that benefits the whole human family, who in Christ have received, like the prodigal son of the parable, the ring, the robe, and the shoes of sonship. The words spoken by the voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," were not only to Christ but to all mankind with whom Christ had just publicly identified himself. While the whole family has been restored to its original relation with God, each member, like Adam in the beginning, has to express his or her will to obey God and be a part of God's kingdom. This is a decision that has no meritorious value and must not be understood as "man's part" in his salvation. Thus we have both the breadth of universalism and the certainty of particularism in the Second Adam.

This book is stylistically well written and deals from a biblical standpoint with a most important and practical theme of theology. It will provide a rewarding experience for its readers.

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Richards, Lawrence O., and Martin, Gilbert R. *A Theology of Personal Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981. 332 pp. \$12.95.

The reader of this book must remember that he is studying a textbook. Like most textbooks, it requires more than just cursory reading. One of the most important hurdles in the understanding of this volume is mastering the vocabulary. The authors have used a minimum of terms from biblical and philosophical theology, but they have coined and borrowed terms that express their understanding of their theme, *a contemporary theology of the laity*. So the reader must come to sense the meaning (as understood by the authors) of such terms as "Believer-priests," "Body gifts," "Discipling," "Equipping," "Giftedness," "Identity," "Laos," "Personal Ministries," "Vision," "Modeling," "Gift of Prophecy," "Relationships," "Servanthood," etc.

A succinct summary of the structure of the book is found on p. 144: "The first part of the present text sought to define core theological truths that must be considered if we are to have God's perspective on personal ministries and giftedness. With a theology thus defined, we can now suggest some of the implications. *Then* we have a basis both to evaluate present practices and to develop ways of living together as Christ's church that better express God's plan for His body."

In harmony with this summary, the first part of the book is captioned, *Theological Core: The Identity of the Believer*. The chapter headings are "A People of God," "A New Covenant People," "A Kingdom People," "A Servant People," "An Empowered People," and "A Gifted People." The second part of the book is designated, *Practical Implications*. The chapter