

## The More-Loving-Than-God Argument (1)

A brother in Wales writes, “Though it has been formulated in various ways, one popular argument for common grace/well-meant offer (CG/WMO) is that God, after all, must love everybody, ‘otherwise He is outdone by His own creatures.’ I have named this ‘the more-loving-than-God argument’ for CG/WMO.”

The brother then lists six reasons why some people reckon it is necessary that God loves every man, woman and child that ever lived. I hope to treat these six individual points separately but, first of all, it is important to address the argument as a whole. It is interesting that these arguments continue to come up in the camp of the defenders of common grace. That this same argument, though in different forms, continues to appear becomes, at last, a sort of screech of desperation, because these arguments have been satisfactorily answered again and again. The fact is that they have been repeatedly refuted also by theologians outside the Protestant Reformed Churches. Nor can it be denied that this idea has been convincingly answered by the whole tradition of orthodox thought beginning with Augustine (354-430) and continuing through the theology of the Protestant Reformers and second-generation Reformers on into the mainstream of Reformed thinking throughout the world.

Defenders of common grace, though they are theological dwarfs in comparison to the giant theologians of bygone centuries, think they know such great things that they can, with a wave of the hand, dismiss the whole tradition of Reformed thought.

If you question the fact that a denial of CG/WMO is indeed the tradition of all solid Reformed thought, I urge you to read my most recent book, *Corrupting the Word of God: The History of the Well-Meant Offer* (available from the CPRC Bookstore for £16.50, including P&P, with cheques payable to “Covenant Protestant Reformed Church”).

In this issue of the *News*, I will give a few reasons why the notion that God loves all men cannot be supported. In later issues of the *News*, I will answer the arguments of those people who defend a universal love of God.

1) No one has ever presented any proof from Scripture that God loves all men. It is true that some, who are “unlearned and unstable [and] wrest ... the ... scriptures, unto their own destruction” (II Pet. 3:16), appeal to various texts but they do not properly interpret them in the light of the whole of God’s Word. These “proof texts” have been repeatedly answered over the ages, beginning with the great N. African theologian, Augustine. Just read Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, chapters 94-107 ([www.cprf.co.uk/articles/augustineenchiridion.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/augustineenchiridion.htm)) to learn what this ancient church father believed.

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2) If God loves all men, He loves the monsters of iniquity who have committed crimes so outrageous that our souls shudder even to read of them. Two modern examples are Hitler and Stalin. To say that God loves them when they never expressed one word of repentance for their heinous sins is preposterous. I have listened to one man who, in defence of his position, insisted God also loves Satan and all his demons.

3) It is a deadly travesty of God’s greatness to argue that He loves many whom He sends to hell at the end of their lives. If one wants to avoid such wicked notions, one can only conclude that all men without exception are finally saved. One wonders: all devils as well? Many, in defence of the heresy that God loves all men, have been forced into a universalistic theology.

4) If God’s love for all men is expressed in a divine desire to save everybody, He is a very weak God, a failure in His purpose and helpless to attain that which He earnestly desires—unless one does really want such a Bible-denying position as universalism.

5) Some may argue that not all are saved but only those who reject Christ. But the so-called well-meant offer is, after all, a part of common grace. And common grace insists that God gives every man the grace to accept or reject the gospel offer. This is sheer Arminianism, leaving the final determination for salvation up to man’s free will. Such a position has been condemned by the church of Christ for many centuries. What profit is there in resurrecting old heresies that have never been accepted by the church of Christ?

6) Finally, the truth of God’s sovereignty is the heart of the truth of the gospel. CG/WMO denies God’s sovereignty. This is a denial of the very essence of God. If God is not sovereign, God is not God. God, by definition, does as He pleases and has no need of man (Ps. 115:3; 135:6). Nor does He leave anything at all, especially His most important work—salvation—to man’s arbitrary will and final decision. I want no deity like that. He cannot do what I need most. He cannot overcome my sinful will, decisive in the question of an eternal heaven or hell. He is but an idol, worse than those the heathen worship and serve, for He cannot save those whom He loves and wants to save.

Because of my sin and depravity, I need a God who is absolutely sovereign. He has to overcome, with His powerful grace, all my resistance and make me willing, in the day of His power, to love Him. Then all glory belongs to Him and there is nothing else to do but praise and bless His holy name. I have come to know that there is not even 0.0001% of my salvation that I can do, and have to do, to be saved. Thank God, it is not so! Thank God that He does it all by the cross and Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nor does God do it by pulling me to heaven as a child pulls a toy duck over the floor, for He works in me “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). This is the wonder of God’s sovereign, transforming grace in Christ!

*Prof. Hanko*

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### Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Lord’s Day services at 11 am & 6 pm

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## Our Identity in Christ (1)

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One's identity refers to who one is. There are two issues here. First, what is it to be human in general? Second, who am I personally? Human identity and personal identity are probably bigger issues in our world today than ever before.

What is a person? Some 150 years ago, aboriginal people were viewed by some as subhuman, despite the fact that all of humanity has descended from our first parents, Adam and Eve (Acts 17:26). Similarly, 75 years ago, the Nazis wickedly classified certain people as *Untermenschen*, including the Jews, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. 9:5).

In much of the world, unborn babies are not viewed as persons. Therefore, they, like Aborigines or Jews in the past, are disposable and can be killed. In certain places of the world, there is a drive to have some animals classified as persons possessing various legal "rights" (e.g., bonobos, chimpanzees, elephants, whales, dolphins and eagles).

The modern "culture of death" is spreading, with not only abortion (the murder of unborn babies) at one end of the human lifespan, but also euthanasia (the voluntary killing off of the elderly) at the other end. Moreover, consent can be problematic and there are reports of involuntary euthanasia too. Increasingly, there is a push to allow the consensual termination of the lives of people in the middle years of life as well, especially those with severe disabilities or experiencing great pain.

There are also issues of mental health, including depression, self-harm and suicide (the sixth commandment forbids the taking of one's own life, as well as the lives of others). Radical Islamic suicide bombers have blown themselves up in order to murder others.

All these things raise questions. Who are we as human beings? What is our life?

Our bodies are also included in our identity. As Western societies revert to paganism, body piercing has seen a massive increase. It is not just the piercing of ears but also of noses, tongues, navels and other body parts. Men, as well as women, are doing it.

Along with body piercing, tattooing is becoming well-nigh ubiquitous—for women, as well as men. Some even use tattoos (and other means of body alteration) in order to look more like animals.

Others are pushing for greater acceptance of public nudity. If we are merely evolved animals, since animals do not wear clothes, why not go naked? Ideas have consequences; principles work through!

What views of a person's self-identity and the meaning of life are expressed in drunkenness or drug abuse, when life's "highs" are experienced by entering oblivion?

One's sexuality is an aspect of one's identity. We are continually hearing about homosexuality, bisexuality and more. Part of the defence of these lifestyles and behaviours is this: "This is our identity! You must respect our identity!" These things are being aggressively defended, encouraged, promoted and celebrated in many spheres, including legally, politically, culturally and educationally.

Others are practising and promoting bestiality (sexual intercourse with animals).

Among their arguments are the following: "We are only animals like them. The other animals seem to enjoy it. No one is being hurt by our private actions." In our secularist age, the main legal argument against bestiality is that from animal rights!

One's marital status is an aspect of one's identity. A few years ago, civil partnerships were introduced for sodomites and lesbians. Advocates said publicly that this was all that they were after. But the ink had hardly dried when they were clamouring for homosexual "marriage" as a basic human right! Those who maintained that marriage is between a man and a woman, as the Lord Jesus Christ taught (Matt. 19:4-6), are denounced as "bigots" and worse. Recently a man and a woman campaigned for *heterosexual* civil partnerships in the UK, as in some other countries, though they lost their case.

One's gender is also part of one's identity. These days we have not only the binary: male and female (Gen. 1:27); we have many more "options." A recent form in Brighton gave as many as 25! Transgenderism is a new crusade to justify a man who thinks he is, or wants to be, a woman and vice versa. Someone transitions to the desired gender by taking hormones, undergoing surgical operations, wearing different clothes, taking a different name, etc. Debates have started regarding the correct personal pronoun. Instead of being either a "he" or a "she," a person may choose gender-neutral options like "ze," "e," "xhe," "they" or many others.

As well as transgenderism, we now have transracism. There was a recent case of an American political activist who modified her hair, skin colour, speech, etc., and claimed to be black. However, it came out that she was white. Her defence essentially was, "Everybody has to respect my self-identity! If I say I am black, then I am black!"

There is also transageism, whereby grown men (or women) act like little children and comfort themselves by playing with rattles and suchlike. If one's gender, sexuality, race, etc., can be redefined without respect to objective reality, but on the basis merely of one's subjective feelings or wishes, what is wrong with a 50-year-old man self-identifying as a 6-year-old boy or girl (or even as a cat or a dog)?

Where does it end? There are people who want to be disabled (and even those who have acted upon this desire by cutting off their limbs). This is transableism. In today's politically-correct world, who wants to challenge their subjective feelings?

In 1979, Francis Schaeffer and Everett Koop wrote a famous book *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* They would have a lot more to write about in 2017!

Our world, especially in the West, is hopelessly confused and lost regarding the meaning of life and self. Many are endlessly trying to "find themselves" or "reinvent themselves" or "re-identify themselves." Many people do not know who they are or do not like who they are or are totally sick of being who they are. Some are looking to pagan or Eastern religions, or are looking within, or are looking to ever-changing public opinion, the secular state or politically-correct ideology to try to find some meaning in life. Many are crippled by the fear of man and concern about what others think of them.

Surely, there has to be a better way! What about the gospel of Jesus Christ and finding our true identity in Him and God's saving love?

*Rev. Stewart*