

God has revealed himself generally to all people in creation, in providence, and in their inner consciousness and conscience. This revelation does not lead to a saving knowledge of God but does leave people without excuse for their failure to glorify him as God and to give him thanks (Psalm 19:1–6; Romans 1:19–21; 2:14–15). God in grace has revealed himself savingly in Christ and through the Scriptures (Psalm 19:7–14; John 1:14, 18; Romans 1:16–17).

(Sola 5 Confession 1.5)

A 2000 M. Night Shyamalan film posits that superhero stories are sensationalised accounts of true-life heroes who, while not as powerful as the superheroes of which comic books tell us, are extraordinary people who are able to do extraordinary things. As the stories of these extraordinary people are told, they become sensationalised so that the story of a real-life person who exhibits superhuman strength and durability morphs into an invulnerable alien resident among us. Comic books may be sensationalised, but there is a kernel of truth to them.

Missionaries and missiologists have long traced a similar theme in pagan religion, whereby core truths of the gospel can be found in ancient traditions of peoples who have long ago lost any living memory of Christian truth. Don Richardson movingly tells the story of one such people group in his autobiographical missionary story titled *Peace Child*. He tells many similar stories, in shorter form, in *Eternity in Their Hearts*.

The Sola 5 Confession 1.5 picks up a little on this theme when it affirms that there is something within humanity, put there by God, that attests to his existence. At the same time, it affirms that, apart from the clear exposition of the gospel as it is contained in holy Scripture, such rudimentary knowledge is incapable of producing saving faith.

The Confession affirms that God reveals himself **generally to all people** in at least four ways: **creation, providence, inner consciousness** and **conscience**. Briefly explain, as you understand it, how God reveals himself in each of these ways.

Creation: *The design that we see all around us in creation testifies to the fact that there must be a designer. It is important to note, as we will see in a moment, that acknowledgement of a designer's existence does not, in itself, constitute saving faith. A good many unbelievers recognise "intelligent design."*

Providence: *There are events that take place—or don't take place—in our world that defy rational explanation apart from a God who holds all things together by divine providence. Only a creator, intimately involved in his creation, can explain these otherwise inexplicable happenings.*

Inner consciousness: *God has placed within humanity an innate sense that something or someone bigger than humanity exists. It is only as people deliberately suppress this knowledge that they come to deny God's existence. As Augustine once said, "You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you."*

Conscience: *If creation testifies to the fact that God exists, conscience testifies to the fact that we have committed transgressions against the God to whom we are accountable. Conscience is one of God's means to show the unbeliever that he needs to make right with his creator.*

In what way has God revealed himself **generally** to people by these means, and how does this differ from how he has **savingly** made himself known **in Christ and through the Scriptures**? *The general knowledge that we receive through creation, providence, inner consciousness, and conscience simply shows us that God exists and that we need to be made right with him. It does not tell us how to be made right with God. For that, we need the revelation of Christ in the Scriptures.*

What does it mean that creation, providence, inner consciousness, and conscience **leave people without excuse for their failure to glorify him as God and to give thanks to him**? *People sometimes like to think that they will one day have some words to say to God at the judgement. The Confession here affirms that, at final judgement, all sinners will recognise that they were given all the evidence they needed to point them to the need for a Saviour, and will recognise that they stand under God's righteous condemnation for sin.*

In what way do **the Scriptures** reveal God savingly, as creation, providence, inner consciousness, and conscience do not? *The Scriptures tell us not only about the character of God, but also about the character of man, the character of sin, and God’s solution to sin in Jesus Christ. Creation and conscience are sufficient to condemn; they are not sufficient to save. Only the Scriptures tells us what God has done to provide the solution to our sin problem.*

As we will see in Section 2 of the Confession, we affirm that the Scriptures are infallible, inerrant, and authoritative. The same cannot be said about general revelation (i.e. God’s revelation of himself in creation, providence, inner consciousness, and conscience). Why is this so, and why is it important to recognize? *We affirm that Scripture is inerrant and infallible because it is a source of authority outside of ourselves that objectively states what God speaks. While God makes no mistakes, even in speaking in creation, providence, inner consciousness, and conscience, these areas of general revelation are more subjective than the objective, authoritative Scriptures. The human conscience is corrupted by sin, and while there is some innate sense of morality built into the human conscience, our sin nature enables us to suppress the conscience, or for our conscience to mislead us, in a way that Scripture never will.*

We are sometimes told that the gospel can be clearly discerned in nature—for example, that the stars and the signs of the zodiac can be interpreted in such a way that the gospel can be presented in them. Along similar lines, people sometimes use manmade illustrations—novels, films, etc.—as illustrations of gospel truth. Is there value in these approaches? *In Athens, Paul used a cultural phenomenon—a statue to the “unknown God”—as a doorway to the gospel, but he very quickly transitioned from the human illustration to divine revelation. While there may be limited value in using cultural illustrations to introduce the gospel, we must remember that God has clearly revealed his gospel in the Bible alone. Because creation testifies to the existence of a good and holy creator, it is not surprising that elements of creation should highlight aspects of God’s character, but our foundation of gospel truth, for the saving of souls, is Scripture alone.*

If the written word of God is the only source of special revelation by which the gospel is revealed to sinners, is it fair for God to condemn those who have never heard the gospel? *We must remember that human beings stand condemned, not because they have never heard the gospel, but because they are sinners. God would have been perfectly just to never provide a Saviour for fallen humankind, but to instead allow all of humanity to die in sin. It is therefore in no way inconsistent for sinners to stand under condemnation for their sin even without knowledge of the gospel. God’s revelation of the gospel to some is pure grace. Ultimately, when it comes to those who have never heard the gospel, we must trust that God is both good and just, and that the judge of all the earth will ultimately do what is right.*

Is it possible that those without any ordinary access to the Scriptures might be brought, through a proper grasp of general revelation, under the sound of the gospel? *The Bible, in no uncertain terms, tells us that those who seek God will be found by him (cf. Jeremiah 29:13). We can be sure that those who, through general revelation, acknowledge God’s existence, and acknowledge their need to be made right with the God who exists, will, by divine aid, be given opportunity to hear the gospel. God is perfectly capable or so ordering lives and events that he can ensure that anyone searching for gospel truth will come under the sound of gospel teaching.*

What is God’s ordinary means of bringing unbelievers under the sound of the gospel? *God ordinarily uses his people to share the gospel with unbelievers, thereby bringing them under gospel conviction. It is the responsibility of the church corporately, and Christians individually, to take the truth of the gospel, as it is contained in the word of God, to a lost and dying world. God is sovereign in salvation, but the means that he has chosen to save people is the preaching of the Scriptures by local churches and ordinary Christians.*

Given your answer to the above, what is the role of the evangelist, or the local church, in bringing God’s revelation of the gospel to bear in the lives of sinners? *The role of the evangelist is—nothing more and nothing less—to clearly articulate the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in holy Scripture, and to call people to repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ. We trust God, through his word and his Spirit, to do his work of saving when we have done our task of evangelising.*