

them; and that he saves them on the basis of Christ's atoning work, through faith, even though they have not heard of him. This proposal has two particular merits. First, it preserves the three safeguards outlined above, especially that we cannot save ourselves and that Christ is the only Savior. Second, it can claim some biblical warrant, since Old Testament believers were saved by God's grace through faith, even though they knew little if anything about the coming Christ ....

Speaking now for myself, I believe the most Christian stance is to remain agnostic on this question .... The fact is that God, alongside the most solemn of warnings about our responsibility to respond to the gospel, has not revealed how he will deal with those who have never heard it. We have to leave them in the hands of the God of infinite mercy and justice, who manifested these qualities most fully in the cross. Abraham's question, "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25) is our confidence too.

However, I am imbued with hope. I have never been able to conjure up (as some great evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but who will inevitably perish. On the other hand, as I have said, I am not and cannot be a universalist. Between these extremes I cherish the hope that the majority of the human race will be saved. And I have a solid biblical basis for this belief. True, Jesus said that those who find the narrow road that leads to life were "few" (was he referring to the little remnant of his own day within the nation of Israel?). But we need to remember that God is the Creator of all humankind, and remains infinitely loving, patient and compassionate toward all whom he has made .... The final vision of the redeemed in the Book of Revelation is of a "great multitude that no one could count" (7:9), a huge international throng, in whom God's promise to Abraham will at last be fulfilled -- that his seed (his spiritual posterity) would be as innumerable as stars in the sky, the dust of the earth and the