

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 6

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Volume 6 • Number 1 • April 1982

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews selected from publications  
worldwide for an international readership,  
interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary  
living.*

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Published by  
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP  
Theological Commission [p. 4](#)

**ISSN: 0144-8153**  
**Vol. 6 No. 1 April-September 1982**

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The *Evangelical Review of Theology* is published in April and October by The Paternoster Press, Paternoster House, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter, UK, EX2 4JW, on behalf of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, 105 Savitri Building, Greater Kailash-II, New Delhi-110048, India.

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# Editorial

The WEF has called churches and agencies to make 1983 a year of church renewal, believing that the renewal and revival of the church, beginning with the local church, holds the key to world evangelisation, the restraining of institutionalised evil in society and the effective meeting of human need. The Church may be numerically small, as it is here in India, but where it truly manifests the power and ethical demands of the Kingdom of God, it is like a mustard seed which has the potential of great growth and useful service. The crisis in the world-wide Church today is not so much a lack of vision, as the infiltration of a syncretistic spirit of secular humanism and hedonistic materialism. Added to this is the loss of nerve on the conviction of the uniqueness of Christ and the Gospel in a religiously pluralistic world. Our problem first and foremost is an internal one of the quality of belief and lifestyle of the Church.

The renewal of the Church means a renewal of commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and obedience to the biblical Gospel and its ethical demands. But it is also a commitment to the Church in unity, holiness, love and compassion which cannot be separated from obedience to the Holy Spirit, Who convicts of sin, counsels and guides and enables the people of God to manifest the transforming power of the Gospel to re-create human nature and renew society. Such a renewal is the necessary priority for making evangelism and the establishing of new churches primary, to compassionate service and witness to justice in society. Only a renewed church can stand the test in times of suffering and persecution which has come to perhaps one half of the believing Christians in the world today.

This issue of ERT focusses on some of the components of renewal. The exegesis and exposition of our Lord's proclamation on the Church as recorded in [Matthew 16](#), the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and the acceptance of sound hermeneutical principles are foundational components. The lessons of church survival and growth in the midst of persecution in China during the last 30 years call for careful study and reflection. In this issue we have especially focussed on the ethical demands of the Gospel in personal sexual behaviour, in education and in the public use of the communications media. Unless there is a return to faithful obedience to the moral law of God, the Church's influence in the world will be nullified. We need to ask, why is it that with all the phenomenal growth of evangelical witness and activity involving unbelievable sums of money, evangelicals seem anaemic in their influence on public morality and the ethics of [p. 8](#) the all-powerful communications media? The WEF is convening an international conference on the Nature and Mission of the Church under the rubric "I Will Build My Church", 21st–30th June 1983 at the Graham Center, Wheaton, Illinois, USA. In a call for evangelical unity, the WEF has invited Evangelical Alliances and Fellowships, church bodies and para-church agencies to form the Sponsoring Body and has entrusted to them the leadership of the conference. The three internal consultations, namely, the Nature and Mission of the Church in the Local Setting, in New Frontiers for Missions and in Reaching Human Need, reflect the direction and emphasis of this conference. In the following issues of ERT we would like to publish articles, whether original or reprints, that will contribute to this overall theme. Readers are invited to suggest materials that will be helpful to our international readership. [p. 9](#)

# The Blessing, Power and Authority of the Church

*A study in Matthew 16:17–19*

Ian S. Kemp

*This paper attempts an exegesis of a passage of Scripture which has been the subject of vast scholarship and conflicting interpretation. We seek to look at it afresh and to find some relevance to current issues in the Church.*

The Church is confused about her own constitution. Why she exists, who she belongs to, and even who belongs to her are questions that receive the most diverse answers though they concern the very heart of the Church's being. The Church has her back to the wall. Usually a tiny minority in a pluralistic society which either ignores her, despises her, opposes her or threatens her very existence, the Church questions her inferior position and is painfully conscious of her weakness. The Church also has lost her nerve. What can she say in the world when she is rent asunder by inner division, doctrinal confusion and moral failure?

What the Church of our day needs is deep conviction on those very points where she is most confused. Jesus laid those convictions like foundation stones when He first spoke to Peter about the Church in [Matthew 16:17–19](#). "You are mine," He said. "You are a power structure. You have enormous authority." Our purpose in this study is to try to establish the correct meaning of this crucial statement of our Lord's. Clarity of thought here should help the Church towards a much needed conviction.

Jesus' teaching about the Church came in direct response to *Peter's confession*. Some understanding of the content of that confession will thus help us to see the issues to which Jesus responds.

The confession was the first considered affirmation by any of the disciples of Jesus' Messiahship. It is true that the Gospel writers refer to Jesus as Christ before this scene at Caesarea Philippi ([Matt. 1:1, 16, 18, 11:2](#)) and that he had been so acknowledged by devils ([Matt. 8:29](#)) and by followers of Jesus ([John 1:41, Matt. 9:28, 12:23, 14:33, 15:22](#)). But these acknowledgements were spontaneous and tentative rather than considered statements. Now with Peter's confession in [Matt. 16:16](#), we have a deliberate conscious expression rejecting other popular possibilities that Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. So far as Peter was concerned [p. 10](#) he had come to the conclusion that Jesus was the Christ and Son of the living God.

The confession involves several significant insights on Peter's behalf.

1) It showed that Peter saw *Jesus as the promised Messiah*. Current popular hopes for the Messiah were for a political leader, at best an ideal human king. But Peter's observations of Jesus the wandering teacher, miracle worker, prophet and friend led him to see in this non-political figure, one who fulfilled the Scriptural hope of Messiah. Further, Peter even went beyond the Scriptural pre-figuration of a human king in the line of David when he said that this clearly human Jesus Messiah was the Son of the living God. Peter had an insight into Jesus that was unequalled among his contemporaries.

2) It showed that Peter saw *Jesus in terms of the Kingdom of God*. "Son of God" in pre-Christian Judaism was a term understood as "God's adopted vice-regent in His Kingdom." "Son of man" the term which Jesus used in questioning His disciples about who people thought He was, is also a term implying the Kingdom of God. The well known passage in

[Daniel 7](#) from which the Son of man terminology comes, sees him “given dominion and glory and kingdom ... His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” ([Dan. 7:14](#)). Moreover Daniel saw that the Kingdom shall be received by “the saints of the Most High” ([Dan 7:13](#)) implying that somehow these “saints” are associated with the Son of man who receives the Kingdom. Peter’s confession thus implies that Jesus is the King exercising authority with his saints in the Kingdom of God.

3) The confession also shows that Peter saw *Jesus as unique*. Of all the Gospel accounts of this confession at Caesarea Philippi, it is only Matthew who records the words “Son of the living God.” Biblical thought about the living God is that God has life originally in Himself, His life is indestructible and He therefore lives eternally. It also refers to the transcendence of God’s existence over men and of His action and intervention in the affairs of men. Peter, in saying that Jesus is the Son of the living God, is thus affirming that Jesus is in a unique relationship to Him who is the transcendent and indestructible God, that he knows the mind and purposes of the living God as only a son may know the mind of his father. When the disciples said that men were identifying Jesus with John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah, they meant that these men saw Jesus as similar to men of the past, or as possessing some characteristics of those men in history. But when Peter confessed, he saw Jesus as transcending all such characters of [p. 11](#) the past, unique in all history, alone of His own kind. That Peter, a devout monotheist, could in this his first considered opinion of Jesus nearly ascribe to this man Jesus characteristics of deity which were later openly affirmed by the Church (“Jesus is Lord”) shows how radical his thinking was.

Peter’s confession of Jesus thus reveals that he saw the Person of Jesus as God’s agent, fulfilling Scriptural prophecy as an anointed King reigning with His saints, and as one who was in a unique relationship to the living God. It is to this confession that Jesus responds with His teaching about the Church.

The crucial verses [17-19](#) of our study are set in the context of further teaching about Jesus’ Messiahship and the true meaning of discipleship. The Messiah is to be a suffering King (21) and his followers too must tread the path of suffering ([24-26](#)). The Messiah however is to rise from the dead (27) and the disciples are to share in the eternal kingdom of the Son of man (28). The “saints of the Most High” in sharing the Kingdom are also to share the glory with the King. Thus Jesus’ teaching about the church in vv [17-19](#) must be seen in the context of suffering, self denial and ultimate victory. This is what it means to be living in the Kingdom.

The three verses, in themselves unique to Matthew’s Gospel, form a triad each of three lines, the second and third line explaining the first line in each triad, in antithetical parallelism.<sup>1</sup> Thus Jesus says in the first triad “Blessed are you Simon bar Jona”; then the following two statements (“for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you; but my Father who is in heaven”) explain why Peter is blessed. Similarly in v. [18](#) the statements about building the Church and the powers of death explain “you are Peter” and in v. [19](#) the explanation of the keys is found in the two following statements about the binding and loosing. We shall now look at each triad in turn.

## THE BLESSING

(a) The word of blessing with which Jesus begins His response to Peter is the common word “makarios” used frequently in the New Testament of the distinctive joy which comes

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremias in TNTW Vol V1, p.327, article *Pute*

to a man when he shares in the salvation of the Kingdom of God. Thus Mary is called blessed by all generations, for she is the mother of the Messiah who brings this salvation ([Luke 1:48](#)), and believers are pronounced blessed because they have received the message of salvation (Gal. [P. 12 4:15](#)) and have been reckoned as righteous before God ([Rom. 4:6, 9](#)). Blessing in the New Testament is usually in the context of the eschatological proclamation of the Kingdom. It expresses the tense emotion of a soul that is now set in the dawn of the new age of salvation ([Matt. 13:16, Rev. 19:9](#)), as it also expresses the joy of the one who has found in the Kingdom of God spiritual realities infinitely more valuable than any material possessions (e.g. the beatitudes [Matt. 5:3ff, 1 Peter 3:14](#)). The blessed person is in fact the one who has discovered in the Kingdom the reversal of all human values. What he now possesses be it purity of heart, meekness, pity or faith counts before God. These are the possessions that last forever. Indeed the New Testament beatitudes are intimations of future glory. Or, to put it the other way, the future glory guaranteed to the man of faith sheds light on his present sorrows. Being blessed means that he sees his present in the light of the glorious future:<sup>2</sup>

Jesus thus begins by highly commending Peter for his faith. He assures him that he has what really counts with God, and that the future glory of the Kingdom of God now perceived by Peter enables him with joy to see his present earthly life in a new light. The fact that Jesus addresses Peter here in his original family name Simon bar Jona enhances the thought that the joy and reality, the hope and assurance of an entirely new dimension of life had now come to this very ordinary human being. Life's *summum bonum* had been found.

(b) The first explanation of this new blessedness of the Kingdom Jesus now gives in the negative statement that it was not flesh and blood that had revealed the truth about Jesus to Peter. There was nothing in Simon *per se*, nothing in the human nature that was his in common with all other human beings that could have given him the insights he had expressed. "Flesh and blood" is man in his entirety, man in his weakness, and is a solemn reminder to us that by means of all his noble achievements, his flights of philosophy and his moral endeavours, the smile of God's approval, the pearl of great price, can never be obtained by man. The discovery of the truth, membership in the Kingdom, is a divine gift.

(c) The divine gift is the positive part of Jesus' explanation of the blessedness of the Kingdom, the third line in this first triad. The heavenly Father had revealed it to Peter. So Peter's confession was more than insight. His understanding of Scripture, of the Kingdom and of Jesus Himself was the result of revelation. God had shown it to him personally. Here in a moment God's eternal light focussed on [p. 13](#) one man. Here in this one man the work of the Father had taken place bringing Peter into possession of the Kingdom, causing him to see life in the light of eternity and effecting a radical shift in the centre of his own being.

It has been suggested<sup>3</sup> that the key for interpreting verses [17-19](#) is this personal revelation of the Father to Peter. Each of the three statements that begin each triad "Blessed are you ... You are Peter ... I will give you the keys" are to be seen not as three different ways of saying that Peter is to be the principal person in the Church, but three different results of the revelation which the Father has made to Peter. This is a helpful key to interpreting the passage, and to our understanding of the Church. The underlying primacy here is not that of Peter as many have suggested from Jesus' words in the next triad. The underlying primacy is that of the Father and His will. Jesus virtually says here that Peter himself is of no significance: left to his own intelligence he would have come to

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<sup>2</sup> See F. Hauck in TNTW Vol IV, p.369, article *makarios*

<sup>3</sup> R. Newton Flew: *Jesus and His Church* p. 92.



his own conclusions and they would be wrong. But what *is* of significance is the will of God the Father who guided Peter to the truth. The basis is not Peter, nor the rock, but the Father, the Father's will and the Father's personal revelation to an ordinary human being.

Such, then, is the blessing. It is characterised by a faith in Jesus that transcends natural human understanding, by a joy that exults in receiving what transcends every earthly possession, and a hope that bears present tensions in view of eternal guarantees. It is the result of the heavenly Father's initiative, the gift of His personal revelation.

## THE POWER

Verse [18](#) begins with the emphatic *Kago do soi* "But I again say to you ..." indicating that the revelation which the Father had given to Peter in the confession he had made, is now being followed by a further revelation which Jesus makes in this and the next verse. "Light received brings more light." "To him who has shall more be given." Peter, once open to the revelation of God, is now given more. A principle of all spiritual growth, indeed, of all church growth, lies here.

The revelation now given to Peter concerns the church, specifically mentioned as *ekklesia* only in this verse and in [Matt. 18:18](#) and nowhere else in the Gospels. We start with the opening statement "You are Peter" and the two explanatory statements following it. We shall [p. 14](#) therefore look for the significance of Simon's name Peter, given to him by Jesus some time earlier ([John 1:42](#)).

1) *Peter's name*. There is an obvious word play on *petros* the name of Peter, and *petra*, the rock on which Jesus will build His church.

Many have thought that in the subtle distinctions of these two words Jesus was saying that Peter himself was of little significance (*petros* = stone), but what counts for the Church is the rock (*petra*) on which it stands. The rock is then variously interpreted as Jesus, God the Father, or Peter's confession, any of these being of greater significance than Peter himself just as a rock is greater than a stone.

But we should be cautious about the subtleties of such word play.<sup>4</sup> The word which Jesus most probably used in Aramaic is *Kepa(s)* meaning a rock. Being a feminine word in Aramaic, *Kepa* would rightly be translated into Greek as *petra*. But if a man is to be given a Greek name meaning rock, the feminine form *petra* could not be used: it would have to be the masculine form *petros*. Seen in this light the distinctions in our text must not be pressed and we shall settle for the basic idea that Jesus said to Simon "You are Rock, and on this rock I will build my Church."

But in what way precisely is Peter the rock on which Jesus will build His Church?

The Roman Catholic interpretation is that in these words Jesus conferred on Peter "the primacy of jurisdiction over the entire Church" and that "the primacy principle and foundation of the structure are to endure as long as it (the Church) does and that Peter is to transmit his authority to his successors."<sup>5</sup> The whole argument of the papacy is built on the interpretation of this verse.

The argument is not so convincing however when we consider that in the two other New Testament responses where the apostles are said to be the foundation of the Church, Peter's name is not even mentioned ([Eph. 2:20](#), [Rev. 21:14](#)). Add to this Paul's own confrontation when he "withstood Peter to his face" ([Gal. 2:11-14](#)) and Peter's own self-

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<sup>4</sup> See R. N. Flew, *op. cit.* p.93. D. Hill *Gospel of Matthew* p.261.

<sup>5</sup> Canon Boulenger: *Apologetique* pp.335-39, quoted by A. F. Kuen, *I will build my church*, p.109.

effacement when he does not think of himself as invested with special privileges ([Acts 10:26](#), [1 Peter 1:1](#)) but stands equally with others as a “fellow elder” ([1 Peter 4:1](#)).

Undoubtedly Peter did have primacy of a sort in the early church. He was the first to lead Jews into the Kingdom on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)), and Gentiles not long afterward ([Acts 10](#)). He was [p. 15](#) singled out by Christ for strategic pastoral ministry ([Luke 22:31ff](#)) and confirmed in this after the resurrection ([John 21:15ff](#)). His leadership in the Jerusalem Council ([Acts 15](#)), and in the churches of Asia Minor (1 Peter) is clear. But any primacy for the Roman Church and its bishop as successors to Peter cannot be found in our passage. Jesus is speaking here about the foundation of the Church, and in the nature of things that cannot be repeated.

The common Protestant reaction to this view appealing to the distinction between *petros* and *petra* is that the Rock is not Peter but the confession which Peter made or the truth revealed to him.

While this satisfies the Protestant desire to refute the Roman Catholic claim and to have a propositional basis for the Church it depends too heavily on the linguistic subtleties and seems motivated by dogmatic presuppositions. Both Catholics and Protestants alike have been able to find in this passage what each wanted to find.

We cannot but admit that Jesus was referring to the person of Peter himself. Jesus builds his Church on a man, not on stones or dogmas, but on human beings. Indeed He builds His Church on a new man, a Simon, who on an earlier occasion had been renamed with a name designed to fill him with hope as he followed his new Master. Further, Jesus builds His Church on the man who as a result of following Jesus is open to the revelation of God in Christ, who now confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, and whose life is now integrated to God through Christ. This is the kind of man who very soon becomes a person to be reckoned with, to whom others naturally turn, a man who though by nature impetuous and unstable, is now as good as his new name. On such a man the next stones in the Church can now be placed.

A Rabbinic parable throws further light on Peter as the Rock. It likens God to a king who wanted to build a house but could find no sure foundation, so he dug down deeply till he found rock. “So” says the parable, “when God saw Abraham who was to arise, He said, ‘Now I have found a rock on which to build and establish the world’ ”.<sup>6</sup> Thus [Isaiah 51:1](#) calls on Israel to look to the rock (Abraham) whence they were hewn. It is more than likely that Jesus had some such thought of Israel’s foundation rock in mind when He spoke to Peter, and said to him in effect “Just as Abraham was the foundation rock of the Old Israel, so you Peter, the man to whom my Father has revealed the truth, will be the foundation of the new Israel”. [p. 16](#)

But why this one man Peter? In what way is he different from other like confessors? We have already seen that the argument for the primacy of Peter cannot be sustained on Biblical grounds. Peter is not here being given status in the Church. It is rather a question of priority. In order of time Peter is the first stone of the new church structure; other similar stones will be placed on him as the church in time rises and grows. Spokesman here, as often for the twelve disciples, Peter appears as the representative disciple on which Christ builds his Church. Thus Paul can speak of all the apostles including Peter as the foundation of the Church ([Eph. 2:20](#)) and, with a change of metaphor, of James and John along with Peter as pillars of the Church ([Gal. 2:9](#)). Peter the Rock then is the kind of man on whom Jesus builds His Church. There are other rocks on which the Church is built, impetuous, vascillating, denying like Peter maybe, but men with hearts open to God, men confessing the Christ, men whose characters become like their names because their lives

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<sup>6</sup> G. F. Moore: *Judaism*, vol. 1, p.538.



are integrated in Christ. In such men God is at work. In such men the power of the Church is to be found. Power in the Church begins here. The great need of today is for men and women of this order. The Church of Jesus Christ cannot have power unless it is built on rocks and supported by pillars like this.

2) *The ecclesia*. Our explanation of Peter the rock has already led us into the second line of this triad—"on this rock I will build my Church" (v.18). But there is more to notice.

The term *ecclesia*, as already noted, occurs only here and in [Matt. 18:18](#) in all four Gospels. This has caused some to see it in these passages as a reading back into the teaching of Jesus the ecclesiology of the later institutional Church.<sup>7</sup> But to treat Jesus' words here in this way as unauthentic is not necessary once we grasp the significance of the word *ecclesia* for Matthew's readers.

A. H. McNeile has pointed out that whether Jesus had used either of the Aramaic words *Qahal* meaning the body of Israel assembled as a congregation or *kenishta* meaning a synagogue, "for Matthew's Greek readers *ecclesia* was the only possible word to express the Christian body as distinct from Jews".<sup>8</sup> That Jesus intended it to be distinct from Israel is seen in His calling it "My Church." Though the Church is co-terminous with the Old Testament body of Israel whom God had called to Himself, it was nevertheless to be *a new body*, called by Christ, and *His* possession. This particular point in Jesus' life [p. 17](#) just at the end of His Galilean ministry and on the point of His going to Jerusalem to be killed, He chose as the fitting time to prepare His disciples to become that new body. The teaching that immediately followed concerning the suffering Messiah and the cost of discipleship begins to outline that newness.

The *intimate bond* between Jesus and His Church is also bound up in this term *ecclesia*. Because Jesus had asked the initial question about the Son of man (see [Matt. 16:13](#)), the [Daniel 7](#) association of the Son of Man with the saints of the Most High must have been in His mind. There the Son of Man is no mere individual but the representative of the Saints of the Most High who share rule in the Kingdom with Him. "Just as the poimen (shepherd) is no real shepherd, without the poimnion (flock), so the Christos is no true Christ without the *ecclesia*".<sup>9</sup> Here surely is the germ of Jesus' later teaching about the Vine and the branches ([John 15](#)) and Paul's teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:12ff](#), [Eph. 5:27ff](#)). Jesus' Messiahship implies the Church. They belong together.

The *security of the Church* is found in the fact that it is Jesus who will build His Church. "I will build *my* Church." Built on the rock of people who confess like Peter gives it one kind of security. But its ultimate security is in the will of Christ Himself. Because He wills to build His Church, the Church is not any kind of human institution, but a divine creation, rooted in the will of God, growing up under the direction of Christ Himself.

Thus in explaining what is to be built on the rock Jesus speaks of the Church as a powerful community. The Church is to be the new people of God grouped around the Messiah who suffers, dies, and rises again. It is to share with Him His rule in the everlasting Kingdom of God, and it is to grow up at the will of and under the direction of Christ, the Son of God.

3) *Powers of death*. In the third line of this triad (v.18), Jesus says "the powers of death shall not prevail against it." Here is more about power.

"Powers of death" is the R.S.V. translation of *pulai hadou* or "gates of Hades." Hades was the common term in the ancient world for the place of departed spirits, the

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<sup>7</sup> S. David Hill, *op. cit.* p.259.

<sup>8</sup> A. H. McNeile *Gospel according to St. Matthew* p.241.

<sup>9</sup> Gloege, cited in K. P. Schmidt, TNTW, vol. 3. p.518ff.

underworld, similar to the *Sheol* of the Old Testament. In terms of ancient oriental and biblical cosmology the underworld was viewed as a place in the hollow earth, a land, a city, a fortress or a prison with strong gates which prevented the escape of its occupants or barred access to any invaders. The gates of [p. 18](#) Hades came to be a synonym for Hades itself or more particularly as in later Judaism a vivid term to describe the strength and security of the underworld.<sup>10</sup> R.S.V. “powers of death” conveys that idea. But since Hades in New Testament times often meant the realm of the ungodly dead<sup>11</sup> “powers of evil” is also a possible translation.

*Katishuo* (R.S.V. “shall not prevail against”) can be used in a passive sense meaning “be a match for”, so that Jesus’ meaning is that the powers of death shall not be able to stand up against the Church. This presents the Church as an attacking force against death or evil, a picture not unknown in the New Testament<sup>12</sup> and in Christian hymnology.<sup>13</sup> But if we hold to Jeremias’ contention that *katishuo* followed by the genitive in Jewish Greek is always used in an active sense meaning “to vanquish, overpower” then the gates of Hades in Jesus’ words are the aggressors against the Church.<sup>14</sup> Death in its attack against the Church shall have no power over it.

This view is strengthened when we understand the significance in ancient cosmology of the sacred rock which topped the hollow mountain inside the earth. The double function of this rock was to support the sanctuary built on it and to close off to the world the underworld with its dead in the inside of the mountain. This mountain is also the source of the primal flood which threatens to burst in upon the world, but which is sealed off only by the rock securely placed on top with the sanctuary above it.<sup>15</sup> The powers of death therefore are seen to be the attackers against the rock and the Church built upon it. But the Church, possessed and built by Christ who, so He now reveals to His disciples, will soon go to the realm of the dead and return victorious ([v. 21](#)), is equipped with all the power it needs to resist such an attack.<sup>16</sup> The promise of Jesus to Peter therefore means that the community that trusts in Him is secure from the powers of death and from the evil which those powers exert.

A little reflection on current social injustices, religious persecutions and ruthless oppression leads us inevitably back to the powers of death. For the threat of death is constantly used by the oppressor against the oppressed. “Give us what we demand or we will kill you” [p. 19](#) is his weapon of attack. And the poor man yields, because death has the last most powerful word. But linked to a risen victorious Lord, a new power structure has arisen in the community, the Church over which the powers of death have no power. This small community, powerless in the eyes of the world, suddenly stands up against death with a new confidence. Death no longer cowers them into fear and submission. Should some of their number die in the conflict, their death is to the community but a victory and others are quick to take their place. The oppressor is unnerved for he does not know how to deal with a people who have conquered his ultimate weapon. He desists from evil, and

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<sup>10</sup> O.T. has several such references. [Job 17:16, 28:17, Ps. 9:13, 107:18, Is. 38:10](#).

<sup>11</sup> See J. Jeremias TNTW vol. 1, p.147, article *Hades* and Vol. V1, p.926, article *Pute*.

<sup>12</sup> See [2 Cor. 10:4, Eph. 6:10ff](#).

<sup>13</sup> “Onward Christian soldiers ...”

<sup>14</sup> J. Jeremias, TNTW, vol. V1, p.927, article *Pute*.

<sup>15</sup> J. Jeremias, *op. cit.* p.96, article *petra*.

<sup>16</sup> See also [1 Peter 3:19](#).

justice and righteousness begin to appear. So long as the Church maintains its faith in Christ the Son of the living God, the life of its deathless Lord makes it a power structure against which man's last most terrifying weapon has no effect.<sup>17</sup>

## THE AUTHORITY (V.19)

Handing over the keys was in Biblical and later Jewish usage, as in our own, a sign of full authorisation. We are thus presented in this verse with the authority of the keys put into the hands of the man on whom the Church is being built. Again we look for the meaning of the first line of the triad and then its explanation in the two lines following.

1) *The keys.* [Rev. 1:18](#) speaks of Jesus having the keys of Death and Hades, meaning most probably, not the keys TO the place of the dead (objective genitive) but the keys OF death (subjective genitive), that is the keys which the personified Death and Hades carry as lords of the underworld. By virtue of His death and resurrection in which the decisive battle between Jesus and these lords has now taken place, these keys are now in the hands of Jesus Himself. It is attractive to think that these are the keys which Jesus gives to Peter for in the previous verse Jesus has been speaking of the gates of Hades. And tradition has firmly allowed the keys to be in Peter's hands in the age-old image of him as the porter at the gates of heaven. But we must note that Jesus spoke here not of the keys of heaven, but of the keys of the *Kingdom* of heaven. So if we see Peter as the porter we imply an identity between heaven and the Kingdom of heaven which we find nowhere in the Gospels.

A second line of interpretation sees the keys as the key of David [p. 20](#) which according to [Rev. 3:7](#) the risen Christ possesses. The imagery of this verse goes back to [Isaiah 22:22](#) where "the key of the house of David", that is, King David's palace in Jerusalem, is given to Eliakim with unlimited authority over the royal household. Christ, the representative of the Davidic line ([Rev. 22:16](#)) is thus seen to possess the key to God's eternal palace opening and shutting where no man has any authority. If this is the kind of authority given to Peter alone so that like a Grand Vizier, he opens and shuts the kingdom of heaven, then the history of the early church denies it. For in the early church Peter's leadership is shared. But this kind of authority is indeed given to the apostles as the following two lines of the triad will explain.

A third line of interpretation is also worth considering. While there is no known non-Christian instance of the term "keys of the Kingdom of heaven",<sup>18</sup> nor does the term appear anywhere else in the New Testament, there is in [Matt. 23:13](#) a presupposition of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. For in this passage Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of shutting the Kingdom of heaven against men neither going in themselves, nor allowing others to enter. And in what appears to be a parallel passage in [Luke 11:52](#), Jesus accuses lawyers of taking away the key of knowledge, not entering themselves, and hindering others who would enter. There was a Rabbinic saying: "He who has knowledge of the law without reverence to God, is like a treasurer who has been given the inner key, but not the outer key. How can he enter?" So knowledge of the Torah was considered to be possession of the key. The teaching of the scribes was the exercise of the key, and since it was said of the scribe "When he has opened, no one shuts," the decisions of the scribes were of absolute validity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See V. Mangalwadi TRACI Journal No. 17, p.19ff; No. 18, pp.60, 61; No. 19, p.32 for examples of this in U.P., India, and a helpful discussion of this theme in relation to social justice.

<sup>18</sup> J. Jeremias TNTW, vol. 111, pp.744ff. Article *Kleis*

<sup>19</sup> J. Jeremias, *op cit.* p.747, footnote 42.

It appears therefore that Jesus has in mind the claim of the theologians of the day to have the power of the keys by virtue of their knowledge of Scripture. Jesus accuses them of not using this power and of so debarring people from the Kingdom of God. If this were the background to Jesus' thought in giving the keys to Peter, then Peter is being entrusted with the authority to declare the will of God as it is revealed in Scripture, through his teaching, preaching and judging. If we bear in mind Bultmann's observation that knowledge in the Septuagint is "a spiritual possess on resting on revelation"<sup>20</sup> then the key now given to Peter is the authority to proclaim the Word of God on the basis of the revelation about Christ which he has received for [p. 21](#) the purpose of admitting people into the Kingdom of heaven. Not long after this, Peter was exercising this authority among Jews ([Acts 2](#)) and Gentiles ([Acts 10](#)). Peter was the first to use this key, but not the only one. The authority for ministry in the new household of God lies here and is used whenever enlightened believers by proclaiming the Biblical truth about Christ open to others the door of revelation through which they themselves have passed.

2) *Binding and loosing*([19b](#), c) The change from "Kingdom of heaven" to "heaven" in these two lines is noteworthy because "heaven" meaning God's dwelling place here stands, as it often does, for God Himself. Binding and loosing in Rabbinic language meant forbidding and allowing practical matters of conduct. It would appear therefore that Jesus tells Peter that he will exercise a legislative authority adjudicating on matters of conduct with such absolute authority as God will recognise in heaven. Roman Catholic interpretation has followed this line of thought.

Yet in [Matt. 18:18](#) the identical words are spoken by Jesus to all the disciples and in [John 20:23](#) similar words to all the disciples, so any thought of Peter's primacy must be ruled out. In these two verses all the apostles shared Peter's authority, and we may infer as we have seen in every line of these triads so far that what is said to Peter is true of all the members of the new community. The authority is given to the Church.

It is true that in [Matt. 18:18](#) the application of this authority concerns discipline within the Church. But the issue in [John 20:23](#) is broader, concerning the forgiveness and retention of sins. If we keep in mind the analogy of the scribes who on the basis of their expert knowledge of the oral tradition declared some things forbidden (bound) and other things permitted (loosed), Peter is now being told that in the coming Kingdom he would be like a scribe.

If we also keep in mind that these two lines in this triad explain the first line, this binding and loosing concerns not juridical decisions on fine matters of the law in the manner of the scribes, but the weightier matters of grace, mercy and judgment that affect people's admission into and exclusion from the Kingdom of God. This is what it means to use the keys.

On the basis of his knowledge of the Scriptures, of Jesus and of His teaching, Peter was to proclaim the Gospel. In doing so he would have authority to forgive or retain sins and to pronounce on the admission or exclusion of people from the Kingdom of God. Such authority was to be not Peter's alone, but that of the whole Church ([Matt. 18:18](#), [John 20:23](#)), a church that acts in the Spirit ([John 20:23](#)) [p. 22](#) and through the Word. Peter exercised this authority through preaching in [Acts 2](#) and [10](#) and through legislative decision along with the Church at the Jerusalem Council ([Acts 15](#)). Such authority has continued to be exercised wherever men of Peter's faith have characterized the Church ever since.

In this study we have looked at three basic factors of the Church. Each has great relevance to the church in India today.

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<sup>20</sup> Bultmann: TNTW, vol 1, p.699, article *giuosko*.

1) The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of men and women who have the same faith as Peter's faith. Wherever there are people to whom God has personally revealed Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God and who integrate their lives around Him, there is the Church. Apart from this reality the Church has no foundation. Any superstructure not built on this foundation is a facade. We should not be afraid therefore if some of the current superstructures fall, nor should we waste our efforts seeking to prop them up—administrative programmes, forms of worship, properties, institutions and the like. What is of paramount importance is people who believe and confess Jesus the King. For the emergence and upbuilding of such a people our energies are to be directed.

2) The Church is a power structure against which the ultimate weapon of men and the devil has no power. In days when the Church is increasingly being told to prepare for persecution, she needs to learn *now* that because she is the Church of the risen deathless Lord, she has nothing to fear. She can stand up against all the powers of evil. She will suffer and pour out his (her) soul unto death, "yet will still stand up with boldness that will startle many nations, and kings shall shut their mouths because of him (her)" ([Isaiah 52:15](#)). There is talk today of a theology of persecution. Surely this is it. Because the Church is the community of the risen Lord, she is invincible before men's greatest power. We must preach more on these lines.

3) The Church so constituted and so emboldened has the keys of the Kingdom. With these she proclaims the Gospel of God's truth and admits into the Kingdom of God those who will believe and receive the message of the Kingdom. Not to be identified wholly with the Kingdom, the Church is nevertheless part of the Kingdom, the sign of its presence in the world and the instrument of its increase. The divine order is first the Kingdom, then the Church, then the world—not the kingdom-world-Church. The Kingdom comes with Christ, into the world. Those who enter the Kingdom constitute the Church. The Kingdom creates the Church and the Church preaches the Kingdom to the world.

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## Concrete Alternatives to the Historical-Critical Method

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*Translated from German by Leni Sommer and Carol Gregory and printed with permission. A version of this article appeared in Cornu, 1980.*

*Dr. D. A. Carson in an article "Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends" published in ERT April 1981 discusses the Maier/Stuhlmacher debate on the historical-critical method. Dr. Maier has outlined his position in The End of the Historical-Critical Method (ET St. Louis: Concordia 1977). In this article Dr. Maier takes the debate a stage further.*



(Editor)

## WHY “ALTERNATIVES”?

“However right it is for the historical method to continue as the best way to push through to historical realities ... we should nevertheless not now conceal the negative consequences of the radical protestant criticism of the Bible and cover it up or make it appear harmless by referring to its effect of doing away with illusion and building true faith”.<sup>1</sup> With this statement of Peter Stuhlmacher’s We find ourselves in the midst of the problem.

Alternatives to the present interpretation of Scripture can only be discussed if we postulate that

- a) the present Bible exegesis has proved to be deficient and therefore needs to be reconsidered, and
- b) that genuine alternatives are coming forth which promise improvement.

In this paper, I shall limit myself to point a).

In the book referred to, dealing with “Interpretation of Scripture on its Way to Biblical Theology”, Stuhlmacher mentions the erroneous development of the exegesis of the New Testament which left the canon of Holy Scriptures an expanse of ruins of hypothetical possibilities”.<sup>2</sup> And he ends by saying: “From a historical point of view, it is imperative to resist the hypothetical disintegration of the New Testament tradition into a multiplicity of individual branches p. 24 and communities and isolated theologies which can no longer be interrelated”.<sup>3</sup>

In my book on “The End of the Historical-Critical Method” I tried to explain why we are not making progress with the existing historical-critical method. The reasons may be summarized as follows:

- A canon within the canon, explicitly or tacitly taken for granted by all who are working according to the historical-critical method, cannot be deduced from the Bible.
- The Bible as a whole is not only the Word of God but also the word of man and refuses to be split into eternal truths and statements which are valid only for a period of time.
- It is a medium of divine communion, not to be separated from the personal relationship of God and man, and is, therefore, more than just an object.
- For its content criticism, historical-critical work needs a standpoint outside of the Bible and therefore its conclusions are already given.
- and finally, congregations cannot be built up by means of the profuse results of historical-critical work and a common creed becomes impossible.<sup>4</sup>

During a discussion with students at Tübingen in January 1978, Peter Stuhlmacher agreed in principle to this analysis. As “agreement” the report published in *Theologische Beiträge* (ThB) states the observation of “a grave deficiency in today’s exegesis”.<sup>5</sup>

If we merely consider the field of scientific results, we do indeed find intolerable differences with regard to subjects of central importance. Exegetically the protestant doctrine of justification cannot be separated from the atonement tradition of the N.T.

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<sup>1</sup> *Schriftauslegung auf dem Wege zur biblischen Theologie*, Göttingen, 1975, pp. 102ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.111.

<sup>3</sup> pp.126ff, *ibid*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Wie legen wir die Schrift aus?*, Giessen/Basel, 1978, p.11.

<sup>5</sup> *ThB*, 9, 1978, p.224.



Bultmann considered the idea of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins to be immoral.<sup>6</sup> For Käsemann it was a “tradition of minor importance”; he was not interested in the atonement tradition of the N.T.<sup>7</sup> For Stuhlmacher it is “central”.<sup>8</sup> What are we to believe? The bridge between promise and fulfilment is one of the fundamental elements of the Bible. It cannot be separated from prophecy. For Conzelmann p. 25 and Lindemann the predictions with regard to Jesus’ death are merely *vaticinia ex eventu*, originating from church teaching.<sup>9</sup> According to W. Wrede it was impossible for Jesus to have known in advance that he would be returning to life in three days. For John the evangelist, however, the fact that Jesus had the gift of prophecy is an indication of His messiahship ([John 2:24f; 13:1](#)). For Bengel, Beck, Delitzsch, Hartenstein, Hengetenberg and Hofmann the Revelation contains predictions of the future destinies of the church and the world. For Semler that was bizarre fantasy, for Gunkel “nothing but confused, wild phantasmagoria bordering on madness”, in relation to prophecy.<sup>10</sup> Now, who is right? One of the fundamental decisions for the interpreter of Scripture is his position with regard to the unity of Scripture. Schlatter held that “unity is a necessary characteristic of Scripture in order that it may be recognised as the Word of God and may serve as such ... If Scripture is to help us reach our goal it must not destroy its own testimony by contradictions”.<sup>11</sup> The unity of Scripture, however, is no longer a presupposition for most exegetes. Peter Stuhlmacher, for instance, said in *Theologische Beiträge* 1977 that for him “a final Yes” with regard to the unity of Scripture “could not be proved to be either genuinely protestant nor historically established”,<sup>12</sup> and then in January 1978 he said: “Faith can certainly not be based on the canon as such, because here testimony stands against testimony”.<sup>13</sup> Who is right here? Whom shall we believe?

Enough of these examples. There is only one other thing we should seriously consider: Content criticism of the Bible has for 200 years proved to be an intolerable burden to congregations and not only in Germany. It prevents us, the protestant church, from testifying to the world around us as we ought to. Now as before it breaks the neck of young theologians’ fresh missionary enthusiasm. It has indeed, as H. Strathmann says, become “the creeping disease of protestant theology, and thus of the protestant church”.<sup>14</sup> Neither the considerable number of respectable achievements, nor the acknowledgement of the fact that God has been acting in, *sub* and *cum* a theology sometimes gone awry, sometimes stimulating and yet frequently erring, frees theology from responsibility for the “creeping p. 26 disease” which Strathmann speaks about. It should be an important and honourable task for us to contribute towards overcoming this illness. Our country has conveyed to the world the blessing of the Reformation. It has followed this blessing with the poison of radical biblical criticism. The present situation does, however, seem to be open to a

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<sup>6</sup> *Neues Testament und Mythologie, Kerygma und Mythos, 1*, Tübingen, 1961, p.20.

<sup>7</sup> *ThB*, *ibid.* p.227.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> H. Conzelmann/A. Lindemann, *Arbeitsbuch zum NT*, 3, ed., Tübingen, 1977, pp.88ff.

<sup>10</sup> H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*, Göttingen, 1895, p.391.

<sup>11</sup> A. Schlatter, *Das christliche Dogma*, 2, ed., Stuttgart, 1923, p.369.

<sup>12</sup> *ThB*, 8, 1977, p.90.

<sup>13</sup> *ThB*, 9, 1978, p.226.

<sup>14</sup> In E. Käsemann, *Das NT als Kanon*, Göttingen, 1970, p.41.

hermeneutical change of mind. I should now like to indicate a few steps that have been taken towards that change of mind.

## THE PRE-CRITICAL PHILOLOGICAL METHOD

Generally it is hardly known that before Semler differentiated between Scripture and the Word of God a careful scientific method of exegesis was practised. This method, of which Christoph Reuchlin and Johann Albrecht Bengel gave an example, I should like to call the “pre-critical philological method”. Compared to the historical method used today one is surprised to learn that the individual procedures have largely remained the same. In fact, the historical-critical method has merely added literacy-critical analysis and form-criticism. But we can perceive signs of these even in Bengel’s method.

Bengel starts with the “crisis sacra”, which is what he calls his identification of the Scripture text truest to the original manuscripts. Obviously the meaning of the term “criticism” has had a chequered history. There are vast difference between Bengel’s “holy critique”, Schlatter’s critique of “pure observation” and the content criticism of the Bible. It does not exactly contribute to clarity to have so many “critique” terms used interchangeably or incorrectly. After establishing the text, Bengel continues by elucidating the meaning of words. He aims to point out from the original meaning of the words “the simplicity, depth, harmony and wholesomeness of the divine thought”.<sup>15</sup> Then he turns his attention to the context. The “emphatic” examination (*Sermo emphaticus*), weighs the position and importance of words. The emotions of the authors are also considered in order to determine the range of meaning later. After this Bengel compares the text with other statements from Scripture. Bengel firmly adheres to the rule *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*.<sup>16</sup> But Bengel also goes beyond Scripture in order to throw as much light on the text as possible. He makes use of patristics. Like Spener, he holds Eusebius and Irenaeus in high regard.<sup>17</sup> He also takes into consideration p. 27 country and custom, and non-biblical authors, amongst whom are Philo, Josephus, the Talmud and in general the history of the Church and the world. Now after taking these methodological steps the range of meaning can be arrived at. Finally he comes to the “homiletic” i.e. the edifying application; A concise preface to the Gnomon summarizes the procedure of proper exegesis. It should be done “critica, polyglotta, antiquaria, homiletica”<sup>18</sup> which means, in a way that is discerning, philologically profound, appropriate to the age of the documents, and relevant for those who hear it today. Thus exegesis is based on the conviction that the complete Holy Scripture is inspired: “Every last word issued from the Holy Spirit”.<sup>19</sup> For Bengel the Bible is “truly reliable, one can absolutely depend on it”.<sup>20</sup> Yes, even the style of the Bible corresponds with the way God speaks: “Deus, non et homo, sed ut Deus verba facit, se ipso digna”.<sup>21</sup> And yet, Bengel’s concept of inspiration, with his fundamental conviction of the unity of Scripture, is not rigid, not separated from the world and

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<sup>15</sup> E. Ludwig, *Schriftverständnis und Schriftauslegung bei Joh. Albr. Bengel*, Stuttgart, 1952, p.27.

<sup>16</sup> C. Wächter, *Johann Albrecht Bengel*, Stuttgart, 1895, p.151.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, pp.142ff.

<sup>18</sup> Preface No. 5, Cf. Ludwig pp.22, 27, 31, 52ff, 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ludwig p.24.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. K. Hermann, *Johann Albrecht Bengel*, 1, Teil, Stuttgart, 1937, p.369.

<sup>21</sup> Gnomon Preface No. 4.

experience. On the contrary, it is by itself a historical procedure, leading apostles and prophets in different ways. With regard to Mark and Luke, Bengel says: "With them there is a lesser degree of theopneusty, they are not as precise and as accurate as Matthew and John".<sup>22</sup> but contrary to growing rationalism, he denies that reason the final word with regard to divine matters.<sup>23</sup>

What does this consideration of church history contribute? We perceive that "historical-critical" and "scientific" are by no means to be equated. The term "scientific" can be exclusively applied to the historical-critical method only as a result of modern dogma or ignorance of church history. And if we are told that the historical-critical method is "the" scientific method for our time<sup>23a</sup> then it must be pointed out that neither J. T. Beck nor his pupils, neither Kähler nor Heim, neither Anglo-Saxon scholarship on the whole, nor the impetuously emerging theology of the so-called Third World, have bowed to this dictatorial claim. p. 28

We can of course, not continue where Bengel left off. His definition is outdated, the front lines have changed, the historical aspect is vehemently demanding to be considered.

In searching for concrete alternatives to the historical-critical method, it is important to get acquainted with present models, but without dispensing with the valuable knowledge of the past—including that of the pre-critical era.

If I am right, there are at present *three different alternative models*: "Pneumatic exegesis", represented especially by Hellmuth Frey, the "hermeneutics of acceptance" which Peter Stuhlmacher proposes and a third which for the time being I want to call "historical-biblical".

## PNEUMATIC EXEGESIS ACCORDING TO HELLMUTH FREY

Hellmuth Frey has turned our attention to the exegete himself. Only when we keep this in mind can we comprehend his call for repentance directed at the present historical-critical theology. He wants to draw attention to the fact that "church and theology in their blindness" are guilty. It is "hybris" because it gave up "humble dependence on the Holy Spirit",<sup>24</sup> and instead stayed closely bound to "Enlightenment" and "humanism".<sup>25</sup> It is an expression of their "sin", "violation of the Holy God" when with their "anthropological approach they attempt to seize control of God's revelation from their position as human beings."<sup>26</sup> A short time ago A. Sierszyn took up Frey's position and tried to expand it.<sup>27</sup>

Where does the call to repentance lead us? For H. Frey it is not enough to exchange one method for another: "It is not methods that are important, but a fundamentally new approach".<sup>28</sup> Yes, in fact we ought not to have a new method, because every method is a "degradation of knowledge from the Spirit", it is man's attempt to control the Spirit of God,

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<sup>22</sup> Ludwig *ibid*, pp.88, 126; H. Reiss, *Das Verständnis der Bibel bei J. A. Bengel*, Münster, 1952, p.58.

<sup>23</sup> Ludwig, *ibid*, pp.77.

<sup>23a</sup> E.g. Stuhlmacher Cf. paragraph 4 following.

<sup>24</sup> H. Frey, *Die Krise der Theologie*, Wuppertal, 1971, p.86.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.87.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>27</sup> *Die Bibel im Griff?* Wuppertal, 1978.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p.88.

doomed to fail right from the start.<sup>29</sup> Instead of this we should “rely in a childlike way on the presence of the Great Interpreter (i.e. the Holy Spirit), and claim it by praying and listening”.<sup>30</sup> With the new penitent pneumatic attitude of the exegete, p. 29 healing has started from the roots. Thus the term “pneumatic exegesis” is not quite correct.<sup>31</sup> It would be more accurately called “exegesis of the pneumatician”. Frey, however, is aware of the approaching dangers of subjectivism. He stresses that he “does not want to ban historical work and escape into some kind of fundamentalism”. Indeed, from his point of view he “feels obliged to be very thorough” in asking what the text says. And he asks questions with regard to “form of text, translation, history of concepts, figures of speech and historical setting, immediate and general biblical context”.<sup>32</sup> The attentive reader will, of course, not fail to notice that in guarding against “fundamentalism” and a serious consideration of imagery and the historical setting, it can indeed develop into “critical” work, critical in a sense different from the one indicated by the combined term “historical-critical”. That is why one might actually call Frey’s model “pneumatic-philological”.

From Frey we can learn that in considering what adequate exegesis should be and may be, we cannot ignore the exegete himself. The problem of a *theologia regeneritorum*, frequently treated lightly, is by no means obsolete. Furthermore, we can learn from Frey that the rejection of the historical-critical method does not mean rejection of the *science* of exegesis. Even the radical position of the rejection of every method contains an acknowledgement, a serious will, and a step towards science. Finally we learn here that a “method” as a sequence of steps is not the end, that it must always remain open to correction even with regard to its basic principles, which we have to review hermeneutically time and again.

But Frey leaves his readers with many problems. How can we deem methodical individual steps necessary, and at the same time call a combination of them “sin”? Does the *pneuma* demanded do justice to the missionary dimension of biblical testimony for everybody concerned with practising exegesis? Does this demand, on the contrary, not make dialogue more difficult because we are now no longer willing to be corrected? Above all: how are we to teach and to communicate without being able to take others along with us, since there is no “method”? Perhaps P. Stuhlmacher can help us here.

## **THE “HERMENEUTICS OF ACCEPTANCE” ACCORDING TO PETER STUHLMACHER**

Whilst Frey concentrates on the exegete, Stuhlmacher concentrates p. 30 on the weaknesses of existing exegesis. Again and again he struggles for an adequate exegesis, starting with “Trying to Take Stock” and going on to “New Testament and Hermeneutics” in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (ZThK) 68, 1971 (page 121 ff); his latest publication is entitled “Understanding the New Testament” subtitle “Hermeneutics”, Göttingen, 1979.

If we look at the result of this struggle from the point of view of what Stuhlmacher calls “radical criticism”, we find that a surprising change has taken place in him. He not only severely condemns the “arbitrary way in which critical biblical science sets up itself and

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p.80ff.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p.81.

<sup>31</sup> But Frey himself uses this definition.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*.

its assumptions as absolute”,<sup>33</sup> not only does he firmly oppose the proposition that “Scripture in itself remains obscure and has no recognisable centre”,<sup>34</sup> not only does he expect the exegete to have a “positive attitude to the subject matter announced by Scripture”,<sup>35</sup> and to accept the “doctrine of inspiration of Scripture” as a “view inherent in the Bible and in accordance with it”, and therefore to be prepared to accept inspiration as an event of election and enablement” in the sense of the inspiration of the writer,<sup>36</sup> but rather, he proceeds to a new approach, enlarging Troeltsch’s principles of criticism, analogy and correlation by means of the “principle of perception” proceeding from a fundamental “acceptance of the transmitted text of the Bible”.<sup>37</sup> He calls this new approach “the hermeneutics of acceptance of the biblical texts”.<sup>38</sup> In his dispute with catholic exegesis he points out two procedures by means of which protestant exegesis can avoid every suspicion of “Agorie”. The first is a consideration of “range and limit” of the “critical means which may be used with regard to the original manuscripts of the Bible” and the second, “adherence to the dogmatics of the Church”.<sup>39</sup>

What do these hermeneutical fundamental decisions really signify in terms of the method of exegesis?

First of all, Stuhlmacher wants to continue using the historical-critical method of exegesis in a conscious and considered way.<sup>40</sup> He still believes it to be the only method which can be “scientifically justified and which makes it possible for the Church to proclaim the p. 31 biblical message in a historically flexible, contemporary way.”<sup>41</sup> No other method can be called “scientific”. Stuhlmacher is aware of the fact that the historical-critical method, to quote his own words, “concerns ... the methodology of historical science developed in the course of the Enlightenment ... by means of which historical tradition, which was determined in the form of manuscripts, is analysed in a methodical way and submitted to modern rational judgement”.<sup>42</sup> In consequence his thesis which at first looks so fascinating, acquires an unrelieved and in this way probably unrelievable tension. This tension is a result basically of the fact that the exegete has to justify himself before a two-fold tribunal. On the one hand it is his task “to serve the Bible in ... its superiority of truth”; on the other hand he is just as much irrevocably obliged to do justice to the “scientific consciousness of truth of modern times”.<sup>43</sup> That means he is simultaneously subject to modern judgement and to biblical authority. Does it not follow that in the end he will not have done justice to either of the two? The central question, it seems to me, is: How can we hold the Bible to be God’s truth and at the same time criticize

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<sup>33</sup> ὅμ ἔρσπετην etc., p.209, Cf. p.28.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, p.200.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p.81.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, pp.47, 49ff, 217, 112.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, pp.220, 218.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, pp.205ff.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*, p.210.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p.206.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p.22.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, pp.206, 146. To the “Wahrheitsgewissen der Neuzeit” cf. pp.32, 66, 86, 92, 98, 172f, 217.

it as such? What about its “superiority of truth” if at the same time it permits of critique? And which weighs heaviest, the consciousness of truth, directed by autonomous reason, or biblical statement, when they express different views? Stuhlmacher is caught in a dilemma. Actually he is inclined to favour autonomous criticism; this is apparent when he says that biblical testimony is “in itself historically diverse and partly contradictory”,<sup>44</sup> or when the New Testament is evaluated, indeed not for the first time, by means of the Pauline message of reconciliation. It is not surprising then when theologians find fault with the so-called Jewish-Christian writings and Stuhlmacher says: “Neither in the Epistle of James nor in the Epistle to the Hebrews, nor in the Gospel according in St. Matthew, have the Christian Jews managed before God to trust exclusively in the reconciliation through Christ in the way Paul does, or as in the First Epistle of Peter”.<sup>45</sup> Regrettably, he continues to profess that “a final Yes” with regard to unity and authority of the Bible is impossible for him.<sup>46</sup> Here we are confronted with the hermeneutical thesis of a theology p. 32 of mediation which is not yet convincing. But still it seems to hint that the historical-critical method in current use may not be the only method of scientific exegesis.

## THE HISTORICAL-BIBLICAL METHOD

In the following we make three assumptions: That a scientific method of exegesis is required, that a historical approach to Scripture is necessary and that the incomparable special character of this Scripture calls for special biblical hermeneutics. I shall try to give a short description of these presuppositions.

A scientific method of exegesis is necessary for mutual understanding. I must be in a position to make both those who agree and those who disagree with my interpretations understand how and why I arrived at just these conclusions. Otherwise *pneuma* would be opposed to *pneuma* and God himself would all too easily be claimed to be a party. Contrary to H. Frey I hold that spirit and method need not be opposed to one another. Quite a number of activities in a congregation are based on methods as for instance administration, management, giving lessons, without excluding the Spirit. For the incarnation of the Spirit it is necessary for us to employ provisional correctable methods—in obedience to God, of course. A scientific method is also required for teaching. Theological theory can only be arrived at and transmitted in methodical ways. Without method, arbitrariness would result, the very thing Frey wants to overcome. Moreover, apologetics and mission in the field of thinking require a somewhat rationally comprehensible method. How shall I try to convince by means of argument without employing the logic of human thinking? Only making an idol of method, setting it up as absolute, is wrong.

The second presupposition we are considering is the necessity of having a historical approach to Scripture. This is an area in which the Enlightenment and even historians have rendered theology a service by asking persistently and precisely what really happened. But now we must persist just as much in pointing out that the historical treatment of the Bible is not the only possible nor the only fruitful one. It seems to have dawned on us during the last few years that we have in certain respects very much overestimated the significance of historical methods. By considering the historical aspect as absolute we inevitably arrived at the schizophrenic state where we separated

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p.239.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, p.239.

<sup>46</sup> *ThB*, 8, 1977, p.90.



individual piety and critical thinking, the “pagan head and the pious [p. 33](#) heart”.<sup>47</sup> We ought to realise instead that apart from the historical method of biblical interpretation, the Church may legitimately use other methods, for instance the dynamic-direct method in which I allow myself to be touched by Scripture directly; the spiritual one in which I can also legitimately work in a typological and to a certain degree even in an allegorical way, or the dogmatic method in which I work in accordance with the point of view of the early church fathers and teachers of the Church. Communication between the different methods is essential; they must all be integrated into the Church of Christ. Theology itself is service for and in the Church, and needs to be integrated into its activities.<sup>48</sup> It certainly does not stand above the Church, either as all-knowing or as a prophet. But why should we take a historical approach to the Bible? We reject a deduction from the “understanding of truth and reality of modern times”. The Bible exegete will have to go on using a historical method even when the historical interest of the world surrounding him has vanished altogether. Nor is it sufficient reason that the historical approach is one which can most easily be ‘converted’ into a method. We study the historical background of the Bible because it is—although not exclusively—a historical document. It tells us about the acts of God, which we can also experience in our space-time world. Yes, Christian faith cannot be separated from history; in simple terms: it depends on the fact that here something really has happened.<sup>49</sup> Or, as C. H. Dodd said: “it belongs to the specific character of Christianity that it is a historical religion ... it remains, therefore, a question of acute interest to the Christian theologian, whether their testimony is in fact true”.<sup>50</sup> That is why historical research can, without doubt, enlarge and deepen our understanding. And there is a second reason. Historical research can help to correct sentimental or purely traditional views. A striking example is the way in which liberal research into the life of Jesus has in many instances been able to correct itself. Albrecht Ritschl regarded “the Kingdom of God” as the centre of his theology. His son-in-law, Johannes Weiss, who helped to put forward “consistent eschatology”, realised that Ritschl had interpreted the term “the Kingdom of God” in the wrong way. Whilst [p. 34](#) Ritschl was of the opinion that “the Kingdom of God” consisted of a community of human beings associated for moral purposes with the supremacy of the Spirit over nature, Joh. Weiss proved that for Jesus the Kingdom of God had an eschatological dimension, and was expected to be given by God in a supernatural way. Weiss arrived at this justifiable correction by means of historical research. Of course, we should not overemphasize the necessity of historical research of Scripture lest it appear indispensable for salvation. But what about the third assumption, the specific “biblical hermeneutics”? Is Stuhlmacher not right in speaking about a “permanent failing” of a hermeneutica sacra and especially in accusing biblical hermeneutics of being scientifically impracticable “unless the community of believers gives up all claim to scientific communicability of method and result with regard to biblical interpretation?”<sup>51</sup> Why then does he later emphasize that belief is “no threat to scientific character and communicability” of interpretation?<sup>52</sup> And

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<sup>47</sup> A. Schlatter, *Atheistische Methoden in der Theologie*, *BFchTh* 9,4, 1905, p.235.

<sup>48</sup> But see E. Lohmeyer, *ThLZ*, 1926, Sp. 471, Cf. Stuhlmacher *ibid*, p.221: Der Exeget der Bibel ist “auf das korrigierende Urteil ... auch der glaubenden Gemeinde angewiesen”.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. [Luke 1:1](#) “things that have taken place amongst us”.

<sup>50</sup> *History and the Gospel*, 2. ed., London, 1964, pp.11ff.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, pp.148, 186, 205.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p.204.

does it not, indeed, go beyond the usual “teaching of the art of interpretation of scriptural monuments”—thus the definition of hermeneutics by Wilh. Dilthey<sup>53</sup>—when he wants to “serve” the “superior truth” of the Bible?<sup>54</sup> It gives food for thought to look through the list of theologians who held on to a specific biblical hermeneutic, Have Paul, Augustine, Luther, Coccejus, Spener, Bengel, Francke, Rambach, Crusius, Stäudlin, Lücke, Hofmann, Auberlen, Beck and Hartenstein failed in this respect? Were they unscientific? Or were they not in fact just as able to communicate and just as “successful” as critical exegetes? It is essential to bear in mind that the Bible is not just a book like any other book, but revelation of divine truth put into writing,—which is what it claims to be. A revelation of the only God, even if provisionally considered hypothetical, cannot be interpreted according to exactly the same rules as Hesiod or Curzio Malaparte. We must at least give it the room it claims in order to speak to us. And that means—as distinct from world literature—to “trust in advance”, which includes trust in the “superiority of truth” mentioned.

With its claim of inspiration it points beyond human messengers to God as the final author of its message. The N.T. gives evidence of this inspiration for the Scriptures of that time, for the O.T.<sup>55</sup> Most writings p.35 of the N.T. testify to these inspirations with regard to themselves; Matthew and John, for example, by the careful wording of the introductions to their Gospels (compare [Matt. 1:1](#) with [Gen. 5:1](#); [John 1:1](#) with [Gen. 1:1](#)), Paul for his “Gospel” in [Gal. 1:1ff](#); [1 Cor. 7:40](#) or the Revelation in [22:18f](#). Finally the Early Church, moved by the internal testimony of the Spirit, took certain writings of the apostles and their pupils for its own normative standard. None of the current terms used for inspiration, neither verbal—nor personal—nor scientific inspiration, could be called satisfactory. Following Scripture I therefore suggest we should speak of “entire inspiration”.<sup>56</sup> Thus we can avoid the misunderstanding that inspiration is contrary to the task of historical research or ought always to be understood mechanically. According to [Heb. 1, 1](#) God spoke “polytropos”. The term “entire inspiration” makes us understand the connections between history and salvation, the bridges from prophecy to fulfilment, the recognizable aim of what the Bible communicates. In a similar way the Lausanne declaration in article 2 says that God’s word “is without error in everything it proclaims”—let us be precise: in what it wants to proclaim. It is indeed yet to be ascertained what sort of historical information Holy Scripture intends to communicate. And in using the term “entire inspiration” we do not surrender what—in spite of the unfortunate term “verbal inspiration”—we must not give up: that the entire Scripture is intended to be accepted as a divine gift. To use Bengel’s beautiful words, it is and remains “a letter which my God caused to be written to me, which I shall be guided by and by which my God will judge me.”<sup>57</sup> From this let me point out a final conclusion. If it is true that indeed all Scripture is inspired, i.e. the authoritative word of God which will be fulfilled,<sup>58</sup> it means that we are obliged to look for its unity. For the basic element of its unity is that all Biblical texts either claim to speak about the only God or to Him. The Father of Jesus

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<sup>53</sup> *Ges. Schriften*, V, 1924, p.320.

<sup>54</sup> Stuhlmacher *ibid*, p.206.

<sup>55</sup> [2 Tim. 3, 16](#); [2 Pet. 1, 19ff](#).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *Wie legen wir die Schrift aus?* Basel/Giessen, 1978, pp.33ff.

<sup>57</sup> K. Hermann, *Johann Albrecht Bengel, 1. Teil*, Stuttgart, 1937, p.369.

<sup>58</sup> *Das Ende der historisch-kritischen Methode*, 4. ed., Wuppertal, 1978, p.71.

Christ is at issue, who allows each witness to speak at his own place with his own means. It is impossible for a canon within a canon to be proved historically; it destroys this unity and completeness. "Torn fragments",<sup>59</sup> theological contradications, presuppose what as yet could not be proved, that God set biblical witnesses against each other. By rejecting the content criticism of the Bible we separate ourselves from the system of moderate criticism. p. 36

I believe it can be shown even historically that biblical statements fit harmoniously into a final union of their messages and aims. Belief and thought, understanding and experience, equally support the following statement in Karl Heim's memoirs: "I cannot think of any book more homogenous than the Bible".<sup>60</sup>

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# The Asian Way of Thinking in Theology

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*Lorenzo Bautista, Hidalgo Garcia and Sze-Kar Wan completed an MTh. at Asian Theological Seminary, Manila in June 1981. This thought-provoking paper was prepared in response to a course I taught on "Theological Issues in Asian Theology". It reflects a serious search for a hermeneutic which is true to Scripture and yet addressed to the concrete problems of Asia today. Reflection and response from ERT readers is welcomed.*

(Editor)

## INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the New Testament, theology has emerged from the inter-action between Scripture and representatives of various cultures. In recent years this dialogical character of theological reflection ought to have been underlined by the virtual explosion of modern techniques of communication and transportation. Unfortunately, however, the dominant voices have until recently still come from Europe and North America. The result has not only been an occasional miscarriage in communicating the gospel, but more seriously the failure to appropriate the insights of the whole body of Christ in enriching our understanding of Scripture and our faith. The day is surely past when we simply allow

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<sup>59</sup> J. T. Beck: see B. Riggenbach, *Joh. Tobias Beck*, Basel, 1888, p.154.

<sup>60</sup> Ιχνη γεδενκε δερ'οριγεν Ζειτεν 3. ed., Wuppertal, 1960, p.207.

third world believers to “have their say”, while we Western theologians prepare the definitive answers to their questions. For now we recognize that if we listen carefully we find our own assumptions challenged and our thinking sharpened.

In these pages three Asian theological students do us the favour of reflecting on our common theological task. They show us in the first place that our Christian thinking does not arise in a vacuum but certainly reflects various dominant mental frameworks. These frameworks necessarily determine the way we conceptualize and communicate the gospel. And just as the Western Greek tradition has provided various tools for thinking, the East may also have a contribution to make. Secondly our thinking necessarily grows out of various social and economic situations which call for our response. Here again Asia has a definite agenda of needs which Asian Christians [p. 38](#) must seek to meet. Again we may learn from their struggles to deal with our own particular challenges. Finally all of this may lead to a fresh reading of Scripture from which we all may profit. They have freely acknowledged their dependence on our western traditions; will we now have the joy of learning from theirs? In any case we must hear each other out until “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” ([Eph. 4:13](#)).

*(W. A. Dyrness)*

## **THE ASIAN WAY OF THINKING IN THEOLOGY**

Since Paul’s call to Macedonia, many other causes have led to the establishment of the West as the center of Christianity. This westward movement also meant that Christianity was destined to be understood through the thought forms of its new world. While there were those in the early church who could not see any common ground “between Athens and Jerusalem,” there were also those who thought that “whatever has been uttered aright by any men in any place belongs to us Christians.” Succeeding history has shown that the church did construct its theology using the thought categories of its day. Cyril of Alexandria, to cite but one, spoke of the God-man in terms of the interchange of attributes using the Greek concepts “substance”, “nature”, “person”, and “subsistence”. With due regard to the complexities of the history of ideas, we may say that from the early days down to our own times, Western theologies have always been nourished by the Greek system of concepts. Western models of theology indeed owed to Greek philosophy much of whatever clarity they have achieved.

## **MONISM AND INTUITION IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT**

We are witnessing in our times an accelerated growth of the Asian church and hope may now be entertained that the riches of the Eastern traditions might contribute to the making of a broader model for theology. In the West, the existentialists have shown the limitations of theologies articulated along Greek modes of thought. They have challenged the adequacy of such substance-orientated theologies in understanding man’s true being. The new existential ontology which they have adopted has proved to be very attractive to many Asian theologians. However, existentialism in its Western form is only partially congenial to the Asian mind since it has come largely from a “subject-object” debate strange to Asians. The most important contribution of Asians still must come from their own context of [p. 39](#) ideas. Perhaps the best prospect lies in the Oriental monistic and intuitive approach to reality. Though it is an oversimplification to assign particular ways of thinking to either East or West, we can still broadly discern differences between predominant ways of thinking of the two regions. The Western mind tends to see in reality a basic dual nature (e.g. form-matter, being-becoming, subject-object; possible exceptions

are Nicholas of Cusa, Pascal, de Chardin, the Phenomenological theologians, etc.). This dual orientation also inspires the Western propensity for intellection (of the process of understanding). Tools of reason such as the laws of identity and excluded middle are closely related to a dualistic approach. The indispensability of this system in everyday experience as well as in formal logic is so obvious that its formal limitation is not fully appreciated. In cases where its adequacy is challenged, as for instance in the classic encounter between cognition and eternal truth, thinkers either affirm the one at the expense of the other, or, as in the case of Kierkegaard,<sup>1</sup> create the ontological category “paradox”. Monistic thinking, by contrast, could see the world in terms of unity. It does not deny opposites but regards them as polar complements. It is seldom applied in theology because of the predominance of dualism and the verdict that monism is in basic conflict with the Christian teaching of “a radical distinction between the various grades of being.”<sup>2</sup> But when monism is tempered by a healthy appreciation of the Biblical dualism between Creator and creature, it can be a tool for clarity. Biblical theology suggests how a recognition of a unitary outlook in the Biblical writer’s understanding of the Kingdom of God, man’s psychology, etc, can qualify our own understanding of such relationships as man-creation, sacred-secular, and spirit-matter.

Intuition is related to monism in a similar manner that intellection is related to dualism. Intuition is immediate knowing. Unlike intellection it transcends the process of inference. Attention to this way of knowing is important for two reasons. First, intuition is basic to all knowing. Pure intellection cannot attain true insight without being nurtured by intuition at every point. M. Polanyi has tried to show that the gap existing between our conscious reconstruction and insight itself is bridged only by what he calls “tacit knowing”.<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that whenever there is in the West a reaction against a “subject-object” dualism, models of knowing tend to go in the direction p. 40 of intuition. Thus for Gadamer, the apprehension of truth and reality is more than a conscious conceptualization can achieve.<sup>4</sup> Similar ideas may be traced to Schleiermacher, Dilthey and others in the West who have helped to keep open the question of logic and knowing. Secondly, the necessity of appealing to intuition becomes most acute when one is confronted by eternity. The encounter with the divine does not occur within the dimension of concepts or in terms of logical necessity. It occurs on the level of the immediate. Heschel believes that this is the basic Old Testament way of knowing reality.<sup>5</sup>

But we may ask whether theology’s very nature as conceptual and propositional necessarily relegates intuition outside it, into the realm of mystical experience. To answer this affirmatively is to miss our whole point. An objectifying stance in theology always carries with it the risk of creating gaps between true insight and dogma, between description and encounter, and between theory and practice. Concepts and words, says Heschel, “must not become screens; they must be regarded as windows.”<sup>6</sup> In this program, we do not lose the concepts, we only gain intuition. If this optimism is justified, it will further lead us to a deeper understanding of theological tradition and orthodoxy. They

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<sup>1</sup> *Journals*.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, S. V. “Monism”.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tacit Dimension*, 1966, 57, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Truth and Method*.

<sup>5</sup> *Between God and Man*, 1954, 64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 65.



will now be regarded not as negative factors for creativity but as paths that lead to surprising possibilities. We are reminded of the illustrative case of Planck who arrived at his Quantum Theory out of a new knowledge of established laws available to all scientists. Likewise, old dogmas may be surprisingly confirmed as we engage our intuitive faculties in the continuing effort for theological insight.

## SOCIAL ANALYSIS AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN ASIA

Asians are beginning to articulate their contextually formulated theologies.<sup>7</sup> The discussion on contextualization has been both the impetus of and witness to this development. There is a growing uneasiness P.41 about the place of ready-made Western theology in an Asian context. The main concern, thus, is to formulate theology that is “born out of the meeting of a living church and its world.”<sup>8</sup> One major attempt at theological contextualization is the formulation of “the critical Asian principle” which seeks to identify what is distinctively Asian. This distinctiveness becomes a “critical principle of judgment” in theological reflection.<sup>9</sup>

There is no consensus, however, as to the form contextualization should take. There is still a confusion moreover between indigenization and contextualization.<sup>10</sup> Usually, indigenization includes anthropological adaptation of ecclesiastical elements and activities that focuses primarily on communication of the Gospel in terms of the thought patterns of a people. Contextualization, on the other hand, as formulated by S. Coe and A. Sapsezian, takes a further step and accounts for “the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice which characterized the historical moment of the nations in the Third World.”<sup>11</sup>

Whatever direction contextualization may take it is important that be based on an authentic social analysis<sup>12</sup> which may include sociological, anthropological, economic and political elements. Asian theologians to be sure have been aware of the experience of Asian people. This awareness should however lead them to exploit the richness of the Asian experience in their theological reflection and this calls for careful social analysis. Our cherished desire to “asianize” theology, to a certain degree, can only be achieved by upholding the integrity of the Asian situation in our analysis.

Today, Asian theologians are more serious about socio-political issues than those that arise out of indigenization. They are writing theologies that would respond to the quest

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<sup>7</sup> The increasing number of volumes of Asian theologies attests to this, cf. D. J. Elwood, ed., *What Asian Christians Are Thinking* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1976); G. Anderson, ed., *Asian Voices in Christian Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975). For a summary of some of these theologies, see D. J. Elwood, “Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking,” in *The Human and The Holy*, E. P. Nacpil, D. J. Elwood, eds. (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1978). And most recently, the evangelical assessment by Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> East Asia Christian Conference, “The Confessing Church in Asia and its Theological Task,” in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking*, p.44.

<sup>9</sup> E. P. Nacpil, “The Critical Asian Principle,” in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking*, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> For a short discussion on indigenization-contextualization debate, see B. J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979) pp.20–23.

<sup>11</sup> Theological Education Fund, *Ministry in Context* (London: Theological Education Fund, 1972) p.20.

<sup>12</sup> Social Analysis is an exploration of a social situation, its historical and structural relationships. Cf. Peter Henriot, Joe Holland, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and justice* (Washington: Center of Concern, 1980) pp.3ff.



of Asian people. This quest includes human dignity and freedom, freedom from dehumanizing structures and a more genuine communion among men. p. 42

For many Asian theologians the concern is not merely social ethics. In christology, for instance, Christ as present and working in “Asian suffering and hope” takes a prominent position.<sup>13</sup> But some have also opted for a social amelioration program. To cite one example, E. P. Nacpil has proposed that modernization can be viewed within the “larger perspective” of God’s mission.<sup>14</sup> The theological reason for this is that the mission of God is logically prior to the mission of the church and more inclusive than that of the historical church.

We need not evaluate such theologies on exegetical grounds alone. Rather, since Asian theologians’ main intent is to reflect on the historical reality, theologies may be assessed on the ground of social analysis. A theology which is a reflection on historical reality requires a proper view of that reality. A christology that presents Christ in relation to suffering Asia requires a social analysis that would define and establish the interrelationships of the painful experiences of Asian people. Moreover, God’s mission may indeed include modernization but such an amelioration program must be laid out in accordance with the people’s values, aspirations and capabilities. We should not exclude the possibility that, after all, modernization in the sense of the West or even that of Japan, is not what a people needs. For instance, the multinational corporations’ avowed aim is modernization or development. But in actual practice their presence has more often than not aggravated poverty in Asia.<sup>15</sup>

We are not suggesting that the historical context or some social analysis, becomes the judge of the truthfulness of our theology; we reserve this role for the Word of God. The point is that we want to discover other aspects of the truth of revelation in relation to our particular historical reality. This is quite in accord with J. Luis Segundo who suggests that one’s experience with reality leads to ideological, theological or even exegetical suspicion; this gives us a new hermeneutic.<sup>16</sup> We must clarify, however, that suspicion does not necessarily mean that our previous interpretation of the biblical texts was wrong. Rather an experience with a new reality opens up a landscape of God’s truth which may be overlooked in another historical. p. 43 context. Thus, we should always maintain the essential link between social analysis and hermeneutics and theological reflection.

## POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES: A SAMPLE EXEGESIS

A common approach to “power and principalities” in the West is to distinguish the mythological husk from the message itself. Thus, Allan Galloway calls the “demons” *symbols* of “the distortion in the structure of existence”.<sup>17</sup> The sentiment is shared by G. H. C. MacGregor who sees them in analogy with evil forces.<sup>18</sup> Even so conservative an exegete

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. D. J. Elwood, “Emerging Themes ...” pp.237–38.

<sup>14</sup> “Missions and Modernization,” in *What Asian Christians are Thinking*, pp.277–278.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. E. Muller, “The Multinational Corporations: Asset or Impediment to World Justice?” *IDOC—North America* 53 (May, 1973); Waldron Scott, “American Evangelicals and Global Corporations,” in *Church and Nationhood*, L. Holmes, ed. (New Delhi: World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> *The Liberation of Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p.9.

<sup>17</sup> *The Cosmic Christ* (London, 1951) 28.

<sup>18</sup> “Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul’s Thought,” *New Testament Studies* (1954/55) 17–28.

as F. F. Bruce likens the stars and demons to psychological, physical, or economic determinism.<sup>19</sup> The clearest example of course is Rudolf Bultmann who interprets them as expressions of man's inability to control the future and in terms of the New Testament's call for existential emancipation.<sup>20</sup> Amos Wilder rightly criticizes this interpretation for "lack of sufficient realism to the powers"; but his own suggestion—"symbolizing cultural and psychological reality"—is not a substantial improvement.<sup>21</sup> Oscar Cullmann more than anyone takes the language seriously. He is willing to admit the close correspondence between the spirits and world government in Paul's thinking.<sup>22</sup> This keen insight, unfortunately, is left undeveloped; the spirits tend to be reduced to nothing more than stage-settings for the cosmic drama of redemption.

The intention of this section is to illustrate how an Asian unitary framework can engender fruitful exegesis of "powers and principalities". This is an inadequate basis for any proposed method; but it does underscore the necessity of a Gospel-culture dialectic. For brevity's sake, our scope is limited to Colossians.

[Col. 1:16](#). The hymnic qualities of [Col. 1:15–20](#) suggests a strophic analysis although there is not any agreement in structure. Noting the double Adamic significance (*eikon* and *arche* in 15, 18),<sup>23</sup> we divide it [p. 44](#) into two movements—creation ([15–17](#)) and re-creation ([18–20](#))—in order to emphasize Christ's solidarity with the worldly order.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely because of Christ's intimate relationship with the world right from the beginning that the death-resurrection complex, tacitly implied in the Christological hymn, should affect the rest of the cosmos, and that Paul's later injunction to identify with Christ (2.12ff) becomes intelligible.<sup>25</sup>

But regardless of to what extent this hypothesis is correct, "powers and principalities" ([1:16](#))<sup>26</sup> stand in a much more positive light than is generally assumed. Most critics, basing their arguments on a dubious identification of the Colossian heresy as Gnosticism, assert that the spiritual beings are deliberately debased to accentuate Christ's supremacy.<sup>27</sup> But as part of the original creation, these beings were created good (note the preposition

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<sup>19</sup> E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians* (Grand Rapids, 1957) 241.

<sup>20</sup> *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, tr. K. Grobel (New York, 1951) 258f.

<sup>21</sup> "Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics," *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, eds. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge, England, 1957) 529.

<sup>22</sup> *Christ and Time*, tr. F. V. Filson (Philadelphia, 1964) 185, 191–93.

<sup>23</sup> See H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, tr. J. R. Dewitt (Grand Rapids, 1975) 84–86.

<sup>24</sup> This is most clearly expressed by the *hapax legomena sunistemi* which should be translated as "cohere". The play on words *eis*, *diá* and *en*, which may have originated from the stoic view that God and nature are one, further supports this. See C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1958) 65.

<sup>25</sup> Whether or not [Col. 1:15–20](#) has a pre-literary history is irrelevant for our purpose; that Paul, by including it in the epistle, agrees with its theology is obvious.

<sup>26</sup> Most exegetes agree that "owers and principalities" refer to demonic spirits, if not exclusively. See a recent work which attempts to deal with the problem in the Philippine setting: D. Schneider, "Colossians 1:15–16 and the Philippine Spirit World," *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 15:2 (1974) 91–101.

<sup>27</sup> This is typical of the older commentators such as E. Käsemann ("A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy," *Essays on New Testament Themes*, tr. W. J. Montague (Naperville, 1964) 149–68) and G. Bornkamm ("The Heresy of Colossians," *Conflict at Colossae*, eds. F. O. Francis and W. A. Meeks (Missoula, Mont., 1973) 123–46).

triad, *eie—dià—en* Christ) and are in fact worth being reconciled to God as part of the redeemed cosmos ([1:19](#)).<sup>28</sup>

[Col. 2:15](#). But Christ's relation to powers and principalities is not one-sidedly positive. The very necessity of reconciliation presupposes that a once harmonious unity has been disrupted, and that the originally good-natured beings have staged a rebellious confrontation against God. The restoration of the cosmos is effected through the Christ-event on the cross, where the rebels are decisively defeated [p. 45](#) ([Col. 2:19](#)). The syntax of [2:15](#) is difficult. Some, following the preceding context (vv. [13](#)) supply God as the subject of *apekdusthai*.<sup>29</sup> But such would necessitate taking "powers and principalities" as the direct objects, an alternative discouraged by the middle voice of the verb.<sup>30</sup> *Apekdusthai* the deponent, means "to strip oneself of", denoting the personal interest of the one who acts.<sup>31</sup> It is therefore more suitable to render the construction as Christ's stripping off of *himself* the powers and principalities.<sup>32</sup> Correspondingly, *en avto* must be translated as "through it (i.e., the cross)" instead of "in him".

The concept is difficult for a modern western mind to grasp. After all, Christ stripped off his *flesh* on the historical cross,<sup>33</sup> not powers and principalities. But where a dichotomizing worldview balks at its incongruity, the Asian unitary thinking finds it common-sensical and intuitive. Filipinos, to take a typical example, even those who live in urbanized, industrialized centers, have adopted a desacralized view only superficially. They continue to believe in spirits who infest the trees, rocks and other elements of nature. Ghosts, or departed ancestors as the case may be, are believed to actively participate in human affairs; they are especially influential during important events such as birth, marriage, death, business ventures, or harvest.<sup>34</sup> Within this thought world the flesh is precisely the medium through which [p. 46](#) demonic spirits exercise their dominion over man.<sup>35</sup> Thus, by a voluntary death Christ shatters the demon's ability to hold him in

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<sup>28</sup> E. Lohse (*Colossians and Philemon*, tr. W. R. Pochlmann and R. J. Karris (Philadelphia, 1971) 61) denies that the power and principalities are included as part of the redeemed cosmos. But surely *panles* in [1:20](#) most naturally echoes that in vv. [15–16](#). See for example, C. F. D. Moule, *Colossians* 71; and J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, 1959; reissued 1979) 160. An eventual reconciliation of all things—the animate and inanimate, natural and supernatural—is a Pauline concept; see [Eph. 1:10](#); [1 Cor. 15:25–28](#).

<sup>29</sup> Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 111f.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g., the grammatical observation raised by Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 189f. Lightfoot is joined by Moule, *Colossians* 101; and R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon* (Greenwood, SC, 1974) 87.

<sup>31</sup> Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d. ed. (Chicago; London. 1979) 83; A. Oepke, *TDNT* 2, 319; R. P. Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 101f.

<sup>33</sup> As observed by the Latin Fathers. Cf., e.g. Augustine, *Epist.* 149. For fuller reference, see Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 190. This interpretation is revived recently by J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London, 1952) 41.

<sup>34</sup> See F. Landa Jocano, "Notes on Philippine Divinities," *Asian Studies* 7 (1968) 169–82; L. N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacioban City, Philippines, 1974) 172f.

<sup>35</sup> That this Asian rediscovery plumbs the depth of Paul's thinking is all the more strengthened by the support of C. A. A. Scott, *Christianity According to St. Paul* (Cambridge, 1932) 34f. Recent works by and large consent that Paul conforms to the contemporary Greco-Roman view of the State, according to which rulers are divinely appointed, and spirits stand directly behind worldly affairs. Two well-documented works are in agreement: Bo Reicke, "The Law and This World According to Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 70

bondage; by the resurrection he defeats and subdues them. The cross is the focal point where they are publicly humiliated and where Christ's triumphal procession is staged.

Before proceeding to the third passage, it should be observed that a unitary worldview resolves the odious disparity between evangelism and social concern. The role of the powers and principalities is nowhere explicated in Colossians, though their influence on the *whole* cosmos is implied by [1:15f](#). The enumeration of various spirits serves primarily to emphasize Christ's supremacy,<sup>36</sup> but such a literary device receives strength only if the spirits' influence is presupposed to span the *whole* creation, crossing the artificial boundary that separates the personal from the structural. Biblical dualism is not between the spiritual and the social but between the kingdom of the Son and the dominion of the dark spirits ([1:13f](#)).<sup>37</sup> Christ's victory is therefore liberation from *both* personal/spiritual *and* socio-political bondage. The Church's responsibility is to complete the victory decisively won by Christ.<sup>38</sup> It means to proclaim and effect freedom in *all* areas of personal life and society. The power of evil manifests itself in a number of ways; to deal with only one to the negligence of the others diminishes the cosmic significance of Christ's victory. The dichotomy between social action and evangelism is thus a false one. p. 47

## THE REDEMPTION OF THE POWERS

[Col. 2:10](#). Christ's dialectic—better, redemptive—relation to the powers and principalities is clearly expressed in terms of headship. "Head" implies supremacy, as in [1:18](#). The rebellion is suppressed, and the evil contingents brought under control. But they are also preserved and redeemed, for the head at the same time maintains an inextricable relationship with the body.<sup>39</sup> The loss of connection with the head is the cause of chaos, fragmentation, and disorganisation ([2:19](#)). Here the redemptive cycle is completed. Created good, they rebelled and are subsequently defeated; but the defeat is their redemption, for they are restored to their proper creatureship.

Juxtaposed with this biblical view of the spirits, Filipino spiritism stands in need of both affirmation and correction. Paul's worldview approximates closely to that of the Filipinos. This, given its full weight, ought to neutralize whatever force is left of the desacralization introduced by the West, a result more of "chronological snobbery"<sup>40</sup> than logical deduction. Filipino spiritism, therefore, receives ample support from the New Testament, a conclusion that reinforces our hermeneutical starting point of affirming

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(1951) 259–76; Clinton Morrison, *The Powers that Be* (Naperville, 11, 1960); C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Commentary on Romans 12–13* (Edinburgh, 1965) 68ff; R. J. Sider, "Christ and Power," *International Review of Mission* 69 (1980) 12–15. For fuller bibliography, see Mouw, *Politics and Biblical Drama* (Grand Rapids, 1976) 86 n.1.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 66.

<sup>37</sup> This observation admirably agrees with our proposal-for a biblical monism. While a dualism between the creator and creature is no doubt valid, the dominion of the darkness and the kingdom of the Son must not be placed in eternal, dualistic terms. All kingdoms, even including that of the rebels, are ultimately measured in reference to the Kingdom of God.

<sup>38</sup> The necessity of the church's completion of what Christ has done on the cross is due to the overlapping of the two aeons. For an enlightening and relevant discussion, see Wilder, "Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics," *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> See Simpson-Bruce, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 203. If the solidarity theme is maintained throughout [1:15–20](#), Christ's headship over the church would surely imply not only position of priority but also intimate involvement.

<sup>40</sup> The apt expression is C. S. Lewis's.

indigenous cultures. On the debit side of the ledger, however, the New Testament's redemptive view of the spirits must be given its independent, critical status as well. Christ has decisively defeated the demonic powers; these beings have residue dominion over man only because we still wait for the consummation of our redemption. They are subservient to Christ. Any piety, veneration, and worship offered to them therefore must be deemed misdirected.<sup>41</sup>

But Christ's relation to the spirit world is really intimately connected to the question concerning the Gospel and culture since Paul himself discusses these two issues side by side (2:13f. and 2:15). Most exegetes regard the abolition of the "written codes" and "regulations" (2:13f.) as merely *vivid illustration* of Christ's victory over demonic powers (2:15).<sup>42</sup> But within a unitary framework, these two events converge. Paul emphasizes Christ's supremacy in order to dispel p. 48 the mystique of these legalistic elements over man.<sup>43</sup> Once human customs are exposed, man need no longer be enslaved by them since their backers are now hopelessly weakened. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the redemption of the power and principalities and that of cultural values. That which was originally created good, in spite of its rebellious corruption, must now be transformed, renewed, and reconciled.

This redemptive view of culture is illustrated perfectly in 2:10f, the transition from Christ's headship in 2:10 to a comparison of two forms of circumcision in 2:11 is harsh; but it can be resolved if the dualism between the kingdom of the Son and the dominion of darkness is maintained on the one hand (1:13f.), and on the other the unitary framework which allows us to penetrate the facade of human achievements and discern the demonic influence behind them. Caught in the cosmic struggle, man now can transfer from one sphere to the other. The sign of the dark dominion is "a circumcision done by Christ" (2:11).<sup>44</sup> Noteworthy is the fact that even though the two forms of circumcision may bear no physical resemblance to each other. Paul insists on designating both as "circumcision". Even circumcision needs redemption. Though it was originally instituted by divine ordinance, it has fallen prey to the control of the dark lords. It must be submitted to the headship of Christ before it qualifies to be the sign of the new kingdom. It is significant that redemption is not annihilation. Cultural goodness is tacitly affirmed, but it is affirmed critically, or redemptively. The cosmos has fallen under the sway of demonic powers; if its goodness is to emerge at all, it must acknowledge the redemptive relationship. That is, a culture will realise its p. 49 fullest potential only when it assumes the creaturely posture under the headship of Christ.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> A similar critique can be levelled against other Asian views of the spirits such as ancestral worship among the Chinese.

<sup>42</sup> Or, in the words of R. P. Martin (*Colossians and Philemon*, 83) "picturelanguage."

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion of the Colossian heresy, see Lightfoot's classic essay, "the Colossian Heresy," in his *Colossians and Philemon*, 73–113. More recent discussions are summarized in Francis-Meeks (eds.), *Conflict at Colossae, passim*. See also Banstra, "Did the Colossian Errorists need a Mediator?" *New Dimensions in New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids, 1974). Suffice to say that, for our purpose, Paul is fighting a form of legalism more subtle than that of the Galatian church and therefore more lethal. See Simpson-Bruce, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 166.

<sup>44</sup> Contrary to Moule (*Colossians and Philemon*, 94–96), the translation, "done by Christ," is favored when we take seriously the dualistic opposition between the two dominions.

<sup>45</sup> What is said about cultural bondage and transformation can equally be applied to the political world as well. References to the socio-political problems are lacking in Col. 1:16; but it is possible to take "powers," "principalities," "thrones," "rulers" as human potentates, although most commentators lay emphasis, correctly, on the cosmic dimension. For the spiritual beings after all stand behind the *whole* of creation, in



## CONCLUSION

We are faced with an ambiguity. At one extreme, as advocated by the majority of Asian theologians, contemporary Asia is the sole consideration towards the construction of a “critical framework” within which we are to pursue our theological reflection. But such a simplistic incorporation is laden with dangers; modernisation is a treacherous, even if necessary, path teeming with dark forces lying in ambush. There are ample evidences that refer to the evil by-products of modernization. An independent voice of the Bible must be allowed to assume an authoritative posture over developing Asia. Such a consideration, however, is not to support the opposite extreme maintained by those content to merely parrot the biblical content. We cannot escape, epistemologically, our cultures, backgrounds, and concerns, which define our mode of expression. But more than this, our theology, while thoroughly grounded in the Bible, must address the concrete problems of Asia today. A penetrating study of Asia’s problem is hence imperative.

An Asian theology must therefore be governed by the dialectic interplay between culture and the Bible. The cultural context poses the questions to the Bible. And the biblical answer, to complete the hermeneutical circle, must be given full integrity not only to respond to the contemporary issues but especially to reformulate, if necessary, the questions themselves. And these answers must then be applied to the bleeding sores of a suffering continent, or some such thing; we need to complete the *Pastoral* circle too! p. 50

# Principalities and Powers and their Relationship to Structures

Peter O’Brien

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*The author surveys the arguments for interpreting “principalities and powers” in terms of socio-political structures of human society, and then examines the biblical texts especially in Ephesians and Colossians, and suggests a theological reconstruction. This article should be read in conjunction with “The Asian Way of Thinking in Theology”. The reader may then reflect on the importance of cultural background in biblical interpretation.*

(Editor)

## INTRODUCTION

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the political as *well* as the cultural sphere. The Colossian problem was basically cultural, and thus Christ’s cosmic victory finds its application in cultural terms. But it can be applied politically. *Ezouslaus* is known to be used of political authorities ([Rom. 13:1](#)), and in [1 Cor. 2:7–8](#), the “powers and principalities” are held responsible for the crucifixion. Such a blending of history and “mythology” which is otherwise inconceivable to the modern West, can be quite naturally affirmed by a Filipino hermeneutic. Demonic beings also stand behind political structures.



In a recent article written in preparation for the meeting of the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelization, held at Melbourne, Australia in May, 1980, Ronald J. Sider commented: "To announce Christ's Lordship to the principalities and powers is to tell governments that they are not sovereign."<sup>1</sup> Earlier in the same article Sider had noted: "There is growing agreement that when St. Paul speaks of the principalities and powers ..., he refers *both* to the socio-political structures of human society and to unseen spiritual forces that undergird, lie behind and in some mysterious way help shape human socio-political structures."<sup>2</sup> Sider's references to governments, and the principalities being identified, in part at least, with "the socio-political structures of human society" is consistent with a recent trend among contemporary theologians. So, for example, Ernst Käsemann, in a paper read at the Melbourne conference and entitled "The Eschatological Royal Reign of God," acknowledged that when the New Testament referred to the powers and authorities it seemed to indicate that they were personal. However, Käsemann recognizes that we may "criticize and demythologize the language and ideas of an antique world-view as out of date." In fact, he adds, we must do this "since only in this way can we have a true perception of the reality of our contemporary life and present world" (p.4). Accordingly we must reinterpret the Pauline statements and **P. 51** understand them of demonic structures which need to be exorcized in the name of Christ.

The purpose of this essay is three-fold: first, to chart the development of this post-war theory which assumes that when the apostle Paul spoke of the "principalities and powers," as well as equivalent terms, he was alluding to structures of thought such as tradition, convention, law, authority and even religion, particularly as embodied in the state and its institutions, rather than to demonic intelligences. Second, we shall attempt to offer a critique of this view by reference to the New Testament. And, third, some brief concluding remarks will be made about the relationship of the principalities to the structures.

### THE RECENT DEBATE<sup>3</sup>

The particular facet of Sider's work to which attention has been drawn gives evidence of an indebtedness to John Howard Yoder's writings (note especially his volume *The Politics of Jesus*) and he in turn has been influenced by Hendrick Berkhof (see below). Ernst Käsemann, meanwhile, is the most recent in a long line of exegetes to espouse this increasingly fashionable theory, and it is interesting to note in passing how similar conclusions are reached by scholars from a variety of theological backgrounds using different hermeneutical methods.

Although a number of German theologians had been debating this possibility in the 1930s, in the English-speaking world it seems to have been a post-war discussion. Gordon Rupp (*Principalities and Powers*, 1952) writing in the aftermath of the Second World War drew attention to the Pauline expression "principalities and powers" at the beginning of his book. By this phrase, borrowed from later Jewish apocalyptic thought, Paul meant "supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings who inhabited the stars and ... were the arbiters of human destiny," enslaving men "beneath a cosmic totalitarianism" (pp.11, 12). However, without any exegetical justification he

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Sider, "Christ and Power", *IRM* 69, (1980), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Attention is drawn to the clear and incisive treatment of this development, to which I am indebted, by John R. W. Stott in *God's new society, The message of Ephesians*, 1979, pp.267-275.

simply transferred the expression to economic, social and political forces. Rupp spoke of the “little people” who in every era had felt themselves to be nothing more than the playthings of great historical forces and now in the twentieth century [p. 52](#) believed they were the victims of “great economic and sociological pressures”. Down the centuries, according to Dr. Rupp, the principalities and powers have assumed many disguises. Today, as terrifying and as deadly as ever, they are the economic, social and political forces.

Hendrik Berkhof’s monograph, *Christ and the Powers* (1953; E.T. 1962), has been influential in this debate (for example, note Yoder’s indebtedness, *The politics of Jesus*, 135–62). His thesis is that Paul borrowed the vocabulary of the powers from Jewish apocalyptic, yet his understanding of them was different. Jewish apocalypses thought primarily of the principalities and powers as heavenly angels; Paul regarded them as structures of earthly existence (p.23). He demythologized them! Although the Apostle may have “conceived of the Powers as personal beings ... this aspect is so secondary that it makes little difference whether he did or not” (p.24). According to Berkhof such powers are to be identified with the *stoicheia tou kosmou* (“elemental spirits of the universe”) of [Galatians 4:3, 9](#) and [Colossians 2:8, 20](#). He translates the expression as “world powers” and considers they are seen in human traditions as well as religious and ethical rules. The powers (e.g. tradition, morality, justice and order) which were created by God have become tyrannical and the objects of worship. They both preserve and corrupt society. But Christ has overcome them for, in his cross and resurrection they have been “unmasked as false gods”, and “the power of illusion” has been struck from their hands.<sup>4</sup> As a result Christians see through the deception of the powers and refuse, in principle at least, to be enslaved or intimidated by them. The “Holy Spirit ‘shrinks’ the powers before the eye of faith”<sup>5</sup> so that the believer sees their true creaturely existence. Also the church announces to the powers that their unbroken dominion has come to an end and wages a defensive warfare against them; it is thus along these lines that Berkhof sought to explain [Ephesians 3:10](#) and [6:10–17](#).

G. B. Caird in a series of lectures delivered in 1954 (subsequently published as *Principalities and Powers. A Study of Pauline Theology*, 1956) took a similar line on the meaning of the powers in Pauline thought. He drew particular attention to three of them: first, “pagan religion and pagan power”, including the state, and according to his understanding of [Ephesians 3:10](#) these have already begun to be redeemed through Christian social action. Second, the law which is [p. 53](#) good in itself, since it is God’s, becomes demonic when it is “exalted into an independent system of religion”. The third power is those recalcitrant elements in nature which resist God’s rule, e.g. wild animals, diseases, storms and even the whole of creation’s bondage to corruption. According to Paul’s view—which Caird thinks is marred by “faulty logic and equally faulty exegesis,” not to mention “the insufficiency of Paul’s spurious arguments”<sup>6</sup>—man lives under these divinely appointed authorities which because of sin have become demonic agencies. These powers can be robbed of their tyrannical influence and brought into true subjection to God only in the cross.

In his more recent commentary on Ephesians Caird seems to have shifted his ground somewhat by conceding that Paul was referring to “spiritual beings” which operated in

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<sup>4</sup> Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, pp.388, cited by Stott, *God’s new society*, p.269.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.269.

<sup>6</sup> Caird, *Principalities and Powers*, pp.20, 21, cited by Stott, *God’s new society*, p.269.

and through the structures. He comments: "The real enemies are the spiritual forces that stand behind all institutions of government, and control the lives of men and nations."<sup>7</sup>

Markus Barth is the fourth advocate of this position whose writings John Stott examines in his survey.<sup>8</sup> In an earlier work on the subject, *The Broken Wall. A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (published in 1959), Barth identified the principalities and authorities by reference to four features of Pauline thought, namely, the state (including political, judicial and ecclesiastical authorities), death, the moral and ritual law, and economic structures including slavery. In his later comprehensive commentary on Ephesians Barth seems to agree that Paul believed in supernatural powers—a belief which Barth regards as "superstitious" or "mythological." So "Paul denotes the angelic or demonic beings that reside in the heavens" though there are direct links between these powers and structures or institutions of life on earth. In a statement that wishes to have it both ways Barth adds: "the 'principalities and powers' are at the same time intangible spiritual entities and concrete historical, social or psychic structures or institutions."<sup>9</sup>

One might add the names of other authors to the list, but this is unnecessary. The case has been argued with considerable skill by exegetes and theologians who have then been followed by more popular writers. Furthermore, two exegetical and hermeneutical problems of the New Testament and contemporary theology seem to have been p. 54 resolved in one stroke. On the one hand, since the onset of critical New Testament studies it has virtually been taken for granted that when Paul spoke about angels, demons or powers he was simply reflecting an antique and outmoded world-view which had to be reinterpreted radically or even dropped. On this recent view, however, Paul's obscure references to the heavenly powers speak relevantly to our own earthly situations. On the other hand, advocates of this line have admitted they had great difficulty in finding in the New Testament any allusions to social structures, which have become a significant modern preoccupation. The new theory now solves both problems simultaneously. "We lose the demons and gain the structures, for the principalities and powers are structures in disguise."<sup>10</sup>

## SOME CRITICAL COMMENTS

Although one may express some doubt about this interpretation on the grounds of the presuppositions of its advocates and those who have been prepared to accept it, it would be wrong to reject the theory (or its variants) on this basis alone, or for that matter because some of its features were new. The issues must finally be settled on exegetical and theological grounds. Our initial response, therefore, will be to examine some key texts in Ephesians and Colossians which have been used in support of the theory, before making a survey of the wider New Testament teaching.

### (a) Texts in Ephesians and Colossians

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<sup>7</sup> G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, 1976, p.91.

<sup>8</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, pp.270f.

<sup>9</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 11, p.800, quoted by Stott, *op. cit.*, p.271.

<sup>10</sup> Stott, *ibid.*, p.271.

The three main references in Ephesians to the principalities and powers are chapters [1:20–21](#); [3:10](#) and [6:10ff](#).<sup>11</sup> In the first Christ is said to have been raised by God “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion ...” The difficulty with interpreting this to mean “far above all earthly rulers and institutions” is that the realm in which Christ has been supremely exalted is specifically designated as “in the heavenlies”<sup>12</sup> at God’s right hand. Earthly structures do not fit this context. At chapter [3:10](#), again because of the allusion to “the heavenly places,” the interpretation which considers Paul to be asserting that God’s manifold wisdom is made known through the [p. 55](#) church to the power structures on earth is very strange indeed. Finally, in chapter [6:10ff](#) the Christian’s spiritual warfare is said to be “not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers ...” On the more recent view this must mean that the believer does not war against human forces, but demonic structures. However, there are several serious weaknesses with this understanding; first, as in the two previous references, there is the awkward addition of the phrase “in the heavenly places.” These principalities and powers are in the heavenly realm. Second, the references to “the world rulers of this present darkness” and “the spiritual hosts of wickedness,” as well as the kind of armour needed to withstand them, fit supernatural powers more easily, particularly when it is noted that the devil is mentioned twice (vs. [11](#), [16](#)) in this context. The view that the phrase means “not with human but with demonic forces,” which until recent times has been universally held, is still more satisfactory on exegetical grounds. Stott,<sup>13</sup> after his exegetical critique, claims, “I have not come across a new theorist who takes into adequate account the fact that all three references to the principalities and powers in Ephesians also contain a reference in the heavenly places, that is, the unseen world of spiritual reality.” Perhaps this is also why both Caird and Barth, when writing their commentaries on the Letter to the Ephesians, modified their earlier positions in the direction of supernatural spiritual forces.

The evidence of Colossians is best understood along similar lines. At chapter [1:16](#) the principalities and powers, together with thrones and dominions as part of “all things,” have been created in Christ, as well as through him and for him. These same authorities are said to have been reconciled in him (v.[20](#)) so that the universe is again placed under its head and cosmic peace has been restored. When Paul speaks of reconciliation on this wide front he probably includes the notion of pacification, since some of the principalities and powers are not depicted as gladly surrendering to God’s grace but as submitting against their wills to a power they cannot oppose.<sup>14</sup> Although the point cannot be established decisively from verses [16](#) and [20](#), the most natural interpretation is that four classes (“thrones, dominions, principalities and powers”) of spiritual and supernatural forces (possibly representing the highest orders of the angelic realm) are in view.<sup>15</sup> In our judgment this personal interpretation also makes the [p. 56](#) most sense out of chapter [2:15](#). In a statement full of picturesque language and graphic metaphors Paul asserts that God stripped the principalities and powers—who kept men and women in their dreadful clutches because they possessed the damning indictment, man’s signed

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<sup>11</sup> The issue of the Pauline or post-Pauline authorship is not particularly relevant to the exegetical issues and need not be examined.

<sup>12</sup> Note A. T. Lincoln, “A Re-examination of ‘the Heavenlies’ in Ephesians”. *NTS* 19 (1972–73), pp.468–483, esp. p.472.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of this crux see my article in *RTR* 33 (1974), pp.45–53.

<sup>15</sup> For details see Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 1971, p.51.

acknowledgement of his indebtedness—of their authority and dignity. Not only so, but having divested these principalities on the cross God exposed to the universe their utter helplessness. He has paraded these powerless “powers and principalities” in his triumphal procession in Christ, making plain to all the magnitude of his victory. Their period of rule is finished; they must worship and serve the victor. They have been pacified ([1:20](#)); overcome and reconciled, yet not finally destroyed or appeased. They continue to exist, opposed to man and his interests ([Rom. 8:38, 39](#)). But they cannot finally harm the person who is in Christ, and their ultimate overthrow though future is sure and certain ([1 Cor. 15:24–28](#)). Such language describes supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings, as Käsemann acknowledges when he admits that the language and ideas need to be demythologized.

Before leaving Colossians a comment should be made regarding the expression “the elements of the world” (*stoicheia tou kosmou*, [Col. 2:8, 20](#); [Gal. 4:3](#); cf. [v.9](#)). The precise meaning of this phrase has puzzled Christian interpreters since very early times as Bandstra has shown in his stimulating study on the history of the exegesis of these passages.<sup>16</sup> One line of interpretation has been to regard *kosmos* as denoting the material, physical world, with *stoicheia* pointing to the elemental parts of that world. Eduard Schweizer,<sup>17</sup> a recent commentator on Colossians, has pursued this line of the physical elements. He suggested that the Colossian “philosophy,” which Paul was seeking to correct in his letter, had been influenced by Pythagorean ideas in which cosmic speculation about the elements had been ethicized. The elements exercised power in much the same way as the law did. Purification of the soul took place by abstaining from meat, etc. To behave in accordance with these elements was a matter of life and death, but in fact led to a kind of slavery to innumerable legalistic demands. Whether Schweizer’s detailed arguments with reference to a Pythagorean background convince contemporary New Testament scholars or not, he has certainly opted for an impersonal understanding of *stoicheia*, meaning “elements” or “elemental principles,” and such a view lends itself more easily to [p. 57](#) being reinterpreted with reference to a structural understanding of the principalities and powers. However, the majority of commentators this century have understood the *stoicheia tou kosmou* in Galatians and Colossians as denoting spiritual beings, regarded as personal and active in the physical and heavenly elements. It is probable that in the syncretistic teaching being advocated at Colossae these *stoicheia* were grouped with the angels and seen as controlling the heavenly realm and man’s access to God’s presence.<sup>18</sup> (Jewish apocalyptic literature had already associated angels closely with the heavenly powers. According to Jubilees 2:2 each of the elements had its own angel to rule over it, while in Enoch 60:11, 12 reference is made to the spirits of the various natural elements. In the New Testament at [Acts 7:53](#); [Gal. 3:19](#); and [Heb. 2:2](#) the Jewish tradition regarding the angelic mediation of the law is mentioned, and in [Galatians 4:3](#) some close connection between, or identification of, the angels and the *stoicheia* is required.)

## (b) A Survey of the Wider New Testament Teaching

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World*, 1964.

<sup>17</sup> *Der Brief an die Kolosser*, 1976, pp.101f.

<sup>18</sup> For a survey of the ways this expression has been understood by Christian interpreters see my forthcoming commentary, *Colossians and Philemon*.



Up to this point our critical comments have been made only with reference to the evidence of Ephesians and Colossians. It is now necessary to survey the wider New Testament teaching, though in the nature of the case our remarks will necessarily be brief.

The powers of evil are referred to by an unexpected variety of names in the New Testament, and they appear in the Synoptic Gospels, John, many of the epistles and the Book of the Revelation. In addition to “principalities” and “powers” we read of “authorities,” “dominions,” “thrones,” “names,” “princes,” “lords,” “angels,” “devils,” and “unclean or wicked spirits.” In the singular there is also mention of “Satan” or “the devil,” who is called “Beelzebul,” “Bellar,” “the evil one,” “the accuser,” “the destroyer,” “the adversary” and “the enemy.”<sup>19</sup> He also appears as “the prince of demons,” “the prince of this world,” and “the prince of the power of the air.” The New Testament is reserved in its statements about the principalities; it has no theoretical or speculative interest in them. It provides no description of the phenomena, and makes no attempt to differentiate among them or to arrange the names or appearances systematically. It would appear that the names given to the powers of evil are in large measure, interchangeable. One distinction is clearly [p. 58](#) drawn, namely, that the demons, spirits, angels, principalities and powers are regarded as subordinate to Satan or the devil. They are his innumerable powers seen as organized into a single empire (note especially [Mark 3:22–30](#); cf. [Luke 10:17f.](#); [Rev. 12:9, 16:13ff.](#)). They are manifestations of the devil’s power.

The New Testament teaches that the principalities and powers are kinds of personal beings. This is obvious from the names that they bear (they are called gods, princes and angels, while Satan is the prince of this world, the god of the world, the accuser, the adversary, the destroyer, etc.), and from the nature of their operations and activities. To speak of “personal beings” means that they “manifest themselves as beings of intellect and will, which can speak and be spoken to. They are something which is capable of purposeful activity.”<sup>20</sup> This is not to suggest that they are always encountered as individuals. Sometimes they are examples of a species (cf. [Mark 5:9](#), “My name is Legion for we are many”). The principalities are not only kinds of personal beings with will and intelligence, but also beings of power.

There are, in the New Testament, five stages in the drama of the principalities and powers and it may be convenient for us to mention these in order.

#### *i Their original creation*

In a passage already referred to, [Colossians 1:16](#), we noted that all things were created through Christ. That statement is amplified in the following words: “whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” The forces of tyranny that hold sway over men’s lives—and perhaps some of the Colossians were troubled by this—are, in fact, a part of creation and subject to Christ as Lord (cf. [Rom. 8:38,39](#)).

#### *ii Their subsequent fall*

Several passages in the New Testament refer to the subsequent fall of these supernatural authorities, e.g. [Jude 6](#) and [2 Peter 2:4](#). At the same time the hymnic passage of [Colossians 1:15–20](#) implies a serious dislocation or breach. Although there is no specific mention of it, a cosmic rupture of enormous proportions is implied, since the high point of the hymn

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<sup>19</sup> For details see H. Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (1961) and Roy Yates, “The Powers of Evil in the New Testament”, *EQ* 52 (1980), pp.97–111.

<sup>20</sup> Schlier, *Principalities and Powers*, p.18.



refers to the reconciling work of Christ, by which “all things” which have been created are now pacified in Christ’s death. [Colossians 2:15](#) is to be understood along similar lines for the principalities needed to be disarmed and their utter helplessness [p. 59](#) made plain to all since they had rebelled against their creator. They became independent and autonomous, manifesting a self-centredness that is in opposition to God and his power.

### *iii Christ’s defeat of the powers of evil*

In most of the New Testament references to the powers of evil there is some mention of God or Christ’s supremacy or victory over them. Christ is supreme in the temptation. Driven by the Spirit into the wilderness, the traditional place of temptation and haunt of wild beasts, Jesus faces the Satanic onslaught ([Mark 1:13](#); [Matt. 4:1–11](#); [Luke 4:1–13](#)). He is victorious as he chooses the mission committed to him by God and which will finally be vindicated by the Father, even though it leads through suffering and humiliation. This victory over Satanic temptation is held up as an example and an encouragement to Christians in their perseverance in suffering ([Heb. 2–18](#); [4:15](#)).

Jesus is supreme over evil spirits. In the Beelzebul controversy it is made plain that it is by the finger ([Luke 11:20](#)) or Spirit of God ([Matt. 12–28](#)), not by the power of Beelzebul, that Jesus exorcizes the unclean spirits. He is the one through whom the kingdom of God operates to destroy the power of Satan ([Mark 3:23–26](#); [Matt. 12–26](#); [Luke 11:18](#)). He is able to enter the strong man’s house and plunder his goods ([Mark 3:27](#)). Every exorcism is a further spoiling of Satan’s goods and signifies his defeat. Jesus is also shown as delegating his power over evil spirits in his followers who then exercise it as his representatives ([Mark 3:14f](#); [6:7](#); [Matt. 10:1](#); [Luke 9:1f, 10:1](#)).

Christ’s victory over Satan and the powers of darkness occurs preeminently in his death, resurrection and exaltation. In John’s Gospel there is a clear and obvious connection between the defeat of Satan and the death of Jesus. “ ‘Now is the time for judgment on this world, now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.” ([John 12:31–33](#), NIV). The same point about the victory over the evil powers at the cross is brought out in [Colossians 2:14, 15](#) (cf. [1:20](#); [Heb 2:14, 15](#)), as we have observed above. In [Ephesians 1:20–23](#); [4:7, 11](#) (cf. [1 Peter 3:19, 22](#)) the exaltation of Christ is proof that he is superior to the powers of darkness; he is Lord.

In these cases the victory of Christ over the powers of evil is asserted as a fact, and believers are called on to recognize the fact and live accordingly. So [Colossians 2:20](#); [3:1ff.](#) makes it plain that the Christians at Colossae have died and were raised with Christ out from the sphere of influence of the powers, and ought to live as those free [p. 60](#) from the binding rules and regulations.

The triumph of Christ over the principalities is a frequent theme of the New Testament. They have been overcome by him and condemned to await the final ruin of their power.

### *iv Their continued hostility*

For the time being, however, the triumph of the crucified, risen and glorified Jesus Christ over the principalities is hidden. It is not yet final as far as the world is concerned. At this present moment the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, or to put it in the language of Ephesians the prince of the power of the air is the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient ([2:2](#)).

Although defeated foes the principalities and powers continue to exist, inimical to man and his interests. This is a reality even for the believer. The recipients of Peter’s first letter are exhorted to resist the devil and stand firm in the faith for he, their enemy, “prowls

around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” ([1 Peter 5:8](#)). [Ephesians 6:12](#) underscores the reality of our engagement with the powers of darkness. There will be no cessation of hostilities until our departure to be with Christ or his return, whichever is the sooner. Our struggle is not with human beings but with supernatural intelligences. Our enemies are not human but demonic who are powerful, wicked and cunning. But the power of God is stronger and we are to make use of it to the full ([Eph. 6:10ff.](#)), knowing that neither these powers nor anything else in the whole of creation will be able to separate us from God’s love ([Rom. 8:38f](#)).

#### *v. Their final overthrow*

If Satan and his hosts continue to exist in order to make war on the saints, then their time is short ([Rev. 20:3](#)). The final outcome is certain and their ultimate overthrow has been fixed by God, as [1 Corinthians 15:24–28](#) and the many references in Revelation make plain: “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” ([Rev. 20:10](#)).

## THE PRINCIPALITIES AND THE STRUCTURES

The powers of evil then are to be understood as personal, supernatural agencies. But what is their relationship to the structures, traditions, institutions, etc.? Can they use these things? Satan and his hosts exist by influencing the world and mankind at every level. Satanic power, though hidden, is no less real for all that. Satan works [P. 61](#) through the events of history ([1 Thess. 2:18](#), he hinders Paul; cf. the activity of Satan in the circumstances surrounding Job’s life). According to [Revelation 2:10](#) the devil will cast some believers into prison. The inherent distresses of life according to [Romans 8:38](#) are related to the evil powers mentioned in the same verse. In [Revelation 13](#) the devil exploits public and political life, having been given authority to make war against the saints (v. [7](#)).

According to [Colossians 2:20f](#), the elemental spirits of the universe made use of the legal demands of the false teachers in order to bring the Christians at Colossae into bondage. It would appear that social, political, judicial and economic structures can become demonic. This seems evident to anyone who has considered the state: in [Romans 13](#) it is the minister of God, while in [Revelation 13](#) it has become the ally of the devil.

But at this point we might well ask whether “structures” is the right word. The Biblical emphasis is that the powers of evil work in and through *people*, rather than impersonal structures. In speaking of the latter we are inclined to remove any responsibility for action from those who are responsible human agents.

Further, to identify “the powers” with human structures of one kind or another leads to several erroneous consequences. First, we do not have an adequate explanation as to why structures do not always become tyrannical. Second, we unjustifiably restrict our understanding of the malevolent activity of Satan, whereas he is too versatile to be limited to the structural. And this is the great weakness of the new theory with its identification (by some of its advocates) of the principalities with multi-national corporations and the like. Third, we become too negative towards society and its structures. For if we identify the powers of evil with the structures we will seek to dethrone them, or to fight against them. Advocates of the new theory may warn against defying the structures; they have to be warned against demonizing them. Both are extremes to be avoided. Some structures may be changed for good.

# Who Speaks for the Church in China?

## INTRODUCTION

Although attempts by Christians outside of mainland China to understand and interpret the history of the churches in China during the past thirty years are legion, it is very difficult to arrive at a balanced judgement. The central question is "Who speaks for the Church in China?" Is it the leaders of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the Catholic Patriotic Association, the local leaders of the growing number of house churches or the Chinese and missiologists living outside of China? In his study paper for the workshop on China and Christianity at the International Association for Mission Studies (Bangalore 4–9 January, 1982) John C. England said, "when all the available knowledge is assembled we (and even some of our colleagues in China say this of themselves) know all too little. 'The sky' as a Chinese proverb reminds us, 'is not big to a frog at the bottom of the well'. An evangelical Chinese leader from Hong Kong suggested to me a few months ago that we should say less, pray more and trust in the sovereignty of God.

Evangelicals are anxious to know more about the phenomenal growth of house or home meetings during these 30 years and to better understand the perplexity of relationship between these groups and the Patriotic Associations—Protestant and Catholic. At the National Christian Conference in Nanjing, October 1980, held to establish the Christian Council of China, a number of leaders of home meetings were among the participants. John England concludes from reports available that there is a widespread openness and trust towards the work of the patriotic association and that there is evidence in many districts of large numbers of Christians who are enthusiastic in attending worship in both "homes" and the churches. He comments, "Services of worship, prayer and Bible study, whether in the open churches or in home meetings—Catholic or Protestant are noticeably biblical in content, 'spiritual' in the sense of carefully avoiding any political reference, and theologically or liturgically conservative". Further he suggests that an important factor in the extension of religious liberty has been "the continuing life of numberless Christian communities—in city and village, commune and neighbourhood—and the faithfulness of countless individual Christians in all the daily situation of work-place, community and political organisation. Deprived of all institutional or public facilities for Christian witness, colleagues in China have testified time and again to their rediscovery, not only of the home meeting, but also of the social dimension of Christian witness in the secular concerns of daily work and political participation". On the other hand, several reports suggest that there is a continuing tension between those p. 63 whose preaching concentrates on themes such as the reality of sin, the grace of Jesus Christ and the requirement of Christian belief and those who seek to grapple with the larger historical issues on the relationship of nature and grace, the relationship of the Christian faith and the social system, freedom and human rights.

Bishop K. H. Ting, the Chairman of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement and President of the China Christian Council, has outlined his position in "14

points". This document, which has been given wide publicity, speaks to the structures and functions of the Church in China today. For a more theological interpretation of the situation we turn to Shen Yifan, pastor of the International Community Church in Shanghai, who presented a paper entitled "How New China Helped Christians Think Anew Theologically" at an international conference on contextualisation in China held in Montreal, Canada, October 2nd–10th, 1980. Shen Yifan maintains that through the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Christians in China have gained new theological insights. According to Jonathan Chao,<sup>1</sup> Shen Yifan lists four. The first insight is a deeper application of the doctrine of incarnation. "The existence and development of the church depends on her identification with the people around her, on her identification with the people of her own society, nation and country". The second insight is that Christians testify to the grace of God when they manifest their love both to God and man. The third insight is the new awareness of the resurrection of Christ, the cosmic Christ who transcends the world and history and yet is within the world and history. Shen's fourth insight is in the area of eschatology in which he says, "Christ who comes again is not to negate and destroy all the human achievements in history, but to accept and perfect them as gifts before the throne of God". Shen adds that the Chinese church is seeking to "weave a self-hood of her own so that in the fulness of time she may dedicate the glory and honour of the Chinese nation to the New Jerusalem, and offer them to Christ as the proper contribution of the Chinese Christians to the new heaven and the new earth". Jonathan Chao observes that Shen Yifan's thinking forms a continuum with the earlier Chinese indigenous church thinking of the 1920's.

There is little information available on what those leaders of the home groups who do not identify with the Three-Self Movement are saying. Their silence must not be interpreted to mean that they have no opinions on the issue raised by the Three-Self Church leaders. p.64 Their primary concerns seem to be evangelism and the pastoral care of their groups.

Arthur F. Glasser, a former missionary to China in an editorial on 'China Today—An Evangelical Perspective'<sup>2</sup> outlines what many non-conciliar evangelicals are thinking about China today. In it he reminds those who have short memories of the theological views held by some vocal theologians and missiologists during the past thirty years. He calls for a more balanced reporting on those who speak for the Church in China.

ERT invites further responses to this important issue.

(Editor) p. 65

## People's Thought in China An Initial Study

Milton Wan

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<sup>1</sup> TSPM Speaks in Montreal, *China and the Church Today*, 3.6.1981.

<sup>2</sup> Missiology: an International Review Vol. 1X, No. 3, July 1981, pp.261–276

*Reprinted from Zhongguo yu Jiaohui, Nov.–Dec. 1980. (Translated by Tan Teng Tiong and printed in China and the Church Today, 3:5, 1981) with permission*

As Christians who are concerned about evangelistic work in China, we must also be concerned about the thought patterns of the mainland Chinese today. It is only through understanding their aspirations, their feelings, and their needs that the gospel can be spread effectively.

At the same time, in discussing people's thought in China today, two difficulties immediately come to mind. First, the land of China is so vast, from north to south, from cities to villages, that to find a common denominator linking the lifestyles of the people would be presumptuous. Second, mainland China today is still apparently in a transition period of its cultural thought patterns. The traditional culture of thousands of years is still entrenched in every level of life; but thirty years of communism is creating a new value system and new lifestyles.

Therefore, the writer would not claim to be able to encompass the complete mental outlook of the Chinese people today. But of the many factors shaping people's thought in China today, the most obvious and direct is politics. In mainland China, no level of lifestyle can be separated from politics. And from the Cultural Revolution, through the "Gang of Four," to the "Four Modernizations," every change in political emphasis has directly affected the fate and lives of the people and shaped their thought patterns. Using this hypothesis as a starting point, this article tries to investigate the changing political climates of the past decade.

We divide the people's mental outlooks into three major trends: alienation, materialism and nihilism. These directions have emerged respectively from the ideological dictatorship of the Gang of Four (1969–1976), the political thought during the present Four Modernizations era, and the switch from one to the other.

## **POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF THE GANG OF FOUR AND ALIENATION**

The main characteristic of the Gang of Four era was full-scale political dictatorship on all levels—every citizen was required to be **P. 66** politically "conscious" and to engage in "struggle." But the fact is that after the storm and unrest of the Cultural Revolution (1966–69), a large majority of the people in China were tired of politics and feared struggle. The conflict of the outer demands and their inner feelings created a strong alienation between people's personal feelings and their public lives. Even though many people's inner feelings about politics had deadened, they were still required to show political consciousness in frequent public meetings.

This double life existed even within families—during the Cultural Revolution parents and children, and husbands and wives had to engage in mutual criticism and struggle in order to "define" and "reform" their political inclinations. And because of those unforgettable experiences and lessons, there still exists a certain amount of alienation and pretension between the two generations in Chinese families.

Generally, Chinese people are warm and frank, but there are now certain forbidden areas which one never mentions to others, even to close friend or relatives. This developed from the indescribable experiences of the Cultural Revolution.

During the Gang of Four era, everyone was supposed to say and do what was demanded of them by the party. The conflict of this type of character acting with one's inner feelings is termed "the disorder of self." It is a deep-rooted alienation from one's self.



If we view sin as alienation, then sin can be alienation between God and man, man and man, man and nature, and even man and himself. Hence, since the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four eras, the mainland Chinese today should have a deeper understanding of the evilness of sin and mankind. The traditional Chinese confidence in an innate goodness of man, which was a great obstacle to the gospel, has been seriously damaged.

## **THE FOUR MODERNIZATIONS AND MATERIALISM**

Since the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, the Chinese Communists have made a complete turn around in their official political thought. While the Gang of Four emphasized political consciousness as a key to social transformation, the present regime is focusing on economic development under the Four Modernisations. This program has shaped the government's education policy and propaganda for some four years. These have had an enormous influence on the lifestyle of the people.

Since 1977, this propaganda has followed a "logical" approach: p. 67 "The need to modernize means we must emphasize science and technology; to emphasize science and technology means we must uphold the omnipotence of science, that the only 'truth' is what can be scientifically proven; to uphold this 'scientism' means we must adopt a materialist outlook and theory of evolution to explain the universe and life."

Therefore, the government's youth education policy is that "to modernize there must be a firm belief in materialism and evolution." In new books and journals, it is always made clear that not to believe in materialism is to be against modernization. Whether we agree or not, the Chinese Communists are moving positively to achieve this goal in their youth education policy.

On the personal scale, due to the collapse of the "politics is all" attitude of the Gang of Four, there has been a relaxation in control over the people's thought in the past few years. But this has also led to a general decline in the Maoist morality of "serving the people," and a rise of individualist attitudes. This change in outlook was behind the '78-'79 Democracy Wall posters and the Democratic Movement, in which young intellectuals promoted human rights and antisocialist ideas.

Among the ordinary people, selfish attitudes have appeared; the spirit of "for the nation, for the people" was transformed into one of pursuing personal benefits. This was encouraged for them by the expansion of limited free-market and private enterprise. Many Chinese people have become openly envious of the western way of life. Some cannot find satisfaction, and desire to emigrate, legally or illegally, to Hong Kong, Europe, or America.

In truth, we know there are loopholes in the "logical" approach: to modernize certainly means that science is needed; but a modernized nation also needs human rights, freedom and democracy. To recognize the importance of science and technology, does not necessarily mean to believe in scientism. Through science one can more clearly see the beauty, harmony and greatness of the universe, which causes people to give praise and worship to its Creator. We hope that the Chinese students now studying in the West will meet scientists who are faithful Christians, and bring back a different and new attitude and influence on this matter.

## **POLITICAL CHANGE AND NIHILISM**

There were recognisable influences on the people's outlook during the Gang of Four Modernisation era. But perhaps the strongest factor P. 68 has been changeability. Political changes created a loss of direction in the people; today's hero may be a great scoundrel



tomorrow. And what is criticised today may be praised beyond measure tomorrow! Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Today's enthusiasm can be tomorrow's evil doings. Such political and value changes only brought a loss of sense of security and ideals: tomorrow became a permanently shadowy unknown. This effect was true for local cadres, educated youth, and all citizens alike.

The many experiences of local cadres—Communist Party and government workers—in the storms of political change made them crafty and experienced. They came to believe that “it is better to have one less affair than one more.” They would not work too hard or be too enthusiastic—in everything they became reserved. They deemed this apathy a relatively safe and secure political life. Some, knowing the insecurity of the future, strove to gain position and authority today, to have some self-protection and material gain while they could. This approach created a serious problem of corruption among the cadres, still a big problem in Chinese politics today.

Yet some educated youths have not abandoned communist ideology and its utopian ideals of the future. That they have not totally given up on Marxism is shown by some of their underground journals. But they profess deep disappointment in, and suspicions about, the party's performance over the past decade. Their attitude has been to trust in Marxist ideas, but be skeptical about the absolute power of the party. They are searching for a new absolute in classic Marxism, a system without one party dictatorship or individual hero worship. These young people may seem immature, but they may be able to lead China away from Mao's strict communism.

For the Chinese, the painfulness of recalling the past and the loss of confidence in the future means that they can only live for today. Therefore a desire for immediate sensual and materialist pleasure has become widespread in China. At the same time, the uncertainty of the future has brought a revival of traditional Chinese superstitions especially in the rural villages.

## CONCLUSION

To what degree and in what directions have the worldviews of the people in China really changed over the last thirty years? It may be that the changes summarized in this article could pass quickly from their minds. For underneath the immediate tensions, the Chinese mentality remains today much as it has been for thousands of years, [P. 69](#) in the world's longest cultural tradition. As Christians, let us pray that during this time of change in China, there may indeed be a lasting change—a change according to the truth of scripture.

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# China Today—An Evangelical Perspective

Arthur F. Glasser

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*The most important questions about China have no absolute answers. Differences of opinion and judgment exist even among the best-informed China specialists, and there will be continuing debate about China's past and future (Terrill 1979:xiii).*

This being so, it is particularly incumbent on missiologists that they interact freely and continuously with all who would presume to interpret the present state of the Christian movement in that vast and troubled land. *Missiology* salutes the *International Bulletin* for its serious effort to bring China back into focus among Christians in the Western world (April 1981 issue). We would encourage all *Missiology* readers concerned with China to read carefully each article in that special issue.

And yet, because these articles largely reflect but one perspective—largely dominant within conciliar Protestantism today—it is felt that a non-conciliar viewpoint is needed to enable the current missiological “conversation on China” to achieve better balance. When serious issues are glossed over, when sweeping judgments are made, and when party-line emphases are loudly trumpeted it is inevitable that some will howl in dismay. Now, it is not the function of *Missiology* to howl back, but it is hoped this editorial will supplement what has been said—and perhaps serve to call for an ongoing dialogue in which all three segments of the constituency of our society participate freely and are accorded the respectful hearing they deserve.

Frankly, I was disturbed when I counted over 20 negative references to “making converts” in one article alone! After all, I was one who went to China to “make disciples” of Jesus Christ in obedience to his explicit command! So in this editorial we shall seek to describe what non-conciliar evangelicals are thinking about China and the complexity of the Christian presence in its midst. It is hoped that *Missiology* shall be able in the near future to publish a comprehensive Catholic overview and thereby further balance the conversation. Indeed, to deny oneself exposure to any particular perspective on China today is to confess albeit tacitly to possessing a distorted and incomplete understanding of what is admittedly a very complex matter. [p. 71](#)

## **SPIRITUAL HUNGER AND THE GOSPEL**

We begin with the dimension of evangelistic concern in the face of the spiritual hunger of the Chinese people. The postulate behind this is the expressed will of God that no individual or people should perish, but that all should come to know the Creator who in Jesus Christ has become the Redeemer. When evangelicals face the Chinese people of this generation, their overriding concern must be: “How shall they hear? ... Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” ([Rm. 10:14–17](#)).

One has only to review what has transpired in China since the inauguration of the People's Republic in 1949: the euphoria that marked the expulsion of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists; the early reign of terror coupled with sharp losses in the Korean war; land reform and the collectivization of agriculture; the Hundred Flowers campaign and its abrupt suppression; the Great Leap Forward and the “Anti-Rightist” campaign; the subsequent relaxation of commune life only to be followed shortly thereafter by the “wasted decade” of the Cultural Revolution; the Red Guard violence and the “Anti-Confucius” movement; the sudden turnaround—the abrupt arrest of the “Gang of Four” and the elevation of Teng Hsiao-p'ing with his modernization program, climaxing in the recent silencing of the “Human Rights” campaigns and the posthumous rehabilitation of Liu Shao-ch'i.

Never have a people experienced such wild swings of the revolutionary pendulum. Never have so many individuals been such tormented pawns of “leftists” and “rightists” in violent struggles for personal power and/or ideological purity. Never have a people been so abused by the “stupid cruelties” of politics. Fairbank’s assessment rings true:

The Chinese revolution since 1949 has been the greatest in history, measured either by the number of people involved or by the extent and rapidity of the changes made. To the outside world it has also been the least known event of modern times. Frenzies of joyful enthusiasm and vengeful hatred of organized effort and self-sacrifice, depths of terror and exhaustion, prolonged frustration, ardent self-discipline, new hope and pride, have been experienced among a population rising from 600 to 1000 millions (1979:358).

We would not be so uncharitable as to deny that China has experienced national regeneration as a result of its socialist transformation. Primary schooling, public health and medical services, improved agriculture, better food distribution and industrialization—all these [p. 72](#) have come to rural China. Much success has been achieved in liberating the Chinese from their agelong bondage to extreme poverty, hunger and disease. For all this Christians can be thankful. However, quite apart from the frightful human cost at which this measure of progress has been achieved, Jesus Christ would have us remember that the person “does not live by bread alone” ([Dt. 8:3](#); [Mt. 4:4](#)).

Pondering the present state of the Chinese people one is reminded of Pablo Picasso who proudly affirmed, “I went to Communism as one goes to a spring of fresh water.” Millions upon millions of Chinese—especially idealistic youth—went to Communism with the same thirst and the same high hopes of satisfying their innermost longings for meaning in life and satisfaction of heart, only to leave Communism “as one clammers out of a poisoned river strewn with the wreckage of flooded cities and the corpses of the drowned” (Koestler 1955:42). Young Chinese by the millions were told that whereas they might fail, the Party could not—it embodied “The Scientific Revolutionary Idea in History”. The Party pontificated:

History flows toward her goal ... she knows the way; ... she makes no mistakes; ... who has no absolute faith in History does not belong to the Party’s ranks ... The Party’s course is sharply defined, like a narrow path in the mountains, ... the slightest false step, right or left, takes one down the precipice ... The air is thin; ... who becomes dizzy is lost (ibid:43–44).

“Lost”! During recent decades millions of Chinese gave themselves to the direction of their Party leaders. They struggled to become blank sheets on which the Revolution wrote its orders. “Ta kung, wu szu”—“Everything for the public, nothing for one’s self.” This familiar slogan from the past was bent to justify any vileness in high hopes of exterminating all supposed vileness. The mandate seemed to be: “Sink into the mud, embrace the butcher, but change the world—it needs it!” In the late ’60s over 15 million Red Guards generated a nightmare of uncertainty and incessant madness, terror, confusion and anarchy—what Leys called “the most gigantic frenzy China had ever known since the Taiping rebellion” (Lyll 1980:110).

And with what result? In late 1980 China’s state radio broadcast to its revolution-weary people the disillusioning line: “We must not sing praises of any saviour again ... The reason is very simple—... there has never been any saviour.” Jonathan Mirsky, a specialist writer on Chinese affairs, commented in the South China Morning Post,

Statements like this attacking Mao’s hitherto unassailable position in history are part of a current campaign in China to reduce the late Chairman to human size. They are printed

and broadcast all over the country, [p. 73](#) from Mao's home province to far-Western Xinjiang.

What does all this mean? What happens when one's leaders are discredited and their integrity is publicly questioned? Bitterness, resentment, disillusionment, cynicism—John King Fairbank and other Sinologists cannot find language vivid enough to describe the depths of the apathy, skepticism and suspicion with which the Chinese are currently reacting to all political slogans.

Seldom has faith been frustrated on so vast a scale ... The initial enthusiasm of the revolution has been spent (1979:415).

Great numbers of Chinese have by now realized that they have been manipulated and exploited by those who pressed them to sacrifice and struggle for romantic mirages and impossible dreams. The revolutionary spirit has so evaporated in the countryside and the fabric of China's society has been so broken that community spirit and mutual trust are rare. Only with a guarded sense of relief do they welcome the nation's present apparent stability, the relaxation of petty restrictions and Peking's official toleration of a measure of personal freedom. Imagine, however, their fear that the "leftists" will again stage a comeback and drive the populace into another artificially-generated revolution. Visitors (Chinese) to China almost uniformly speak of encountering an all pervasive sense of anxiety concerning the future.

What is significant is that this anxiety has generated a growing spirit of religious inquiry throughout China that is increasingly apparent to the discerning. Many Chinese are beyond the reach of any slogans boasting that people unaided shall perfect human society. That dream has died. They now "desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one" ([Heb. 11:16](#)). Overseas Chinese Christians who visit China today speak in glowing terms of encountering a widespread and dynamic "house church" phenomenon (some put the number higher than 20,000!). They find Christians who are increasingly courageous and vocal in their witness to Jesus Christ. Visitors are challenged by their experiential conviction that the gospel is truly "good news". Many are being drawn by the quality of their lives, by the warmth and support of their fellowship groups, and by the "life in Christ" they corporately share. But all who have contacted these "house churches" are appalled at the dearth of Bibles and Christian literature that characterized all Christian gatherings in inland China.

Here's where we come in: China's acute moral and spiritual vacuum and the growing religious inquiry of its people is a challenge to the church outside China. We should be grateful for those Christians [p. 74](#) in the West who have been responding to this challenge for some time. We do well to embrace their priorities: 1) Their widespread pattern of organized prayer in their churches for China and its rulers; 2) their efforts to get Bibles and other Christian literature into China; 3) their sacrificial giving of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years to broadcast the gospel into China. I'm fully aware that Bishop K. H. Ting, the chairperson of the *Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement* along with the *International Bulletin's* "Focus on China" issue frown on all this, but evangelicals cannot but think otherwise (Ting 1980–1981:148).

In recent months the five broadcasting stations outside China participating in this ministry have reported a tremendous increase in the mail response to their programs. It is now abundantly confirmed that the sacrifice that made possible more than 260 frequency hours per week of evangelical broadcasting into China has not been in vain. I would not be so naive or uncritical as to endorse everything that goes under the name of evangelical broadcasting into China, but a careful examination of many programs uncovers a surprisingly creative, relevant and culturally-conditioned use of radio to

commend the gospel to the Chinese people. Reading the Scriptures at dictation speed; providing extended expositions of major books of the Old and New Testaments along with detailed training in personal evangelism; discipleship formation and group Bible study; ministering comfort and exhortation to isolated Christians—the range is wide and varied.

It needs to be kept in mind that about 63 per cent of the 800 million rural population of China are connected to the rediffusion network, i.e., one receiver for every five people. Since a radio ministry is flexible and can reach all levels of people, we do well to call churches in the West to augment their giving and praying, and encourage broadcasters to co-operate among themselves to strengthen their signals and continue to enlarge the range of their programs, especially those of a pre-evangelism nature.

Similarly, with the literacy rate having grown from 20 to over 80 per cent during the past 30 years and with the government now permitting people to read non-Communist materials, Christian publishing houses must be encouraged in producing materials for Christians and non-Christians alike. Chinese Christians from overseas who visit China need to be encouraged to prearrange their movements so that they can share these publications with local Christians. It would be a terrible tragedy if the churches in the West were to fail to make the most of the spiritual vacuum currently existing throughout inland China. [p. 75](#)

## RADICAL THEOLOGY AND THE TRUTH

This brings me to the second issue that evangelicals would interject into this conversation on China. I trust you will bear with the forthrightness with which it must be presented. It arises in part out of the inability of many non-evangelical Western theologians to interpret aright what has been taking place in China in recent decades. In the eyes of evangelicals the whole theologizing process has been tragically betrayed by those who have seen in Maoist liberation history the redeeming work of Christ. Not that any would charge them with deliberately misreading the signals. It is rather a matter of the basic presuppositions upon which they have erected their secularized approaches to *Missio Dei*. The hard data currently coming out of China effectively reduces to unmitigated nonsense some of their most cherished formulations.

I refer to the way in which a few years ago conciliar “China watchers” in their eagerness to read Mao’s China positively tossed biblical categories to the wind. Admittedly, we all “see through a glass darkly,” and the best of us knows only “in part.” But I am not unmoved when I recall the damage that has been done through the penchant for reducing “the good news of the Kingdom” to radical politics; for downplaying the inveteracy of human evil; for resisting the biblical priority of preaching the redemptive gospel and calling people to repentance and faith; for blurring the qualitative difference Christ makes between his followers and the world; for being silent about the holiness and righteous judgments of God; for neglecting the stark biblical witness that people can be lost forever; for regarding the Cultural Revolution as an extension of *Heilsgeschichte*; on and on.

Frankly, when one reviews the papers and reports of the Ecumenical Seminar held at Bastad (1974), the Ecumenical Colloquium held in Louvain (1974) and not a few articles in *China Notes* in recent years, one wishes their authors had been more tough-minded, more critical and more biblical in their orientation. I have no desire to single out for rebuke any particular scholar who sought to evaluate the Maoist revolution in millennial terms or who saw the “new person” emerging in China apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit or who saw “signs of the kingdom of God” despite the deliberate Maoist rejection of Jesus Christ the King. Frankly, I shared the indignation of the Catholic priest



who called one of these “China watchers” a blasphemer at the American Society of Missiology annual meeting several years back. But I am concerned. How can we have honest conversation on China today without being candid [p. 76](#) about what many wrote yesterday? I do not quite know how to deal with this problem. What about authenticity and credibility?

Fortunately, we have a prophetic model in the response of Princeton Seminary’s Charles C. West to such theologizing. He begins with the humble admission that the best of us is

tempted to be unfaithful ... It is so much easier to find the meaning of history in a human movement than to endure the tension of judgment and grace which always exists between the Divine purpose and human power. How much more satisfying if, instead of having to work with the mission of an imperfect church, we can find in Marxist theory and Maoist practice the true expression of our time of Christ’s saving purpose!

West then cites one of the abominable overstatements of a “China-Watcher-cum-theologian”:

The Christian’s task is not to judge or to justify, but rather to locate, recognize, participate and celebrate authentic human liberation wherever it is occurring. Mao’s China is certainly a place where during the last four decades God has been at work to liberate nearly a fifth of the human race from the clutches of “sin”.

To which West gives this devastating and necessary reply:

So, it does not really matter that the church is stifled in China and the Gospel is not proclaimed. The transformation of China by Communist Party leadership is itself the redeeming work of Christ. Mao’s thoughts are covert Christianity. All we Christians have to add is explicit appreciation of that fact.

Then West adds his punch line:

There is only one thing wrong with this: it is idolatry, not theology (West 1976: 39).

Many are well aware of this issue and we should realize the extent and depth of growing evangelical impatience with the sort of “theology of liberation” that equates “salvation” only with social and political revolutionary change. Although a liberation theology has been desperately needed by both Catholics and Protestants in traditionally Christian countries, many evangelicals are rightly concerned to participate in the worldwide struggle for social justice and reconciliation within human society. They refuse to retreat from affirming that the primary task of the church’s mission of sacrificial service to the world is evangelism and making Jesus Christ known to the millions of people living today to whom he is still a stranger. This might mean tolerating (albeit with anguish!) the polarization of the church. Non-evangelicals dare not underestimate the depth of evangelical [p. 77](#) commitment to the evangelistic task.

In 1976 West was among the few in conciliar circles who rebuked these “China watchers” for the freewheeling hermeneutic with which they rendered the specific categories of Scripture as so many noses of wax to be twisted at will (or ignored). He was almost a prophet in speaking so pointedly. Today, China’s utopian facade has been far more completely removed and many are beginning to see China more realistically. Concerning this Lyall writes:

The overall picture of China under the Radicals’ domination, now that the strict censorship they imposed has been removed and the truth is known, is not a pretty one. Oppression, denial of human rights, ruthless suppression of religion, a great leap backward in



education, lawlessness, the deliberate retarding of industrial progress—and all in the name of ideological purity.

And he adds that even Bishop K. H. Ting, the best known church-person in the state apparatus, has “virtually repudiated the Louvain talk” (1980:141, 150).

In my view it is bad theology to confuse the spread of the Kingdom of God as described in our Lord’s parables with humankind’s technological or political activities—especially when the boast is that humans are making progress in history. Ellul concurs:

It is splendid to have rediscovered that God has revealed himself in the course of a history and in history. It is horrible to turn this humility of God into a theme of pride for the history of (humanity) ... The Bible expressly tells us that the history of (humankind) ends in judgment. It does not give place to the Kingdom (1972:20).

Has a new order come to China? Of course! Has this new order improved China? On certain levels, yes; on other levels, no! Should this new order be identified with the Kingdom of God of which Jesus spoke? Never! One shares in the Kingdom by confessing that *Jesus Christ is Lord*. This Kingdom is far removed from the development of a Marxist society. Humankind’s best efforts to create utopian societies all too often have ended in disasters. They have not marked progress toward the Kingdom, nor have they invariably been signs of the Lord’s action in history.

One shrinks from the analogy, but it must be said that these nonevangelical “China watcher” theologians have proved to be no more perceptive than those followers of Reich Bishop Ludwig Muller. The slogan of these ardent “German Christians” was “The Swastika on our Breasts, and the Cross in our Hearts”. Although they dominated large segments of the church in Germany during the early years of [p. 78](#) the Nazi era, who follows them today? We are solemnized when we recall the confidence with which they read “the signs of the times”. Their spokesperson, Pastor Leutheuser, uttered blasphemy when he said:

Christ has come to us through Adolf Hitler. He was the decisive figure when the people were just about to go under. Hitler struck out for us, and through his power, his honesty, his faith and his idealism, the Redeemer found us ... We know today the Saviour has come ... We have only one task, to be German, not to be Christian (Conway 1968:48).

Evangelicals who planted the church in China have been criticized as cultural imperialists. They failed the Chinese people and the Lord Jesus in many ways, and have confessed this. But now one would like to see some contrition on the other side. Many “China watchers” in their “ideological” theologizing on the Kingdom of God, on China and on the mission of the church have written much that is wrong and inimical to the proclamation of the whole gospel to the whole of China in our day. In so doing they have grievously contributed to the present-day polarization within the church.

Finally, conciliars should not again presume to tell evangelicals what to do about “China, the Church, and Christian Mission Today”. Although evangelicals should ponder the “Fifteen Theses” Donald MacInnis has drafted under this rubric as reflecting the current conciliar viewpoint (1981:77), they should not be blamed if their recollections of yesterday make them less open to persuasion today. After all, their sense of missionary mandate has a higher authority.

## WHO SPEAKS FOR THE CHURCH IN CHINA?

I have borrowed from Paul Ramsey, former Professor of Religion at Princeton University, the title for the third evangelical concern touching the Christian presence in China. You will recall that under this rubric Ramsey challenged the WCC penchant for issuing policy

statements on behalf of the church worldwide—without consulting it beforehand. But he also criticized the thesis that “the relevant contemporary knowledge of God and his claims upon us and the judgment and grace he enacts over humankind comes from ‘what-God-is-doing in the world’.” Ramsey regards this as “a fig leaf to cover the unseemly parts of a disintegrated Christian understanding” of the church’s mission (1967:21).

The issue before us is the Church of Jesus Christ in China. Where is it? Who speaks for it? The first question is far easier to answer than the second. Many are convinced that the church is alive and active and p. 79 that its Catholic section is to be found within the Patriotic Society of Chinese Catholics and among those Catholics who have not accepted PSCC leadership but have continued to affirm their allegiance to the Pope. Its Protestant section is to be found in the “house churches” and in the public worship gatherings of the Three Self Movement. In answering the second question, “Who speaks for the Church?” I will confine my remarks to the Protestant section.

Concerning Protestants in China Arne Sovik of the Lutheran World Federation has written:

The Three Self Movement is likely to have some difficulty in unifying the Protestant Community ... (It) tends to be seen by many groups as a political rather than a religious instrument. The tension that is the heritage of the accusation meetings, and of the differences between the “faithful” and the Christians who compromised or left the faith during the Cultural Revolution period has already created a problem reminiscent of the Donatist controversy of the fourth century church. As long as these memories last, there is likely to be either great reluctance to develop a unified Protestantism or a tendency toward something analogous to the Baptist churches of the Soviet Union, where unrecognized groups live in insecurity and some suspicion of the recognized church which has accepted government registration. If in the last generation the Western denominational differences have broken down, there seems to be evidence of a threat of other divisions, the result of theological differences to be sure, but also of different responses to the problem of life in socialist China (1979:65).

Dr. Sovik’s evaluation is widely accepted. *The China News Analysis* of June 8, 1979 carried an article, “The Clock Turned Back? Not Yet” which confirms this:

In all Christian Churches there is a deep cleavage between those who suffered for many years for their faith and those who collaborated with the government. The recent announcement of religious freedom has made it quite clear that only those under the guidance of the government will be allowed to practice—led by the same old figures that have been cropping up over the past 25 years. Those who kept their faith unblemished at the cost of great sacrifice will still rank as second-rate and suspected citizens, suspected, as the official text says, of disobedience to the law of the Party, suspected of counter-revolution.

Two of the “same old figures” referred to above are Zhao Fusan and Ting Kuang-hsun. It is salutary to read what they have been saying during the last two years. Zhao Fusan’s widely publicized 1979 essay on China’s experience with foreign missionaries in the light of p. 80 the Chinese Revolution disturbed many. His frame of reference was the anti-Japanese, anti-foreign Peking Student demonstration of May 4, 1919 (from which the Chinese Communist movement emerged). Because Christianity came to China from the West (which figured so prominently in China’s humiliation during the 150 years prior to Mao’s triumph in 1949), Zhao raised the question whether a Chinese can truly be a Christian and also be a patriot laboring for the socialist reconstruction of China. He particularly blamed American missionaries who “aimed at retarding” China’s social emancipation.

All this helps us interpret Bishop Ting's December 1980 article, "A Call for Clarity," which is an exposition of 14 points from Christians in the PRC to Christians abroad. What concerns us particularly is Bishop Ting's recurring observations on the house churches. He stated that the Christian movement throughout China today is considerably larger than it was originally thought to be. No accurate statistics have been gathered of this diffuse phenomenon, but he feels the house churches are of considerable importance although he resists the suggestion that they represent a grass roots movement. These house churches, he says, are largely evangelical in theological commitment, but Chinese evangelicals do not oppose the policies of the government's "United Front" as expressed through the Three Self Patriotic Association.

Those who do oppose this "United Front" Bishop Ting says are "not significant" within the total context of Christian life in China. Then when Christians abroad attempt to suggest that house churches constitute an organized movement defining itself over against the Three Self Patriotic Association, Bishop Ting feels "this is at best misguided, and, at worst, a deliberate attempt to foster such a split on the basis of theological and ecclesiastical differences which do exist." He concludes that the Cultural Revolution was "directly responsible for the deinstitutionalization of Protestant Christianity in China and for the emergence for the first time in Chinese history of a Christianity fully integrated into Chinese life" (it is "post-denominational" and "deprofessionalized"), and despite disagreements about; "holy orders" (ordination) and "initiation" (baptism), some sort of "United Church" structure should emerge (Whyte 1979:11-20).

Let me add some other characteristics: *First*, the leadership of the house churches is 70 to 80 per cent women. It has been more perilous for men to engage in leadership activity; not a few who were local leaders have been removed by the authorities. The government has about as much success in thwarting the informal though vital outreach of women as the USSR has had in nullifying "The Baptist p. 81 Grandmother" who is determined to instruct her grandchildren in Jesus and his love. (We must not forget the widespread and highly regarded activities of "Bible Women" in the churches throughout China prior to 1949.)

*Second*, the majority of those attending house churches are young people. Ting acknowledges this but does not evaluate its significance in terms of the apathy and cynicism created by three decades of bombastic revolutionary rhetoric and crass manipulation foisted on the people by their leaders. Young people are also much in evidence in the public worship services conducted by the older pastors of the Three Self Patriotic Association.

*Third*, the house churches are truly indigenous in every way, but is the Three Self Patriotic Association? Who pays the salaries of its leaders? Who sets the direction and parameters of its policies? And why does Bishop Ting discourage evangelistic activity?

*Fourth*, the strong rumour persists among house church leaders that those who preach in the former church buildings opened for public services are under considerable pressure, i.e., not to mention the miraculous activity of God through Christ in the Gospels and among Christians today (healing the sick, delivering the possessed, guiding and guarding the prayerful) and not to herald the Second Coming of Christ and his judgments. These themes were frowned on by the Three Self Movement in its earlier days. Fortunately, such a rumour, if false, can be easily dispelled by the Three Self Patriotic Association encouraging its preachers to speak forth on these matters so that "the whole counsel of God" might be shared with those who come to worship ([Ac. 20:27](#)).

*Fifth*, members of house church congregations make up the bulk of those attending the public services. Their motivation is to worship God in a public fashion and thereby establish contact with the larger Christian community. We can sympathize with their

yearning to break from house church isolation and seek identity with the historic continuum that is the Christian church. Even so, they would hardly feel that these “preaching points” represent the koinonia that should characterize the local congregation with its lay participation in policy matters, in the maintenance of its order and discipline and in its systematic study of “the apostles’ doctrine” ([Ac. 2:42](#)).

Who can speak with authority for this church with its thousands of house congregations scattered throughout China? Naturally, the government is desirous of controlling them. And it appears determined to use the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSM) to this end along with the parallel China Christian Council (CCC)—both of which are [p.82](#) headed by Bishop Ting. But before the TSM and the CCC can speak with integrity there should be an honest facing up to what these organizations have done in the past.

Those of us who were in China during the early days of the TSM and who have followed its activities over the years can all too readily recall its early triumphalism. Indeed, thousands of Christians all over China have long memories. How can they forget the “accusation campaigns” in the early ’50s so heavily promoted and supported by “Three Self” leaders? Did not *Tien Feng*, the official “Three Self” publication, endorse the vilification and destruction of many a godly pastor, and then justify this evil by identifying it with Jesus’ denunciation of the Pharisees? How can the TSM then justify its right to speak for all Protestant Christians in China today? Is not some public act of contrition and reconciliation in order?

And what about Bishop Ting’s reduction of all the faithful Christian witness by radio to inland China during the last 30 years to something “alarming and dangerous”? In his judgment it had but one objective: the “fostering of separatism within Chinese Christianity ... They send in money and secret messages and instructions and beam radio programs, all designed for nurturing opposition, carrying out smearing and splitting moves” (Ting 1979:101).

One wonders if Bishop Ting has listened to any of the evangelical broadcasts into China. His remarks hardly convey the impression of objectivity or fairness. True, these years of broadcasting have doubtless included some programs that contained more dross than gold, but those who have carefully monitored them have rejoiced that a witness to the biblical gospel has been faithfully maintained. Would that the bishop had some of the spirit that characterized the Apostle Paul. At times Paul was misunderstood and criticized by fellow Christians. When he was imprisoned and helpless, they sought to get back at him—and did so in their preaching. But how did Paul react?

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel (shades of Wang Ming-tao!). The former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in that I rejoice ([Ph. 1:15–18](#)).

But Bishop Ting doesn’t rejoice. He only repeats the tired line about the “shady aspects of Western Christianity and of the missionary movement with all its political complicity and compromises” (Ting 1979:101). Indeed, this sort of unrelenting criticism of the Western [p.83](#) missionaries who planted the church throughout China is not going to build up the unity of the Chinese church. Nor is it going to give the average Chinese evangelical confidence in the spiritual integrity of the TSM and the CCC. These Christians have experienced something of the “changeless, pitiless and fanatical” opposition of Communists to such matters as “world outlook, ... freedom of conscience, freedom of philosophic thought, freedom to create a spiritual culture” (Berdyayev 1960:169–170). They are bound to be suspicious of any religious agency in China (e.g., TSM or CCC) which

manifests today the sort of hostility to evangelical Christianity that yesterday sought the destruction of so many devout Christian leaders.

One has no desire to defend everything that Western missionaries did in the past. But the fact remains that China was made a better place because of their witness “by word and deed” to the gospel of Jesus Christ. John King Fairbank, America’s great China scholar, reminds us of this—and in so doing exposes the reason why those missionaries are so vilified today:

The Chinese Communist revolution of recent decades has stressed the spread of literacy to ordinary people, the publication of journals and pamphlets in the vernacular, education and equality for women, the abolition of arranged child-marriages, the supremacy of public duty over filial obedience and family obligations, increased agricultural productivity through the sinking of wells and improved tools, crops, and breeds, dike and road building for protection against flood and famine, public health clinics to treat common ailments and prevent disease, discussion groups to foster better conduct, student organizations to promote healthy recreation of moral guidance, and the acquisition and Sinification of Western knowledge for use in remaking Chinese life.

Missionaries of the nineteenth century pioneered in all of these activities. Little wonder that the revolutionaries of China since 1949 have resented them in retrospect. The missionaries came as spiritual reformers, soon found that material improvements were equally necessary, and in the end helped to foment the great revolution. Yet as foreigners, they could take no part in it, much less bring it to a finish. Instead, it finished them. But in the Maoist message of today, “serve the people”, one can hear the echo of the missionary’s wish to serve (one’s neighbor) (1974:2). p. 84

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# Keeping His Commandments

Klaus Bockmuehl

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*Klaus Bockmuehl discusses the extent the spirit of modern antinomianism has penetrated the Church and vitiated Christian discipleship and witness. He argues for the need to reinstate the commandments of God and clarify their function in relation to creation, redemption and the consummation of all things.*

(Editor)

## MODERN ANTINOMIANISM

### 1. Sign of our Times

Whoever today speaks about God's commandments is likely soon to be in hot water. He who thinks to say something positive about the law will be quickly met by contradiction. We live in a time when the tendency is not only towards practical, but also towards theoretical, conscious, intentional lawlessness, i.e., *antinomianism*, enmity to the idea of law as such. We hardly accept any restrictions of our own choosing, and none which come from the outside. Basically, every fence is a challenge to us, and the idea of "authority" is apt to disturb even the most peaceful of minds.

As with every other trend in our time, so also our lawlessness has had its prophets in the nineteenth century. Heinrich Heine, the romantic poet and friend of Karl Marx, wrote with respect to the pursuit of the enjoyments of life and with full theoretical clarity: "In order to do away with the idea of sin we had to abolish the law." As soon as man "became aware of his essential divinity," moral autonomy was the consequence, for, as Heine proudly said: "Every god is a law to himself." At the same time the Russian revolutionary, Michael Bakunin, discovered the political analogy to this program: anarchism, the programmatic destruction of law and order. Another philosopher, Max Stirner, in his

book, *The Only One and His Property*, showed that the atomization of society would be the end result of this whole endeavour.

Since then, we have begun to see the fulfillment of those prophecies. We hold: man has come of age; that permits the abolition of the law. Man is free; that demands unlimited liberation. *Lawlessness*, until recently the name of a nightmare, today seems to be listed among the virtues. We have tried “lawlessness” and anarchism in the arts, and some think that the arts have already arrived at nihilism and meaninglessness. We have hailed the concept of anti-authoritarian [p.86](#) education: our children were to grow up without any rules and, therefore, assumedly without distortion and in happiness. Also, in the field of sexual morality we today witness a comprehensive demolition of existing norms. Most astonishing is the attempt to apply the ideal of lawlessness to legislation itself. Here, at least in some sensitive areas concerning sexuality and abortion, laws have already been abolished. Also, the limitations which the institution of marriage doubtless imposes on the freedom of movement of the individual are to be successively removed. “Law and order” now is a term often quoted only ironically; its advocates run the danger of being called the secret agents of fascism. Perhaps only in the area of motor traffic, the program of deregulation seems to have been unsuccessful; in fact, one notices an increase of rules and regulations. Nonetheless, anarchism, the many-sided application of the ideal of lawlessness, seems to be the sought-for utopia of modern man. And he is not deterred by the fact that in history, strangely enough, anarchism has always prepared the way for dictatorship.

Admittedly, the continuing energy and ecology crises pose serious problems for the establishment of unlimited liberty of man. They meet him in the form of forced restrictions. However, exterior necessities have seldom been able to effect a change of mind and thus self-discipline and solidarity. Therefore, I think that antinomianism—enmity towards the law—is part of the essential signature of our times.

The general trend towards lawlessness has its roots in materialism and sensualism; to put it simply—in the quest for physical enjoyment. Some of the younger generation have no hesitation to proclaim this openly. A 1979 opinion poll taken among young people came up with this result: “Feeling happy is our highest value. For us, the traditional virtues have died.” The older generation in practice does not express a much different attitude. Materialism begets anarchy. Where self-realization and self-enjoyment are basic, law, authority and limitations must necessarily disappear.

## **2. The Tendency Among Christians**

It is no surprise that in a cultural climate of antinomianism the Church also will find itself invited or pressed into an attitude of accommodation or uniformity. We are offered all kinds of arguments that appeal to religious background. Did not Christ fight against the legalism of the Pharisees? Did not the apostle Paul write: “Christ is the end of the law”? Did not the Reformers above all emphasize Christian liberty? Therefore, for some, Christianity is above and beyond [p.87](#) morality-concern, and has nothing to do any more with the law.

It has been said already of the theologians of the nineteenth century that they no longer understood the positive attitude of Paul towards the law and that the idea of Christian liberty was the only thing they picked up from the Reformation. This situation has been aggravated in the twentieth century: antinomianism may now be found in all sectors of theology, across the range of denominations (among liberals, new moralists, but also in early neo-orthodoxy).

It is, however, a recent development that one finds this hostility toward the law and commandments also among evangelicals. There is a little story which demonstrates this.

On the day of his installation, a young evangelical pastor was given, as a gift, a plaque inscribed with the Ten Commandments. In his home, the pastor (however, for reasons different from those of Moses) threw it on the floor so that it broke into pieces. He exclaimed, "Shall I come under the law again? By no means!" He felt that the Ten Commandments belonged to a past period of salvation history. Similarly, one could recently read in a best-selling religious book that the law held as little obligation for Christians as the highway code for birds. They are quite free.

Could it be that this theory helped to pave the way for the practical developments which are usually more visible than the theory behind them? Today, divorce, although it implies the destruction of a marriage and often a family, seems also to be more and more acceptable among evangelicals. Pre-marital relationships seem to be widespread and common-law marriage the coming fashion. The dissolution of family life is another consequence of our opting for lawlessness.

Some young evangelicals welcome the glorious new freedom in every field. Their motive often is a reaction against the strict codes and customs of their tradition—but is reaction the road to an unbiased assessment?

A most peculiar phenomenon is what seems to be the quiet acceptance of today's trends in the evangelistic movement. Successful preachers advise their lesser colleagues not to mention "sin". In evangelistic meetings the young are asked to sign a "decision card" without ever having been instructed in detail about what a Christian conversion implies. "Conversion" then is a change of mood, of opinion, perhaps of the circle of friends, but no profound change in daily life. Or will we call it change when the recently "converted" publisher of a well-known sex magazine declared his journal would carry sex *and* Christ in the future? Evangelicals have to take care lest they make Christ their *maître de plaisir* and the accomplice of their aversion to the law. A gospel with its moral teeth drawn like that will [p. 88](#) never give the strength for the large tasks that are waiting for us in missions and development around the globe, and, perhaps, persecution.

### **3. The Essential Dimension of the Battle**

Modern antinomianism—the tendency towards lawlessness—would be characterized insufficiently if we failed to perceive it against the background of the fundamental struggle between the sovereignty of God and the assumed sovereignty of man, between the Kingdom of God and secularism: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us' " ([Ps. 2:4](#)). That is the larger horizon which we need to see and understand. Man's desire for autonomy—anarchism—develops into a rebellion against the Kingdom of God. Certainly this tendency is to be found in all of us, but that does not justify it. We need to call these things by their true name if we are to survive spiritually, and then also, physically.

## **KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS—THE BIBLICAL PROPOSITION**

### **1. The Biblical Material**

If we look through Scripture with this theme in mind, we will be surprised to see how much importance is attached to it. We may perhaps think of the commandments as a mere minimum of Christian morality, but it is truly astonishing to see the broad assent which this word from the last chapter of Scripture, "Blessed are those who do his commandments" ([Rev. 22:14](#)), receives elsewhere in Scripture.

The original context of the Ten Commandments links the love of God and keeping the commandments. In the book of Deuteronomy we read: “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments ...” (7:9). The same emphasis is to be found in the New Testament. Jesus himself thinks in these terms: “I do know the Father and I keep His word” (John 8:55). He also demands this from his disciples: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (John 15:10). The negative form of the affirmation in John 14:24 underlines the linkage observed: “He who does not love me does not keep my words.” The apostle John identifies communion with God and keeping the commandments: “All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them” (1 John 3:24), and sums up: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his p. 89 commandments” (1 John 5:3). St. Paul, of whom one may not expect it, in a similar fashion parallels the new creation with keeping the commandments (cf. 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15). The new man excels through a faith which is love in action and thus fulfills the commandments. In the life of the new person where one no longer lives according to the flesh, but in accordance with the Spirit, the requirements of the law are being fulfilled (Rom. 8:4). Here the commandments are being accepted on a level beyond legalism or lawlessness.

## 2. On the Recapitulation of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament

That the importance of God’s commandments also is the view of the New Testament is not an empty assertion. It can be shown in detail by the way the Ten Commandments themselves are recapitulated in the New Testament. There are a number of places where we find not only an individual commandment, but a cluster or group of commandments (see especially Matt. 5:17–32; 15:4–6; 15:19; 19:18; Rom. 13:8–10 and 1 Tim. 1:8–10). It is also pertinent in *which way* the commandments are being resumed. Three of those six passages contain a fundamental affirmation of the continuing validity of the Decalogue: Matthew 5, the radicalization of the commandments right up to the critical question of the attitude of the heart; Matthew 15:4–6, the defence of the commandments against human accretions; Matthew 19, the eschatological relevance of the commandments as standards of the last judgment. The three other passages reveal the following distinct usages of the commandments: 1 Timothy describes them as a fence to deter the potential evil doer; Matthew 15:9 uses the commandments as the means of convicting sinful human nature. Romans 13, in the context of Christian exhortation, determines love as the intention and content of all the commandments: here they have a regulatory function for Christian living.

These three usages—prevention, conviction and regulation—are identical with the “three uses of the law” formulated by the Reformers, especially John Calvin, as a doctrine fundamental to the teaching of Christian ethics.

It is, then, this collection of New Testament passages, which, in principle and with their different modes of application, emphasize the continuing validity of the law, i.e., the Ten Commandments in the Church, and so reconstitute the keeping of the commandments.

Whoever has become aware of this will no longer be astonished at Paul’s words of encouragement for the church of Thessalonica: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were p. 90 taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15). He sends a similar exhortation to Timothy, including both the creational and the eschatological perspective: “In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment unrestrained and free from reproach until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:13f.).

## “KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS” IN THE LIGHT OF THE HISTORY OF SALVATION

The passage last quoted with its reference to creation and the Second Coming should call our attention to the fact that, biblically speaking, the law must be seen in the framework and context of the whole history of salvation. We need to recognize its ministry and service in the fields of creation, redemption and consummation, if we are to understand what it is meant to do. Let us, therefore, investigate the purpose of the law in each of these three fields.

### 1. The Purpose of Law in the Context of Creational Life

Keeping the commandments first makes good sense in the realm of our life as creatures. God’s commandments describe the order that serves the sustainment of his creation. They are, as it were, the moral grammar of creation, the grammar of the *social* world and, generally, the created world. In a relevant passage at the end of the repetition of the Ten Commandments ([Deut. 5:33](#)), but in other places too, one can read concerning this: “You shall walk in all the way which the Lord your God has commanded you, *that you may live*, and that it may go well with you ...”

The same point is often made by the promise of *blessings* which are to follow the keeping of the commandments. It is for this reason that the Bible emphasizes the great boon that God has given us in the form of the commandments. I would merely quote [Psalm 19:7ff.](#) as an example: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ... Moreover by them is thy servant warned, in keeping them there is great reward.” One must not take such words as general liturgical phrases which might just as well be replaced by any other eulogy. Rather, these words are to be taken literally, as statements of *experience*. As Martin Luther said, Two pillars carry the world although it assails them both: God’s command and the Christian’s prayer. p. 91

It is with the same palpable and evident reality—and we must not conceal this other side—that transgression of the commandments is followed by God’s curse (cf. [Lev. 26:3–12, 14, 38](#)). The prophet Isaiah has described that inescapable linkage: “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” ([24:5](#))—a precise presentation of the sequence of the individual steps of apostasy! The result is: “Therefore a curse devours the earth”, even the vegetation dries up. That ecology does not work any more, at first in the social household of a nation, then also in nature, is seen as a consequence of trespassing the commandments. Social lawlessness finds its answer in a lawlessness of nature that is allowed by God.

So of what use is the law? It is to indicate what is unwholesome and injurious. In this it resembles traffic signs. Granted, there may be some traffic signs which are superfluous or arbitrary, a mere whim of the authorities. However, at a central motorway junction in Switzerland, for example, there are signs which signal a speed reduction to 80kph. In my experience, this exactly matches the objective facts concerning the centrifugal force that one encounters in the curb lane. Those signs represent reality. The Ten Commandments are to be understood similarly: theft, character assassination, adultery, etc. disrupt human society and, in the last analysis, destroy the offender, too.

The curse with which God negatively confirmed his order of creation is still valid today. Jeremiah’s words still count as if uttered for the first time today: “Suddenly will I speak against a nation and against a kingdom to root out and to pull down and to destroy



it. But if that nation against which I have spoken shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I thought to do them" ([18:7f](#)).

If these words still carry weight, we must—especially at a time like this which tends towards lawlessness—defend the Ten Commandments as God's good advice for the individual as well as for society, and for our merciful protection against chaos. It is incomprehensible, then, that Christians should lend a hand in the removal of the commandments.

So in the handling of creational life, whether in the encounter with our fellow man or with creation, it is not a matter of our individual opinion or preference. We cannot ignore God's inbuilt order. The secularist rejection of God's commandments fails to see the given structuredness of creation and of human existence. The rejection of the law, where it would occur in Christendom, forgets that according to the judgment of Jesus, God's commandments will stand "till [p. 92](#) heaven and earth pass away" ([Matt. 5:18](#)). God is a God of order. He has wonderfully ordered chaos into *kosmos* (harmonious arrangement), both in the macrocosm of the household of nature and in the microcosm of the human body (a fact emphasized by Calvin).

To pursue *kosmos* instead of chaos, so that life can prosper, was God's commission to man in paradise and it is still so today (see [Psalm 8](#)). But part of the essence of *kosmos* is harmony, regularity and law, which we consequently also regard as beauty. Similarly man, as individual and as society, would need limitation and law, if he is to find culture, the formation of his chaotic nature, instead of intoxication, and in the end, misery.

Finally, part of the creational relevance of the law is its ongoing service to us when we do find ourselves under the material blessings of God, when we are doing well. For just then the danger looms large that we become arrogant. In this case the warning of Scripture applies, "Take heed lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes ... lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, ... and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God" ([Deut. 8:11-14](#)). This passage testifies to what was said in the beginning: lawlessness grows out of affluence; antinomianism is a child of opulence.

As against this, one is almost tempted to paradoxically praise the blessings of at least a modicum of material want. Anyway, we are made aware that in the midst of affluence a little self-denial, at least some restraint and abstinence from possessions and enjoyment would be beneficial. We are not meant to succumb to material abundance, but to retain the mastery over ourselves. The commandment will prove a useful and welcome aid to such self-discipline. Moral and material self-limitation go hand in hand, as do opulence and enmity against the law. In our own situation, the biblical commandment of moderation is particularly relevant: in that we refuse to join the continuing progress in our culture towards materialism, antinomianism, and finally, destruction.

If we are unwilling to be stopped in our tracks, the law will turn against us, as the accusation and curse over the trespasses. It uncovers sin. Luther aptly compared the law to water poured on unslaked lime: it makes it boil and so reveals its true nature. Whoever offends against God's commandments will feel the battle come to his bones. When Paul writes, "The letter kills, but the spirit gives life" ([2 Cor. 3:6](#)), we are to understand that this is not a devaluating slight of [p. 93](#) the law, but a statement of fact. The law indeed kills; it is the very task of the law to turn against the offender.

We should note that man even *needs* the condemning judgment passed on his evil deeds if he is to win any interest in the forgiveness of God. One has to feel the pain in order to find going to the doctor meaningful. The abrogation of the law, wherever it is found in today's theology therefore means not only, as it were, the loss of the "user's manual" for

creation, but also the loss of the cue to understanding redemption. It effectively bars the road to forgiveness.

## 2. The Purpose of the Law in the Order of Salvation

We have discussed the essential task of God's law in the order of creation, of natural life. Is there also a role for the law in the order of redemption? The Bible answers this question with "yes". "Keeping the commandments" as a concept returns in the New Testament. But *how* can one still speak of a function of the law after redemption has been effected by Christ? Everything, it is clear, would depend on the right Christian understanding of the law.

What is the law good for in the order of redemption? That question would first have to be answered with the statement: the law does *not* contribute to the redemption and regeneration of a person in Christ. In fact, here the law ceases being active. Rather it is passive; it has something happening to it, because for those who believe in Christ and call upon his name, law is turned into commandment. That is to say, Christ has taken away the curse from the law and borne it himself, so that now only the blessing remains on the keeping of the commandments.

Observation of the law is not in itself the road to salvation. For it merely provides the *theory* of good and evil, but not the *strength* that would be necessary to perform the one and avoid the other. Nevertheless, it remains good in what it teaches. Christ redeemed us not from the law, but from the curse of the law ([Gal. 3:13](#)). Speaking with Calvin: the teaching office of the law, its task to instruct us about what is right, remains in force "till heaven and earth pass away". And it is very much to the point when Luther coins the phrase (in his highly commendable commentary on Galatians, of 1519): With us, it is not the law that is being changed but man: man is turned from an enemy into a friend of the law.

The same is expressed by the New Testament dialectic of law and freedom. We read: "You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" ([Gal. 5:13](#)). Concerning Christian p. 94 freedom, we are today surrounded by a host of toilsome misunderstandings. Theoretically, our liberation from the service of sin and death which Christ has brought about, opens up two ways: on the one hand the road of unlimited self-enjoyment and egotistic arbitrariness, or on the other hand, the path of love for God and neighbour. The former interpretation of freedom is a complete misinterpretation, for—as is made quite clear in one of the key passages of the New Testament, [2 Corinthians 5:15](#), "He (Christ) died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." So—liberation was effected for the purpose of our service of Christ.

The purpose of the commandments in the order of redemption concerns more precisely the area that is usually described as "sanctification", that is, in the sense of human action and advance which Paul points to when he charges the church, "Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1), or which the letter to the Hebrews enjoins with the admonition "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14).

God has said, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" ([Lev. 11:44](#)). The Christian has been called to live a life of progress in sanctification. We need sanctification not only *functionally*, for the sake of service, e.g., in missions, but also *essentially*, in order to live in a way appropriate to our being God's children. In this area then, and for the Christian, the

commandments continue to be valid—as *indicators*, as general directives for the doing of the good, which is expected of the Christian.

Sanctification and holiness—for past generations of Christians these concepts used to be household words. Things here seem to have changed fundamentally. Are we suffering from a weakness of Christian awareness? Have we forgotten the call to holiness? No doubt, the ruling theology of recent years has left us with a heavy mortgage. Theologians of world stature told us for many years that in practical terms nothing changes when we become Christians. We only begin to see ourselves in a different light; we now understand ourselves as being forgiven. One well-known theologian seems to have taught conversion as being a turn-around of “360 degrees”—full circle. But, could conversion ever not be a palpable experience, solely, as it were, a looping in thought ...? These widely-accepted formulae have a quality ominously similar to those which Marx criticized in his famous Thesis XI against Feuerbach: “Philosophers have always merely interpreted the world in different ways. The point is to p. 95 change it.” Theologians, too, seem only to interpret man differently instead of guiding him to the place where he is actually being changed.

There is in Christendom a whole history of what one might call a *second antinomianism*, i.e., a rejection of the commandments not merely in creation, but also in the Christian life, in the realm of sanctification. Philip Melancthon, co-reformer with Martin Luther, seems to have faced that heresy four hundred years ago. He commented in 1528: Many today misunderstand the freedom of the Christian person; they speak of forgiveness only, but no longer of repentance. Contrition over one’s sin, however, remains the prerequisite for the understanding of the Gospel, and the Ten Commandments are useful and necessary as guides towards the good works which must follow faith.

During the last decade of his life, Luther himself battled with all his might against those theologians who denied the need for holiness, whom he called “the antinomians”. He assessed them as: “truly beautiful proclaimers of Easter, but shameful preachers of Pentecost.”

That the quest for holiness is not left to our discretion, but that there is a special importance attached to the keeping of the commandments, can finally be read from the fact that Christ links keeping the commandments with our progress in the knowledge of God. He emphasizes the fundamental biblical truth that theory and practice always stand in close relation, even in interaction with each other. Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments ... He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” ([John 14:15, 21](#)). John Stott recently pointed out that these words represent a promise, but a conditional promise: “If you love me ...” To him who loves him and keeps the commandments, Christ promises to make himself manifest. Obviously the road to true knowledge of God is open only to those who love—who obey.

We find the same insight into the linkage between keeping the commandments and knowing God, this time in the form of, so to speak, a control formula. “And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments” ([1 John 2:3](#)). There we have, in simple words, the incorruptible biblical truth which we sometimes find so difficult to grasp and retain. Dependable knowledge of God is to be expected only where people keep the commandments of Jesus—God’s commandments. Everything else will be deceptive. John, often p. 96 conceived of as the mildest and most serene among the apostles, nevertheless remains adamant at this point, concluding, “He who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” ([1 John 2:6](#)).

Two aspects concerning the validity of the commandments in the field of holiness still need to be mentioned, so that we would not present the keeping of the commandments in a false light: a look at God’s *Spirit* and *Kingdom*.

One may confidently predict: Whoever has *only* the Ten Commandments will inevitably tend first to a legalistic attitude, and then perhaps later—by way of a sudden shift—to lawlessness. The Spirit, or God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit ([Rom. 5:5](#)), however, not only *moves* us to action; it *teaches* us at the same time what is to be done. That is the distinct character of Christian ethics: it shows how the instruction of the Spirit and the "fantasy of love" go beyond the basic demands of the commandments. Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan can already serve as an example for this. Who, to the contrary, disregards the counsel of the Spirit in interpreting the commandment for the given situation, must see how far he will get with its interpretation merely from human reason and, whether he will not, in practice, soon demand freedom from the commandment and so, freedom from Scripture.

The second aspect is the perspective of the Kingdom or the rule of God, i.e., the horizon of the overall aim of history. Jesus, who demanded from his disciples that love which keeps his commandments, at the same time told them: "No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" ([John 15:15](#)). Aims and norms must necessarily go together. Even in the modern process of the corruption of Christian ethics one can still discern first the loss of goals, then the breakdown of norms. Nobody likes to accept a discipline without knowing the reason why. For example, why should I renounce pleasures and comforts, and submit to severe training evening after evening in the sports grounds, if my only purpose is to reach the bus in the morning with a short sprint? A strict training program, however, would be normal and necessary for one who is to participate in championship competitions!

The commandments, then, go together with the horizon of the Kingdom of God, just as lawlessness goes with secularism. The battle for the Kingdom of God demands purposiveness and determination. Where there is to be love, there has to be discipline. All this is summed up in the words of Paul: "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, [p. 97](#) but a spirit of power and love and self-control" ([2 Tim. 1:7](#)). Where this spirit is not working and where one is not aware of the horizon of the Kingdom, then regard for the commandments will necessarily grow cold or fade away.

### 3. Keeping the Commandments with a View to the Consummation of All Things

Since Christ was raised from the dead, all history and the entirety of our lives are under eschatological determination, i.e., related to the coming and eternal realization of the Kingdom of God. One cannot fail to notice how, in the New Testament, keeping the commandments is constantly viewed in the horizon of that day of completion. Jesus stated, "Whoever does these commandments and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" ([Matt. 5:19](#)). He answered the Rich Young Ruler—and we should not rush over his answer too quickly—"If you would enter life, keep the commandments", mentioning the commandments of the second half of the Decalogue as well as the commandment to love one's neighbour ([Matt. 19:17](#)).

Paul, too, relates sanctification and the good works of the Christians to Judgment Day, when he prays for his friends "that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" ([Phil. 1:10f.](#)). Conversely, he warns that the transgression of the commandments will exclude one from entrance into God's kingdom (cf., [1 Cor. 6:9f.](#)). Even the fundamental passage of [Romans 13:8-10](#), which describes love as "the fulfilling of the law", puts this statement into the context of eschatology. For Paul immediately continues, "You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness

and put on the armour of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desire” ([Rom. 13:11–14](#)). All sanctification stands under the horizon of Christ’s return and judgment.

Keeping the commandments, however, must not only be pursued with a view to the final consummation—it has its own definite place *within* the eschatological situation itself, in the situation of the latter days. For that eschatological situation, according to the teaching of [p. 98](#) the Bible, will be characterized by lawlessness. In a memorable passage Jesus prophesied, “Because lawlessness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold” ([Matt. 24:12](#)). There may be law without love, but there can be no love without keeping the commandments. The New Testament describes the Anti-Christ as “the man of lawlessness” ([2 Thess. 2:3](#)). It is for these reasons that keeping the commandments becomes a direct witness for the reign of God, whereas all lawlessness helps prepare the road for the Anti-Christ. It is therefore also consistent with Christ’s prophecy in [Matthew 24:12](#), when the book of the Revelation even describes keeping the commandment as an eschatological mark of Christ’s Church: Christians are “those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus” ([Rev. 12:17](#)) or “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” ([Rev. 14:12](#)).

And so the book of Revelation, after having described, as in the beginning of Scripture, the blessing and the curse which God laid on keeping or rejecting his commandments, concludes:

The time is near. Let the evil doer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done ... Blessed are those who do his commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the (eternal) city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolators, and every one who loves and practices falsehood ([Rev. 22:10–15](#)).

This is what Christ testifies to, and we will be careful not to take away from or add anything to these words. I am convinced that God’s law—his order of creation—is still valid today. Where individual people and nations respect and obey God’s will it will be to their—even material—blessing. Whoever does not listen to God’s commandments, will lose his life spiritually, culturally, socially, and lastly—physically. Therefore, in a situation like ours which is so fundamentally characterized by its trend towards lawlessness, we more than anything else need a return to God’s commandments, a conversion which would set us on the path to search for God’s will. In this perspective, the Church first needs renewal. For the Church is meant to be a signpost to the way of salvation and a guide to conversion. If it is not, it helps drag humanity towards destruction. The Church is meant to—perhaps as a minority, but nevertheless publicly—represent the alternative to today’s claims to superiority by materialism, secularism and lawlessness. It is the Church’s destiny to [p. 99](#) be the leaven and salt in a civilization that has grown weary, and to strive, with all its heart, with all its soul, and with all its strength, that God’s name be hallowed again and that his will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

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# Mass Media, Ethics and the New International Order—An Overview from a Third World Perspective

Gerry Jayasuriya

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*This article which is a discussion of secular media ethics challenges churches and Christian media agencies to develop biblical guidelines for the communication of the Gospel worldwide.*

(Editor)

I have attempted to provide in this paper a basis and framework for discussing issues involved in the secular debate on communication and ethics, in particular the mass media, with special reference to the non-Western world. I have, however, confined myself to the noncommunist Third World since media subservience is built into the communist political philosophy. The mass media there are used as instruments of the state and the party, are closely integrated with other instruments of state power and party influence, are used as instruments of unity within the state and the party, as instruments of state and party revelation, and almost exclusively as instruments of propaganda and agitation characterized by a strictly enforced responsibility. In communist theory, freedom of the press means “approaching every facet of social life and the activities of every man with the yardstick and criteria provided by Marxist scientific methodology”. Thus under the communist theory absolute freedom is not possible since freedom and responsibility are inseparably linked. The communist mass media are integrated into the total communication system to accomplish desired changes. Hence by definition, in countries such as Cambodia, China, Cuba, Vietnam and the East European countries, the mass media are subservient to the government, and freedom of the press has to be understood in terms of the communist philosophy.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN THE THIRD WORLD

The Third World is largely characterized by the traditional societies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They have been variously classified as “developing nations” or “underdeveloped” or “non-industrialized”, but they have certain common features. They are all poor and **p. 101** are getting poorer with the exception of the oil producing countries. It has been estimated that there are approximately 750 million poor in the developing countries of whom 600 million (80%)—including virtually all the absolute poor—live in rural areas. Forty per cent of the people in the rural area of these countries are poor. Improving their lot is central to any development effort in which the role of the mass media is crucial. These countries all require access to relevant technology; they all have to meet increasing debt burdens with shrinking earnings and budgets and most are seeking to emerge from a past of imperialist and/or colonial domination and exploitation.

What do these similarities mean in human terms? Very briefly, illiteracy, high unemployment, a loss of cultural identity, a pervasive sense of psychological inferiority and dependency, a shortage of managerial and professional skills, lack of technology, unproductive attitudes and rising expectations (the latter largely due to the influence of

Western media and advertizing both direct and indirect). These nations have become formally independent only within the last three decades but it soon became evident to all of them that they were faced with virtually insurmountable problems and obstacles in their efforts to meet the rising expectations generated by the mass media and to a certain extent competitive party politics locally.

Development scientists who have studied the process of political evolution in emergent countries in the three continents (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) have concluded that the aspirations and expectations created in the wake of political liberation are doomed to remain unsatisfied. These countries engaged in the uphill struggle on the road to modernization find the task facing them bewilderingly complex and painful. No shortcuts exist that would enable an emergent nation to attain the goal of modernity without travail. This is why Dr. Gunnar Myrdal was so pessimistic in his assessment of the Asian scene in his classic work *Asian Drama*. Myrdal did not see much hope for the peoples of the region because of the inadequate tools available to them to tackle these tasks. Modernization itself has tended to nullify progress, since development quite often meant a widening of the gap between the urban elites and the rural poor. Daniel Lerner has pointed out that poverty makes sustained economic growth impossible, since each specific rapid advance is back-stepped by some counter-tendency in the social system.

Similarly low production ensures that there are no surpluses for investment which in turn means accumulation is impossible, hence progress is limited. Stated differently, an undeveloped country is poor because it has no industry; and it has no industry because it is p. 102 poor! Even foreign aid cannot often be assimilated by these countries because they lack the necessary technological infrastructures to utilize such assistance effectively.

In many of the developing countries such an excessive population growth is one of the most striking counter-tendencies. Ironically more effective health measures have virtually eradicated malaria and typhoid, minimized the incidence of cholera and smallpox, reduced the number of deaths and increased life span, but in the process contributed to a staggering increase of population. This population explosion has had severe repercussions on the already inadequate food resources and all aspects of development planning. Again in the case of education, more education without a simultaneous expansion in the economy has only contributed to an increase in the number of unemployed—and at that the educated unemployed—who then tend to form the spearhead for fostering popular economic and social discontent.

Even the so called “Green Revolution” which caused a tremendous leap in agricultural output only tended to intensify social injustice, as it was the wealthy land-owners who were able to benefit most from it. It resulted in a widening of the social and economic disparity, making the rich richer while the poor continued to remain poor. Even land reforms in the pursuit of social justice did not realize their objectives as the new peasant owners were illiterate, poor and lacked financial resources.

Most developing countries are beset by a scarcity economy which necessitates controls implemented by bureaucracy, often resulting in corruption. In fact, this is one of the reasons for its prevalence in these countries. They also have to contend with imported inflation, fluctuating commodity prices not within their control, and scarcity of foreign exchange for essential imports.

In the political sphere the difficulties encountered are possibly even more formidable. Take the case of some Asian countries. In Sri Lanka parliamentary democracy showed an inclination to the left, which culminated in 1971 in an abortive insurrection engineered by extremist elements, largely comprizing unemployed, educated youth who found in extremist ideologies a possible avenue through which they could vent their frustrations. In the Philippines, delayed social reform and political crises compelled President Marcos

to declare martial law in 1972 and enforce agrarian reforms. Malaysia and Singapore are practically one-party states which have to contend with internal ethnic problems while Indonesia has undergone political upheavals. Pakistan's problems of ethnic and cultural pluralism have p. 103 resulted in a military take-over and a form of controlled democracy.

Political consciousness has also stimulated (among ethnic and cultural groups) the hope of a political identity for themselves. This has given rise to subnational cultures and loyalties which are in conflict with a national loyalty. The most notable case was the East Bengal problem of Pakistan which resulted in a war of liberation culminating in the formation of an independent Bangladesh.

It is not surprising therefore that these countries are going through a phase of political experimentation—sometimes radical or even extremist—in their search for a viable alternative. This complex of diverse and difficult problems calls for an efficient political and social system. This is why several leaders in the developing countries have raised the question as to whether democracy can deliver the goods. In fact President Marcos of the Philippines, when he suspended the democratic system in his country, is on record as having said: "If democracy cannot offer a system which guarantees change, other methods will have to be tried." What we have evidenced in India—a country which has enjoyed political stability comparatively speaking—in 1975 and 1976 was a move to devise an alternative political system suitable for the sub-continent.

It is not surprising that many of the developing countries faced with insurmountable problems, even though they started as democracies, soon found the democratic system too slow, inadequate and cumbersome to tackle the complex problems. They gradually changed into "guided" or "controlled" democracies, one party states and even dictatorships. The mass media and freedom of the press were the main victims of these changes since it was felt that a free press controlled by private interests was not contributing to the development of a national consciousness for a nation still trying to determine its own path forward. What these countries of the Third World are attempting is to devise a political system suited to indigenous conditions which could solve their peculiar problems in their struggle for development, modernization, and national stability. It is in this context that one seeks from the Western world sympathy, understanding and constructive criticism rather than harsh judgements. These countries are only in the process of experimentation in their search for a viable political system.

It is the reporting of these aspirations as perceived by the peoples of the developing nations, that needs to be communicated to the rest of the world by media personnel who have a thorough competence, understanding and knowledge of these complex issues. p. 104

## **MASS MEDIA AND ETHICAL ISSUES**

Media practitioners have not paid serious attention to the ethics of mass communication. It appears that professionalism was their main concern since the inception of the mass media. All effort has been concentrated on technical development and the perfection of mass media techniques for producing programmes, and for editing and publishing newspapers.

When the developing nations acquired the technology of printing and broadcasting, they also imported the methods, formats and styles of the media from the Western world. Overseas training for mass media professionals from developing countries further reinforced Western concepts of communication and models of operation. However, when one has to contend with the problems in a developing nation and make use of the media to achieve social ends, one soon begins to question the role of the media in this context.

Are Western models suitable for a developed society the best means of communication in a traditional culture, characterized by poverty, ill health and illiteracy? This is the point at which political leaders and media practitioners began to question the ethical values of the Western media, giving rise to the growing debate on the New International Information Order. The term was first introduced into the international discussion by the “Symposium on Communication Policies” organized in March 1976 by the non-aligned states in Tunis, whose key resolution stated

Since information in the world shows disequilibrium favouring some and ignoring others, it is the duty of the non-aligned countries and the other developing countries to change this situation and obtain the decolonization of information, and initiate a new international order in information.

This was endorsed by the 5th Conference of the Heads of State of the Governments of the non-aligned countries held in August 1976. It brought into focus the differing values and standards in the media. Thus the various societies with their different religious cultures, social and moral standards found it difficult to reconcile the principles and ethics of the Western media in relation to freedom of speech, right to be informed, protection of the individual and society, and so on.

## **DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM**

Let us now look at some of these issues from a Third World point of view. It is generally agreed that the media have an indispensable role to play in modern society. They are an essential two-way link between **P. 105** the government and the people. On the one hand, they keep the ruled informed of the government’s policies, actions and activities, and on the other they bring feedback to the rulers from the ruled.

The media further are an instrument for exchanging messages, both views and information, between different sections of the country—between the rural and urban sectors, between industry and labour, between the majority and the minorities. As a result people are helped to make their own decisions on basic issues.

In a developing nation, the media have the additional role of sharing with the government the responsibility for the task of nation building in which communication plays an important part. It is because of the recognition of this ethical, moral, and social responsibility that “development journalism” and “development news” grew. However, unfortunately, this new form of journalism has been very severely criticized by the Western media which treats information largely as a commodity.

Let us for a moment consider what is development journalism. Briefly it is reporting on development processes rather than events. The emphasis on “development news” is not what happens at a particular moment or on a given day but what is happening over a period of time. Development news is significantly different from so called “action” news as an effort is made to provide information on the continuing and long term process of economic and social change.

Development journalism is one of the most important innovations in news reporting in recent times. In the developing countries it could make the highly elitist media relevant to their predominantly rural societies. Internationally it could enable the developed countries to perceive the Third World not just as objects of pity and charity but as human beings like themselves, struggling to provide the basic necessities of life and improve living conditions against tremendous odds. The developing countries have denied the lack of such news particularly in the international media. But what has been the outcome? Some media representatives from the West have generally denounced development news

as a camouflage for government control or management of news. Others have equated the Third World demand for development-oriented information with government propaganda and information handouts. Even some editors and correspondents in the developing nations themselves still under colonial orientation, have not taken eagerly to development journalism.

What appears to be the primary concern of Western correspondents—especially p. 106 those engaged by the four major international news agencies, Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Agence France Presse (AFP) and Reuters—are disasters, famines, corruption, wars, and civil disorders which tend to make for “action” copy: Economic and social development, being a slow and imperceptible process, rarely appears to be newsworthy.

## FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Let us now turn to the question of the “free flow” of information. Its international application came about in the late forties as a result of the world community approving a principle put forward by the United States news agencies. The agencies have used this concept to continue their own interest, according to the determinants of the transnational system of which they form a part. In practice the principle of “free flow” means that the agencies determine what is news and what shall be distributed for consumption worldwide, and thus they become the arbiters of reality. The manner in which the principle of “free flow” has been applied has not been questioned until recently and until now these agencies have been able to act with responsibility to no one but themselves.

It is therefore not surprising that they reflect neither the interests nor the social realities of the Third World. This is most startlingly evident in their reporting of events in which progressive governments or liberation movements are seeking to change dominant structures or to question the traditional status quo.

The functioning of these transnational news agencies is characterized by a variety of practices that run contrary to the needs of the developing nations, especially those countries attempting to bring about national structural changes or where conservative and repressive regions are meeting with local opposition. Their criteria for selecting news is consciously based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system and the countries in which the system has its roots, and they concentrate on subjects of interest to the preponderant markets of the agencies. Thus in a study made of the coverage of the Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in Colombo in 1976, 50% of all despatches sent by UPI mentioned the subject of Korea while only about one per cent of the final Declaration of the Conference was devoted to the subject. The agency coverage thus reflected an evident lack of relationships between the relative importance of the subject within the meeting and the image they transmitted. p. 107

Distortion of news is a regular feature of international information. It does not necessarily mean a false presentation of events but rather an arbitrary selection and slanted evaluation of events. So says Juan Somavia, the Director of the Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies Mexico, who further points out the various forms of such distortion:

- Overemphasizing events that have no real importance.
- Putting isolated facts together and presenting them as a whole without the whole ever having existed.
- Distortion also by silence, by failing to report on situations that are no longer of interest to the agencies’ home countries.



- Misrepresentation, by presenting facts so that the conclusions drawn are favourable to the interest of the transnational system.

All the news flowing out of the Third World reflects the preferences and needs of the Western media. This is why leaders in developing countries refer to the “one-way flow” of news. These countries would wish for the availability of news with a Third World perspective—and this need not and should not be an official one at that. Do the developing countries not deserve recognition of their efforts to alleviate their problems?

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE “WHOLE MAN”—COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Let us next turn our attention to the values in traditional society such as social goals, community, and solidarity, and see what influence Western media have on them. The yardstick of the Western world has been Gross National Product and this unfortunately came to be the criterion used for judging development and progress in the Third World too. Only in recent times has the question of social good been brought into the discussion.

The doctrine of progress has been a major premise when one talks of development; but what has progress meant in practical terms? It would appear that material acquisitions of property and wealth are evidence of progress and the Western media certainly have emphasized consumption contributing to happiness. At a conference a decade ago, *Church Communication and Development*, the task of communication was seen as helping “each man to increase his sense of dignity as a human being, to preserve his spiritual values, as well as to assist him to achieve greater economic development.” p. 108

Social justice, self-reliance, and economic growth must be considered as inter-related goals and are now widely recognized as the three major factors in any significant discussion of development. But what do Western media treating information as a commodity, ignoring its social significance, contribute? A well-documented paper presented by Dr. Luis Beltran, at the 10th General Assembly of the International Association of Mass Communication Research on the subject of television impact on the minds of Latin Americans, identifies what he calls the “twelve main images” induced by television delivery systems studied in Latin America—all of them in direct confrontation with development needs and priorities of traditional societies. They are Self-defeatism, Providentialism, Romanticism, Aggressiveness, Individualism, Élitism, Racism, Materialism, Adventurism, Conservatism, Conformism (this listing does not imply any order of ranking). This is an area that needs further discussion and consideration by media professionals since it raises ethical issues of the conflicting values and images presented by Western media in relation to the aspirations and nation-building efforts of the developing nations.

## **FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

Freedom of expression as it operates in a democratic society is based on a group of rights to form and hold beliefs and opinions on any subject, and to communicate them through any medium. It also includes the right to listen and the right to access of information. The rights of all in freedom of expression must be reconciled with other individual and social interests. The state has a role to play in assuring free expression in society through providing facilities and information. Freedom of expression in a democratic society is essential for advancing knowledge and discovering truth, assuring individual self-fulfilment, achieving a more adaptable and hence a more stable community, and providing for participation in the decision-making process by all members of society.

One of the media used for accomplishing this group of rights has been the Press. Many leading Third World figures have put forward the view that freedom of the press does not and cannot mean the same thing to underdeveloped countries as to developed countries. Their argument is that press freedom is divisible, it is one thing, say in the Third World; it is another thing, say in the Western World. Comments made by a leading political figure in the Caribbean, George Walter, are representative of the view in developing nations: p. 109

By and large, in the more developed societies, the Press has been able to fulfil its obligations without encountering any severe legal constraints. Two factors account for this: the first is that they have accepted the fact that if they are to enjoy the freedom which they want, they must display a corresponding degree of responsibility ... The second is that the preponderance of publications and other means of mass media communications have created several counter-vailing pressures which ensure that a great degree of responsibility prevails.

In the Caribbean today, we cannot say that a similar situation exists. Instead of having the development of several local publications, which would generate several counter-vailing and independent views on any issue, we have a situation where:

- (a) our mass media are practically dominated by one large multi-national corporation whose editorial policy is hardly designed to serve the needs of our region;
- (b) very little is being done to train and upgrade the standards of our journalists; and
- (c) where our mass communications media are locally owned; in a number of cases they are the organs of minority political parties.

Let us now look at what foreign standards might be. The British socialist, Francis Williams, in his book on journalism, *Dangerous Estate*, makes this point:

the freedom of the journalist—freedom not only from censorship or intimidation by the State but from Censorship or intimidation by anyone including his own employer—is an essential part of press freedom. This freedom involves the right of individual reporters to report facts honestly even if they prove inconvenient to the fancies or prejudices of editors or news editors; it involves the freedom of foreign and political correspondents to report and interpret the evidence before them according to their independent judgements and journalistic conscience, even if to do so is awkward for the policy of the paper that employs them; and it most certainly involves the degree of independence possessed by an editor in his relations with his publisher. Such independence clearly cannot be absolute ... The freedom of the press differs from, and ought always to be recognized as greater than, the simple freedom of an entrepreneur to do what he pleases with his property. A journalist has commitments to the commercial interests of those who employ him. But he has other loyalties also and these embrace the whole relationship of a newspaper to its public.

How far apart are these views? Could the Williams formula be applied in the Third World without getting entangled in the net of Mr. Walter's legal constraints? In his book, *The Politics of Change*, Mr. Michael Manley, another leading political figure in the Caribbean, poses this question: p. 110

Where is the dividing line between the rights of the press to its freedom as one of the main instruments by which a free society protects itself against totalitarian encroachments and the claims of social responsibility? ... Because this line is so difficult to draw; because it is so difficult to decide what is an over-riding social responsibility to which the press should be subject, it is to be hoped that the issue never has to be decided by a government acting unilaterally in restraint of the press. On the other hand, the press itself must recognize that if it will not impose restraints upon itself through self-discipline, it invites a confrontation sooner or later. For example, the press cannot expect its freedom to be defined to include the right to lie and distort merely because it may disagree with a policy

being pursued by a duly elected government. There are other ways in which honest disagreement can be expressed, and provided the disagreement is expressed honestly, the press is entitled to its freedom.

Is the press really free? Are there no powerful commercial interests that influence and even control the media? If profit is the primary motive of newspaper proprietors, can they provide socially relevant information? If they are unable to do so, is there no justification for the call by governments for a free and balanced flow of information and the establishment of a New International Information Order?

## WESTERN MEDIA AND TRADITIONAL CULTURES

The impact of Western media, particularly television, on traditional cultures, values and arts has been such that these cultures have been overwhelmed by an influx of Western popular culture—pop music, comic strips and television programmes. The leaders in developing countries saw in the media, particularly broadcasting, instruments which would contribute to integration. They viewed the media as helping create a nation out of local, regional, tribal and ethnic loyalties. They also saw them making a significant contribution in socio-economic development, through motivating the peoples of these countries.

Now there is a further call for more indigenous self-expression and for promoting traditional culture. The concern is not just national prestige, but for providing a vehicle to reach people with the message of national integration. But what in fact is happening in the developing nations where oral tradition and time-binding communication patterns are still formative elements in the culture and daily lives of the people? The global communications system which is a vehicle for “cultural homogenization” ensures that alien television programming is foisted on these cultures. The Global Television Traffic in particular is a matter of grave concern. Even as early as a decade ago [p. 111](#) Herbert Schiller in his book *Mass Communication and American Empire* pointed out the extent to which the major US networks had established marketing, management, financial and/or technical arrangements, with the television services of other nations. WORLD-VISION, ABC’s international network, reaches 60% of the world’s TV homes—a total of 23 million homes excluding the US. About the same time NBC’s international activities include syndication of 125 film series and service to over 300 television stations in over 80 countries. CBS distributes its products and services through over 70 subsidiaries to over 100 countries. Karle Nordensteng and Tapio Varis published a UNESCO report aptly titled “Global Television Traffic: A One-Way Street”. They report that 60% of all TV programming in several countries is mostly imported from the US. Thus many developing countries find their communications capabilities filled with foreign material. To the extent, then, that it can hardly be used for community development and local communications, this material is of questionable value to their people.

The developing countries have seen in television’s powerful visual impact a useful vehicle for achieving worthwhile goals, such as eradicating illiteracy, alleviating rural isolation, providing information about national goals and policies, developing national aims, and in general creating social consciousness. But once the country is adequately equipped, it finds it difficult to maintain programme output because of prohibitive costs. Consequently it is compelled to purchase overseas programmes to provide even a minimum service. Overseas producers can “dump” programmes at very low rates as costs have already been recovered. Thus the little financing available for local production is reduced even further by foreign purchases. The original objectives for which the system was introduced tend to get lost. Each nation and culture must seek to maximize its

capacities for generating its own messages and programming. Unfortunately television and similar technology foster one-way communication with the powerful nations providing the input and others receiving the output.

How does one reconcile this situation and provide for free expression while also developing mass communications which permit the exchange of ideas without being detrimental to national cultures?

## **ADVERTIZING**

One aspect of media ethics which I believe has somehow not received sufficient consideration is advertizing. And it is not only direct **P. 112** consumer product advertizing that I am concerned with. It is the whole range of images created and promoted indirectly through television programmes and films.

Let me take the case of Latin America, where research studies undertaken on advertizing show that US companies lead the advertizing field in most of these countries. Some of their main clients are the US transnational corporations. In Mexico, of the 170 advertizing agencies operating in the country, only four are solely in the hands of Mexicans. Of the \$500 million spent in that country \$400 million are handled by 11 US agencies. The top ten agencies in Venezuela are US-owned or controlled. Of the 78 members of the National Association of Advertizers of that country, 42 are US transnational firms. Six of Argentina's ten most important agencies are US affiliates or associates. One US agency handles almost all advertizing in the Central American countries. The sales of the two US agencies in Brazil—which are the largest in Brazil—represent twice the sales of the leading national agencies. Advertizing is therefore a very strong transnational influence on the mass communication system of Latin America. Is it surprising that the “coca cola” culture tends to envelop the globe?

## **NEW TECHNOLOGIES**

May I refer very briefly to another area of growing concern? This is the whole subject of the new communication technologies, in particular satellite communications and especially direct satellite broadcasting. The development of new communication techniques associated with the new technologies poses an even greater threat to the developing nations. This is particularly so in the case of television where distribution of programmes via satellites which recognize no national boundaries, will further contribute to “cultural homogenization” through global electronic invasion of the Third World countries. Similarly the development of video technology and the mass distribution of video cassettes by the Western media will almost certainly have an adverse effect on national cultures. It will become virtually impossible for societies to protect themselves from these influences because of the very nature of the technology.

## **THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVES**

From the foregoing it becomes evident that the debate on the media tends to be centred on the difficult concepts of information and particularly news. While it is generally accepted that the values of the **P. 113** West may be applicable to industrialized countries, developing countries look at their information providers as having special functions as instruments of social progress. Even though the Third World countries have different political and social systems and differences exist, they also share common problems and common national and international aspirations. This is why it is argued that since

development is a pressing problem, all national efforts including the mass media must be geared to the purpose of meeting the ends of social progress and economic development. Emphasis is given to the need for accuracy, truthfulness, and objectivity of information. Further, information, instead of misleading people, should enlighten, create national identity, and promote international goodwill.

Media practitioners in the Third World generally advocate a supportive role for the media. A leading Asian journalist has observed that:

the tasks of economic development are so complex and so urgent that they must necessarily be the prerogative of governments to tackle. So are the responsibilities of security. If Asian newspapers were to play parallel or independent roles, they would only confuse and complicate the situation beyond endurance. Asian newspapers must concede that it is both practical and proper for broad social, economic and political objectives to be set by governments. It should then be the responsibility of Asian newspapers to lend their support to the achievement of these objectives—not in a spirit of partisanship but of active contribution to national life playing the “devil’s advocate” too when it is necessary.

Similarly an Asian broadcaster has commented as follows:

Media people love to think of themselves as the great custodians and purveyors of objectivity and truth. Increasingly, governments and people are tending to treat this claim with cynicism or to reject it outright. The least media people can do is to come alive to the historical processes in which they are inextricably caught up and adapt their styles and priorities within them. *Theirs has always been and will continue to be only a supportive role*—supportive of values and systems that are not theirs to prescribe. Those values and systems are fashioned by economic and social forces much larger and more fundamental than themselves. The media ego must learn to diminish gracefully.

## **MEDIA—A SOCIAL NECESSITY?**

How can these positions be reconciled with Western values? We must possibly examine the present concept of information and prevent it from being merely a commodity. It has to revert to being what it should always have remained, a social necessity. This is the thinking **P. 114** behind the call for a new world order for the free flow of information, a call based on the desire for liberation.

The mass media are useful vehicles for propagating culture, ideology and nation building. The media are capable of fostering these bonds of human affection which hold societies together. A modern community is held together through a sense of common identity and destiny, a tolerance of the plurality of which it is made, active participation by its citizens in the decision-making process, and a measure of cultural integration that makes possible a consensus on economic and political priorities. The media have a vital role to play in all these areas by giving expression to national identity, supporting pluralistic values, providing access for the participation of the minority groups, and blending the old and new cultural elements. To accomplish this, the media must be relatively free from pressure—particularly the government—while being accountable to society.

I would like to conclude with a quotation by the father of the Indian nation, Mahatma Gandhi. It embodies the dilemma confronting the developing countries:

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my window to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. Mine is not a religion of the prison-house.



## How Biblical is Your View on Divorce and Remarriage?

Bruce and Kathleen Nicholls

The traditional Protestant stance is that in certain circumstances Christians may divorce their partners and that divorced persons are free to remarry. A *Christianity Today* Gallup poll (*Christianity Today*, June 6, 1980, p.27) estimated that 40% of evangelical clergy in U.S.A. accept remarriage after divorce in cases of desertion or adultery, while 27% accept remarriage after divorce regardless of the reasons, if reconciliation to the former spouse is not possible. One recent survey of divorced rates by profession found ministers with the third highest rate behind only medical doctors and policemen (*Leadership*, Fall 1981, p. 119). The same issue of *Leadership* reports on a recorded forum with five evangelical pastors who had personally experienced the trauma of divorce. All but one had remarried and all were continuing in their churches or in other churches. At least one had gone out and started a new church.

We can admire the openness of these men in the interview in their willingness to share their personal tragedies in print. Those of us who are fulfilled in marriage would be quick to add that our marriages are what they are by the grace of God. All of these pastors condemn divorce and all had been crushed emotionally by their devastating experience. All were deeply grateful for the supporting pastoral care of their elders and fellow ministers. They continued in the ministry because of a strong sense of God's call and enabling. One stated "the divorce enabled me to preach God's grace and forgiveness more realistically"; another said, "divorce increased my sensitivity to people". In no sense did they condone divorce but rather they testified to forgiveness, healing and the recovery of their ministries. The editors of *Leadership* asked a number of well-known Christian leaders in America to comment on this forum. All expressed their concern about this growing tragedy inside the Church and made many perceptive and helpful comments on the report of the five ministers.

Our concern in this issue of *ERT* is to ask the question, "How biblical is our attitude to divorce and remarriage? Does our attitude to the authority of Scripture reflect that we have accommodated it to the changing values of our culture?" There is the subtle danger that we assume what Scripture says and then proceed to interpret Scripture accordingly. This enables us to justify our feelings and actions and yet intellectually declare our belief in the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Nowhere is this clearer than in the widely held assumption p. 116 that those who divorce on biblical grounds are free to remarry. Our strong sense of compassion for those who have fallen and suffer becomes the assumed basis for accepting the view that divorce includes freedom to remarry. Is this line of reasoning any different from that of those liberals who argue for universalism in salvation on the grounds that God is absolute love? Edmund Clowney of Westminster Theological Seminary, expressed his concern in his reply to the forum when he said, "It is most

discouraging to hear ministers discuss their experiences with divorce without even raising the question as to whether or not their divorce was on biblical grounds. These men speak sincerely of their experiences of love and acceptance from church sessions and people, but no one spoke of the faithful exercise of church discipline towards them or their former spouses.” Richard Halverson, chaplain, United States Senate, responded “one of my concerns is that evangelicalism today is much more badly infected with secularism and worldliness than it realizes. One of the readings I’m getting is in the area of marital difficulties. Too often you have the feeling, as you talk to those afflicted, that they don’t really see the seriousness of getting a divorce ... It’s wonderful to show the compassion of Christ working, but we also need to say explicitly, ‘Look, this is what the Word of God teaches about divorce’ ” (p.29).

Yes, it is true divorced persons feel rejected, bruised, guilty and apprehensive. They need love, reassurance, acceptance and a group structure in which to rebuild their lives as they grow as Christians. But participation in the Body of Christ and the calling to the role of leadership in the Church is costly. Discipline whether on ethical or doctrinal grounds is fundamental to the nature and function of the Church. It is this discipline which is increasingly absent in many evangelical churches. But while ethical behaviour is not the ground of salvation, a Gospel without a clear biblical ethic is no Gospel at all. As Klaus Bockmuehl has shown in another article in this issue of *ERT*, the spirit of modern antinomianism has penetrated the church, destroyed its inner discipline and threatened its very existence. We suffer the subtle danger of being selective in our ethical concerns. Evangelicals have much to say on the evils of abortion and euthanasia but little on the sin of divorce and remarriage.

Divorce, or perhaps more strictly separation, may be permitted, Jesus said, on the grounds of *porneia* which we interpret to mean illicit sexual relations. According to Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church an irreconcilable desertion is, in extreme situations, a ground for separation. There is the subtle danger of oversimplifying these grounds of adultery and desertion. Those who feel sinned [p. 117](#) against are never entirely innocent. The boundary between innocence and guilt is rarely clear cut.

What about remarriage? Gordon Wenham in the following article “May Divorced Christians Remarry?” argues on exegetical grounds that Jesus prohibited all remarriage following divorce or separation. You may not accept all his arguments but his exposition of Jesus’ statement found in all the synoptics that remarriage constitutes adultery cannot be ignored. He convincingly demonstrates that during the first five centuries all Church Fathers except one, opposed remarriage after divorce. How many Christians, whether clergy or laity would divorce if they believed that remarriage came under the Lord’s judgment of adultery? The escalating breakdown of marriages and easy remarriage among Christians in the West suggests the urgency of the need to re-examine our basis for divorce and remarriage and to accept afresh the judgment of Scripture. Perhaps the greater issue today is not the defining of the extent of the authority of Scripture but developing a sound biblical hermeneutic and then obedience to the demands of the Word of God.

For those of us working with churches in the Third World where divorce and remarriage are rarely issues, the winds of North America and Europe are blowing strong. The only way churches can prepare themselves against the spirit of antinomianism and the rejection of the commandments of God is by commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and by obedience to Scripture as the Word of God. The teaching ministry of the Church needs to be re-emphasized and what better place to begin than with Christian marriage and the family.

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# May Divorced Christians Remarry?

Gordon Wenham

*Reprinted from Churchman, No. 2, 1981, with permission*

Evangelicals have contributed a number of booklets and articles to the current Anglican debate on marriage and divorce, but David Atkinson's *To Have and to Hold* (Collins, London 1979) is the first full-length book on the subject. In it he upholds the traditional Protestant stance that at least some divorcees are entitled to remarry. In fact he is more liberal than most evangelicals, arguing that any divorcee who is willing to use a special wedding service (essentially the present service with the addition of a penitential preface) may be married in church. In contrast, J. Murray and J. R. W. Stott would only allow innocent parties in cases of adultery or desertion to remarry, while O. M. T. O'Donovan would require some sort of penance before remarriage.<sup>1</sup>

Before outlining and criticizing David Atkinson's book, I should like to add a personal note. Both David and I were research students together at King's College, London—he in chemistry and I in theology—and we have had cordial contact since. I fear that, reading this review, he may feel with the psalmist that his 'own familiar friend in whom I trusted ... hath lifted up his heel against me.' Let me assure him and all who read this article that this is not the case. I am simply using this book as a foil, because it is the most comprehensive and eloquent recent statement of a common viewpoint.

I, too, started out with the typical evangelical view about remarriage and divorce, but the more I studied Scripture and early church history the more convinced I became that this interpretation was untenable. It is my understanding of the New Testament texts on divorce that has changed, not my convictions about their authority. I suspect that some evangelicals are unwilling to face up to the natural meaning of Scripture, and the unequivocal testimony of the early church as to its interpretation, because it is unpalatable. We want to believe that Jesus allowed divorcees to remarry; therefore we bend the interpretation of the texts to fit our prejudice. If we did not have such a high view of biblical authority, we would be more objective in our exegesis.

## THE MAIN ISSUES

David Atkinson's thesis boils down to the following two points. **p. 119** 1) Jesus allowed divorce on grounds of *porneia*, which he interprets as any illicit sexual intercourse. 2) Divorce always entails the right of remarriage. I accept the first point. I think Atkinson is

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<sup>1</sup> J. Murray, *Divorce* (Presbyterian and Reformed, Philadelphia 1961); J. R. W. Stott, *Divorce* (Falcon, London 1972); O. O'Donovan, *Marriage and Permanence* (Grove Books, Nottingham 1978).

correct to maintain that *porneia* is a broad term, not just adultery,<sup>2</sup> incest,<sup>3</sup> or premarital intercourse<sup>4</sup> as maintained by some recent writers. These are included in *porneia*, but it is in fact a broad term. Adultery is the most common form of *porneia*, but not the only offence denoted by the word.

I do not agree, though, that when the New Testament speaks of divorce it necessarily entails the right of remarriage. In this essay I shall try to establish three points. 1) The Old Testament, while placing no legal restrictions on divorce, did limit a divorcee's right of remarriage. The range of potential marriage partners was reduced as a result of the first marriage. 2) Jesus condemned any remarriage after divorce as adultery. Divorce is forbidden, except for *porneia*, but this does not include the right of remarriage. It is therefore preferable to speak of Jesus allowing separation rather than divorce. 3) The early church (up to AD 500) maintained that Christ allowed separation but not remarriage. When Christian divorcees did remarry, they were usually excommunicated. It should be noted that in the following exposition I shall discuss the topics in the order in which they are introduced by Atkinson.

Chapter 1 outlines the changing attitudes to marriage and divorce in society and in the church. It concludes by isolating four approaches to the pastoral discipline of divorce and remarriage. The 'rigorist' regards marriage as indissoluble and therefore forbids any remarriage of divorcees in church. The 'legislative' view allows that divorce is permitted by Christ and Paul for adultery and desertion, and therefore would allow remarriage in church only where a divorce had been granted on these grounds. The 'double-standard' view would allow divorcees to remarry in church if their previous wedding was in a registry office: only church weddings are indissoluble. Finally, the 'more liberal' view allows remarriage for any divorcee who satisfies the church of his penitence.

My only quibble with this analysis is the emotive labelling of the [p. 120](#) first position. To describe it as rigorist is unfair if, as its supporters allege, Jesus regarded remarriage after divorce as adultery. Taken rigorously, this dominical sentence would entail exclusion of the offender from the church until repentance, i.e. the divorce of the second 'spouse'. In fact, divorcees who remarry in a registry office or another church are rarely barred from communion. Thus even those whom Atkinson terms rigorists tolerate remarriage after divorce: they simply refuse to give ecclesiastical approval to remarriage. Some claim that this is inconsistent compromise. It is indeed a compromise, but it is an attempt to square our Lord's prohibition of remarriage with his compassion for sinners. It is men's hardness of heart which leads to the awkward compromise that 'rigorists' favour.

## THE EVIDENCE OF CHURCH HISTORY

Chapter 2 surveys the history of church discipline of divorce. Atkinson begins by looking at the witness of the early church. In the main text he apparently regards the evidence as ambiguous, though in his summary at the end of the chapter he concedes that 'the

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Murray, *Divorce*, p.42; R. H. Stein, 'Is it Lawful for a Man to Divorce his Wife?', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22, 1979, p.119.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. H. Baltensweiler, *Die Ehe im Neuen Testament* (Zwingli, 1967), p.93; J. A. Fitzmyer, 'Matthean Divorce Texts and Some New Palestinian Evidence', *Theological Studies* 37, 1976, pp.197-226.

<sup>4</sup> M. Geldard, 'Jesus' Teaching on Divorce', *Churchman* 92, 1978, pp.125-43; A. Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple* (Gleerup, Lund 1965), pp.135ff.

majority view is that the early church did not normally permit divorce with remarriage' (p.64).

This seems to me too weak a statement. Atkinson can only arrive at this position by heavy reliance on Pospishil, who, like Atkinson, confuses the patristic permission to separate, where one spouse is adulterous, with the right of divorce and remarriage. Pospishil's book is a light-weight work of special pleading. It was answered with great scholarly fairness and erudition by H. Crouzel in *L'Eglise primitive face au divorce*. Here in 410 pages every relevant text is cited and discussed at length. If Atkinson is to maintain his agnosticism about the patristic attitude, he must refute Crouzel<sup>5</sup> and not rely on setting quotations of Pospishil against Crouzel as though they were of equal worth.

To confirm my evaluation of the two works, I read all the reviews of Crouzel I could find—about a dozen. None of them faulted Crouzel on any point of real substance. Typical of these reviews was that in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*.

It would be difficult to praise too highly Père Crouzel's scholarly study of the Church's teaching and practice with regard to marriage and divorce in the first five centuries ... (He) corrects many widespread opinions as well p. 121 as the claims of certain modern writers to have discovered in the early centuries significant evidence of a tradition permitting remarriage after divorce during the lifetime of the first spouse. In fact the evidence for such a tradition is so meagre as to be virtually negligible.<sup>6</sup>

Crouzel shows that in the first five centuries no Greek writer approves of remarriage after divorce; and only one Latin writer, Ambrosiaster (c.366–83). And he only allowed remarriage in the case of a man with an adulterous wife: a woman with an adulterous husband was not given the same freedom. Against the solitary testimony of Ambrosiaster, Crouzel cites the views of some twenty-seven other writers or church councils.<sup>7</sup>

Though the early church was clear that Jesus had condemned all remarriage after divorce, that is not to say Christians never did it. Divorce and remarriage were as freely available then as they are today. Origen notes that, despite our Lord's teaching, some Egyptian bishops tolerated it to avoid worse evil. But, usually, when divorced Christians remarried they faced long periods of excommunication.

Atkinson devotes a longer section to the attitude of the Reformers, showing that they allowed divorce and remarriage in certain cases. For me, this is not decisive for the correctness of this view. Dupont<sup>8</sup> notes that Erasmus also took this line, and maintains that the Tridentine fathers were in fact more open about the correct exegesis of [Matthew 19:9](#) than their decrees might suggest. This indicates that in the sixteenth century there was some uncertainty about what the early church held concerning divorce and remarriage. It is interesting that, despite the attitude of at least some of the Reformers, Anglican canon law formulated in 1603 allowed only separation and not the right of remarriage.

## MARRIAGE AS COVENANT

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<sup>5</sup> To judge from his footnotes, Atkinson has only utilized Crouzel's short article 'Remarriage after Divorce in the Primitive Church', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 38, 1971, pp.21–41, not his main work.

<sup>6</sup> J. J. Hughes, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 24, 1973, p.61.

<sup>7</sup> *L'Eglise primitive face au divorce* (Beauchesne, Paris 1971), p.360.

<sup>8</sup> J. Dupont, *Mariage et divorce dans l'évangile* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), pp.115–22. Dupont's book is a model of careful exegesis.



Chapter 3 is devoted to an exposition of marriage as a covenant like that between God and his people, Christ and the church. This is by and large helpful and unexceptionable. I am sure that the idea of covenant is central to the biblical view of marriage. Atkinson also correctly points out that the one-flesh relationship created by marriage is analogous to blood-relationship, kinship. This is of great importance in interpreting the Old Testament laws on marriage, as I shall argue [p. 122](#) below. The kinship analogy also provides a useful way of describing what happens when marriages end in divorce. Children may fail to honour their parents, mothers may batter their babies, brothers may emigrate and never see each other again, but none of these acts ends the kinship. They destroy the love that should bind a family together, but they do not annul the blood-relationship. I think it can be demonstrated that Scripture sees divorce as terminating the loving relationship, but not the kinship between the former spouses.

Atkinson, however, argues that since marriages break up, so covenants may be terminated. This is true on a human level. But the biblical analogy for marriage is the covenant between God and his people. Now, one aspect of these biblical covenants which Atkinson significantly fails to mention is their permanence. The Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants are eternal: when the people disobeyed the covenant, the covenant curses came into play, but the covenant relationship was and is still there. When Israel or the king repent, they can still enjoy the covenant blessings ([Deuteronomy 30](#); [2 Samuel 7:13ff.](#)). In the words of St. Paul, 'the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' ([Romans 11:29](#)). Now if the concept of God's covenant with his people is the key to the biblical understanding of marriage, one would expect the notion of the eternity of the marriage bond to find expression in biblical law. David Atkinson denies it: I think both testaments assert it, though the Old Testament does not draw out the implications of the eternity and exclusiveness of the marriage relationship as fully as the New Testament.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT PICTURE

Chapter 4 discusses the biblical texts dealing explicitly with divorce and remarriage. It is clearly of crucial importance to all who accept the final authority of Scripture. To my mind it is sadly the most inadequate, as Atkinson attempts to make the texts fit his theory that, in the Bible, divorce always includes the right of remarriage. A secondary consideration is his determination to identify the teaching of the Old Testament on this subject with that of Jesus.

Drawing heavily on my material,<sup>9</sup> Atkinson outlines the financial considerations associated with marriage that would have made divorce a rarity in biblical times. It was the cost of the divorce that would have deterred a man from divorcing his wife under the old covenant. None of the provisions of [Deuteronomy 24:1-4](#) have anything to do with discouraging divorce. The thrust of the law, as nearly all commentators [p. 123](#) admit, is found in verse 4, which prohibits a husband *remarrying* his former wife. Thus the only law in the Old Testament expressly dealing with the practice of divorce is concerned with limiting the right of remarriage rather than divorce itself.<sup>10</sup> Put another way, the divorced man has a narrower field to choose from when he marries for the third time (the law envisages the death or divorce of his second wife): he cannot go back to his first wife.

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<sup>9</sup> *Third Way* 1.20, 1.21, 1.22, 1977, pp.3-5, 7-9.

<sup>10</sup> See now my article 'The Restoration of Marriage Reconsidered', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30, 1979, pp.36-40.

Now of course no man in ancient Israel had unlimited freedom in his choice of wife the first time he married. He could not marry women closely related to him, e.g. his mother, sister, aunt and so on. What Atkinson does not note is that his choice was more limited still for his second marriage, whether that marriage followed the death of his first wife or her divorce. A man could not marry his first wife's close female relatives, e.g. her sister, mother, daughter.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore clear that [Leviticus 18](#) and [20](#) are like [Deuteronomy 24](#) in regulating and restricting a man's right to remarriage after divorce.

What is the rationale for this particular restriction? [Leviticus 18:6–18](#) explains the logic in the motive-clauses of the various prohibitions.<sup>12</sup> These female in-laws are now in the same relationship to the man as his own blood-relations. A man's mother-in-law or daughter-in-law have become as it were his mother or his daughter. The kinship bond created by marriage extends not merely to one's spouse, but to the spouse's relatives. And what is very important, the kinship survives the death or divorce of one's spouse. These regulations would be redundant if they were regulating relationships during an existing marriage, for that would of course count as adultery. Thus already the Old Testament asserts that the legal kinships created by marriage, like blood kinship, survive death or divorce.

Why then does not the Old Testament, like our Lord, prohibit any remarriage after divorce? If legal kinship with one's first wife still exists after divorce, why does not remarriage with another woman count as committing adultery? The answer is simple. Under Old Testament law, as under other ancient law, oriental, Greek and Roman, a married man could have sexual relations with more than one woman. Polygamy was of course permitted. Affairs by married men with unmarried women did not count as adultery. Those caught [p. 124](#) would have had to marry the girl or pay damages to her father, but such behaviour was not adulterous and did not attract the death penalty. Adultery in pre-Christian times was defined as sexual intercourse between a married woman and a man who was not her husband. Atkinson, in his concern to identify Old and New Testament ethics, glosses over the fact that the Old Testament allows polygamy and does not regard a husband's infidelity as adulterous. That the Old Testament allows more latitude for remarriage after divorce than the New is of a piece with the greater liberties it allows married men than married women.

## THE TEACHING OF JESUS: MARK 10:2–12

Atkinson then turns his attention to the background to Jesus' teaching. This is well done, though I think one point may mislead the uninformed reader and since it appears to be based on my *Third Way* articles, I should point it out. He states that divorce on fairly trivial grounds was relatively common in the time of Christ' (p.108). Relative to the Old Testament era that is correct, but compared to our age divorce was still rare. Comparisons with Palestinian Arab practice earlier this century,<sup>13</sup> where the biblical dowry system still operated, would suggest a divorce rate of less than 5 per cent compared with 41 per cent in Great Britain in 1976. I am also unconvinced by his suggestion that the Shammaite Pharisees were much laxer about divorce than they professed to be.

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<sup>11</sup> The levirate law ([Deut. 25:5–10](#)) encouraging a man to marry his widowed sister-in-law was only invoked if she was childless. A man was also not compelled to undertake the responsibility of the levirate.

<sup>12</sup> See my article in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 and commentary *The Book of Leviticus* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979), pp.253ff. for a fuller exposition.

<sup>13</sup> H. Grandquist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village II* (Helsingfors, 1935), pp.271, 284.

In expounding the teaching of Jesus, Atkinson looks first at [Mark 10:2-12](#), the debate with the Pharisees. The Pharisees ask Jesus whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus at first gives no answer, asking them what Moses said. They quote [Deuteronomy 24](#). Then Jesus quotes from [Genesis 1](#) and [2](#) to prove that divorce was not God's intention and only given for men's hardness of heart. *Prima facie*, as most commentators admit, this is a rejection of the Mosaic divorce law. This is clearer in Matthew, where the Pharisees cite Deuteronomy as an objection to Jesus' appeal to Genesis. Atkinson, however, wishes to minimize the contrast with Deuteronomy's provision, arguing that Deuteronomy's assumption of divorce is needed for sinful society despite Christ's coming. As a practical proposition I would concur, but I do not think this is what Jesus and the Pharisees were debating.

We are told that the Pharisees came to test him (v.2): in other [p.125](#) words (if possible) to catch him out in his attitude to the law. And Jesus states bluntly that he rejects the Mosaic provision. To make use of it only proves your sinfulness. David Catchpole brings out the flavour of the debate much more precisely when he says:

What Moses commanded, the historical Jesus rejects. In [Mark 10:2-9](#) Jesus makes a decision about divorce, in effect, a decision about Moses. Nothing should blunt the sharp edge of his words. He diverges from all tradition, whether of Hillelite liberals or of Shammaite conservatives. Paradoxically, by taking a position more conservative than that of the conservative Shammaites, he takes a position more radical than all. For this is an abrogation of a law, an openly declared criticism of the law of Moses, not an accentuation of the Torah but an annulling of it.<sup>14</sup>

I shall come back to the question of whether annulment is quite the right term.

Atkinson then goes on to discuss the crucial saying in [Mark 10:11-12](#): 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery. After arguing that *apolyein* here means divorce and not separation, he continues: If right of remarriage after divorce was assumed, then divorce-and-remarriage belong together in Jesus' thinking, and we may understand the central thrust of his condemnation to be focused on the wrong of "putting away" rather than on the remarriage which in this *ad hominem* discussion is the inevitable consequence' (p.113).

Now this is not the right approach to exegesis. Atkinson assumes what Jesus must have meant and then proceeds to interpret the saying accordingly. He assumes that remarriage after divorce is permitted; therefore he argues that Jesus is condemning divorce, not remarriage. His exegesis cannot stand up in [Luke 16:18b](#) and [Matthew 5:32b](#), 'he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.' Here the man may be totally innocent of involvement in the earlier divorce proceedings; yet by marrying a divorced woman, he (not she) commits adultery. To explain these parallels to the Markan saying, Atkinson has to read into them things that they do not even hint at.

The second reason why Atkinson's exegesis is faulty is that in biblical law the crucial point comes at the end of the protasis, not at the beginning. Thus the decisive thing in [Mark 10:11](#) is the remarriage, not the divorcing. It is the remarriage following divorce that constitutes [p.126](#) adultery, not divorce by itself. Had our Lord been concerned to condemn the initiative of divorce he could have said 'he who divorces his wife commits adultery', or 'he who divorces his wife is an abomination to God.' Similarly, if the second commandment had wished to prohibit the making of graven images as opposed to their

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<sup>14</sup> D. R. Catchpole, 'The Synoptic Divorce Material as a Traditio-Historical Problem', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 57, 1974-5, p.120; Geldard, *Churchman* 92 makes the same points.

worship, it would have omitted the remarks about bowing down to them or worshipping them. A cursory reading of pentateuchal laws will quickly show how general is the principle that the decisive point comes at the end of the law.

By attempting to make [Mark 10:11-12](#) say what it does not, Atkinson fails to appreciate the great innovation Jesus made to the Old Testament view of marriage. First, and most obvious, he abolishes the right of remarriage already restricted under the old covenant law. Jewish bills of divorcement were not valid unless they contained the formula "Thou art free to marry any man." Now even with a bill of divorcement neither man nor wife can remarry without committing adultery. Secondly, if divorce followed by a second marriage constitutes adultery against one's first wife, then how much more so taking a second partner without divorcing the first. Thus Jesus bans polygamy and insists that a husband's infidelity is just as adulterous as a wife's. In this way he established full reciprocity between the sexes.

If, however, one interprets [Mark 10:11-12](#) and its parallels in Atkinson's way, there is no basis in Scripture for condemning polygamy. On his exegesis, as long as a man does not divorce his wife he is all right. There is nothing in the law about how many times you can marry without divorcing, or anything equating a husband's extramarital affairs with adultery. By insisting on the identity of old and new covenant sexual morality, Atkinson has condemned women to the inequalities of the pre-Christian situation. As Crouzel points out, the Fathers, relying on these gospel sayings and texts such as [1 Corinthians 7:4](#), constantly reiterated that in marriage man and wife had equal rights, unlike the women of classical antiquity. Infidelity by the husband was adultery, not merely fornication.

## THE TEACHING OF JESUS: MATTHEW 19:3-12

Atkinson then turns his attention to [Matthew 5:32/19:9](#), which apparently allows divorce or separation for *porneia*. With him, I find no difficulty in regarding this exceptive clause as dominical. Since Jewish and Roman law insisted on divorce for adultery, the Matthean exception could be implied by the Markan and Lukan forms of this saying. As I read them they forbid remarriage after divorce; they do not say [P. 127](#) anything about the legality of divorce itself. Admittedly [Matthew 19:6/Mark 10:9](#) appear to rule out divorce as a Christian option, but they do not describe it as adultery. Therefore as long as [Matthew 19:9](#) is not supposed to allow remarriage after divorce, there is no explicit contradiction with [Mark 10:11-12](#) or [Luke 16:18](#).

Atkinson, of course, does think that [Matthew 19:9](#) permits remarriage. But this causes various problems with the exegesis of [Matthew 19:3-12](#), which he fails to take into account. Catchpole<sup>15</sup> has drawn attention to these problems with great acuteness. In verses [4-8](#) Jesus has condemned both Hillelite and Shammaite Pharisees outright. Then, apparently, on Atkinson's exegesis of verse [9](#) he suddenly agrees with the Shammaites by permitting divorce and remarriage in *porneia* cases. Furthermore, in verse [10](#) the disciples' objection, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry', makes no sense if Jesus was a Shammaite. Marriage was perfectly natural and normal for Shammaites, even if they did not divorce their wives as readily as the Hillelites. For these reasons, Catchpole holds that [Matthew 19:3-12](#) is a somewhat unintelligent composition of mutually incompatible sayings.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.93ff.

It seems to the majority of the most recent writers<sup>16</sup> on this passage that these critical and exegetical problems vanish once it is recognized that [Matthew 19:9](#) only permits separation for *porneia*, not divorce with the right of remarriage. This is much stricter than the Shammaites, who naturally allowed remarriage. No wonder the disciples p. 128 protested so strongly. Despite nineteen centuries of the discipline of separation, we still think it is unfair. Better never to taste the joys of marriage than to experience them and then have them taken away through no fault of your own. That is how we think: that is what the disciples felt. 'If this is how it is ... it is better not to marry' (v. [10](#) TEV).

That the disciples have correctly grasped Jesus' teaching is proved by Jesus' reply, for he goes on to speak about eunuchs, i.e. people who do not marry. There are those who do not marry for human reasons, 'eunuchs from birth/by men', and those who do not marry 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven', i.e. out of loyalty to Jesus. In the context of a discussion about divorce and remarriage, the immediate reference must be to those who do not remarry after divorce. The secondary reference is probably to single people like Jesus and Paul who do not marry in order to devote themselves wholeheartedly to the service of God. Jesus declares that those who embrace the single way of life following divorce are in a special sense following him, the greatest eunuch for the kingdom of heaven.

## THE TEACHING OF PAUL

Finally Atkinson turns to Paul. He thinks [1 Corinthians 7:15](#) allows a deserted spouse to remarry. This may be so, but the text does not require it. It makes equally good sense to hold that Paul is allowing a believing spouse to grant an unbelieving partner a divorce without supposing that the believer would remarry. Given classical assumptions about divorce, the unbeliever might well demand a full divorce so that she could remarry. Remembering our Lord's teaching, the Christian might very well be reluctant to accede to this request if no *porneia* was involved. Paul says that, even so, the believer should be prepared to let his partner go. 'In such a case the brother or sister is not bound.' If Jesus did not permit innocent spouses in *porneia* cases to remarry, it seems unlikely that Paul is granting the right of remarriage to Christians in this case. Crouzel points out that, among the Fathers, only Ambrosiaster permits remarriage in the case envisaged in [1 Corinthians 7:15](#). Atkinson also suggests that remarriage after divorce may be allowed in [1](#)

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<sup>16</sup> Recent writers taking this line include R. Scroggs, 'Marriage in the NT', *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Supplementary Volume, 1976), pp.576–7. B. Vawter, 'Divorce and the New Testament', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, 1977, p.536. It should be noted that Vawter has given up the preteritive interpretation he advocated in 1954 and cited by Atkinson. G. J. Wenham, *Third Way* 1.22 (17 Nov. 1977), pp.7–9. F. J. Moloney, 'The Significance of Matthew 19:12 Within the Context of 19:3–12. A Redactional Study', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2, 1979, p.48. K. Condon, 'Apropos of the Divorce Saying', *Irish Biblical Studies* 2, 1980, pp.40–51. Three articles argue that Matthew is giving grounds for nullity rather than divorce. Fitzmyer, loc. cit. and A. Stock, 'Matthean Divorce Texts', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 8, 1978, pp.25ff. argue that *porneia* means incest, while Geldard, loc. cit. that it means pre-marital unchastity. Only Stein, loc. cit. holds that real divorce and remarriage are being envisaged. It is noteworthy that Fitzmyer, Stock and Stein all assume that Jesus' discussion ends at verse [9](#) and fail to consider the implications of verses [10–12](#). For turning the tide of critical thought on [Matthew 19:3–12](#), Dupont, op. cit. and Q. Quesnell, 'Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven ([Matthew 19:12](#))', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30, 1968 have had the most influence. Most of the authors cited, hold that the exceptive clause is Matthean rather than dominical. But the critical issue is irrelevant once it is admitted that [Matthew 19:9](#) does not contradict the statements admitted as authentic in the other gospels.



[Corinthians 7:25ff](#). This is most unlikely if our exegesis of the gospel texts is correct. J. K. Elliott<sup>17</sup> has given a more probable interpretation of these verses.

Atkinson concludes his discussion of the biblical data by commenting [p. 129](#) on [1 Corinthians 7:8-9](#), 'it is better to marry than to burn'. This remark is addressed to the unmarried and widows. Atkinson says that 'we may infer that his concern would also extend to divorced people' (p.125). This is another example of eisegesis rather than exegesis. If one assumes divorce includes the right of remarriage, Atkinson's conclusion follows. If one does not make that assumption, the natural interpretation is that by not mentioning divorcees in verse [8](#), Paul is excluding them. This is the more probable in the light of verse [11](#).

In fact there are other texts in the New Testament that imply that Christians should ideally only marry once, even if their first spouse dies. These are the regulations dealing with qualifications for church office. Widows must have been 'the wife of one husband' ([1 Timothy 5:9](#)). Bishops and deacons must be the 'husband of one wife' ([1 Timothy 3:2](#), [12](#)). That the NEB margin 'married only once' is the correct interpretation of this phrase is proved by the parallel condition for entry into the order of widows and by the use of the phrase on tombstones in the classical world. In an age when death in childbirth was relatively common, there must have been a significant number of widowers among church leaders. If it was thought possible for them to refrain from remarriage after their wife's death, it is also likely that Paul did not consider it unreasonable for divorcees to remain single.

## THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE LAW OF CHRIST

Chapter 5 discusses more general issues. On pages 135-6 Atkinson appears to imply that secret sins, even adultery, do not affect the marriage covenant so long as one's spouse does not know about it. I hardly believe he means this, and I suppose it is a slip of the pen.

He does discuss at some length the relationship between the law of Moses and the teaching of our Lord. He again asserts the fundamental identity of the two: Jesus is essentially just bringing out the spirit of the Mosaic legislation. Catchpole on the other hand spoke of the annulment of the law. I do not think either position is precisely right. It is obvious that Jesus did teach, for example, that the cleanness laws were obsolete. Elsewhere<sup>18</sup> I have suggested that this reflects the fact that, under the gospel, the symbolism of these laws is no longer relevant. They symbolized the election of the Jewish people: under the new covenant, when believers from all nations can enter the kingdom, these old reminders of the unique status of Israel are no longer appropriate. [p. 130](#)

In the case of the moral laws, the situation is slightly different. Sometimes Atkinson's model of the relationship suffices, e.g. Jesus' extension of the prohibition of murder to anger and so on. But in the marriage laws we have a more drastic change. The Old Testament limited a man's right of remarriage following divorce or his wife's death. The New Testament restricts this right still further, holding that no Christian should remarry after divorce, and that church officers may not even remarry after their spouse's death. I think a more appropriate analogy than annulment, or reinterpretation of the old covenant law, is found in the way the government has gradually altered the rules for Ministry of Transport (MOT) safety tests on cars. Originally only ten-year-old vehicles had to be

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<sup>17</sup> 'Paul's Teaching on Marriage in 1 Corinthians: Some Problems Considered', *New Testament Studies* 19, 1972-3, pp.219-25.

<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Leviticus*, pp.165ff.

tested before they could be licensed. But year by year the limits have been reduced so that now even three-year-old cars must undergo the test. The new rule does not really contradict the old one: it is merely extending its application to younger vehicles. The same relationship exists between the relative freedom on remarriage in the Old Testament and the tighter rules of the New. It may also be noted that the MOT test is now stricter in testing more parts of the car than it did when it was first introduced. This, too, finds a parallel in the marriage rules. Under the old covenant a wife had to be exclusively loyal to her husband: he could be polygamous but she could not be polyandrous. Under the new covenant the husband must be exclusively faithful to his wife. And because Jesus' teaching excludes polygamy, a husband's adultery, and remarriage after divorce, it makes Christian marriage a much clearer image of the relationship between Christ and the church than did marriage under the old covenant.

## CONCLUSION

*To Have and to Hold* is a very stimulating book, and David Atkinson is to be congratulated on setting out the issues so clearly. I still remain unconvinced by his interpretation of the New Testament texts. It seems to me that our Lord did not want his disciples to remarry after divorce. I therefore would prefer the Church of England to continue its present discipline with regard to divorcees. By declining to marry them in church, we express our faithfulness to Christ's ideals: by allowing those who remarry elsewhere to continue in full church membership, we declare his compassion and forgiveness.

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## A Response: Comments on the Article by Gordon Wenham

David Atkinson

I am grateful to the editor for the opportunity both to express my appreciation of Gordon Wenham's careful critique of *To Have and To Hold*, and to comment briefly in reply.

I have admired Gordon's scholarship for a long time, and benefited very much from his own work in this area (as I hope he feels I acknowledged adequately) in the Memorandum which he generously allowed me to see before he published a summary in *Third Way*. I am sorry if he feels that at one point I misrepresented his emphasis. I must acknowledge that in places my book was finished in too much haste and, as Gordon notes, some careless slips are obvious. (May I here give the Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 its proper name; the word 'Reform' somehow slipped out of Divorce Reform Act in the proof of p.159; and the text on pp.40–41 should of course be [Eph. 5:32](#)). But I do not think his assessment of my position is always accurate, and I still find myself in disagreement with him on his main point.

I have no brief to uphold a traditional evangelical or Protestant view for its own sake, and certainly do not want to fit an interpretation to my prejudice because the alternatives are unpalatable! I also think that my pastoral discussion with reference to counselling, careful preparation and adequate discrimination, together with tentative practical proposals for a special service, will make for more responsible pastoral discipline (in which remarriage in church will, I think, still be the exception rather than the rule) than Gordon Wenham's one-line summary of chapter 6 might indicate.

Gordon Wenham's essay makes three main points. First, that the Old Testament limited a divorcee's right of remarriage. There is no dispute about this, and I think that my handling of [Deuteronomy 24](#) is at this point in line with Dr. Wenham's. His second point is that Jesus condemned any remarriage after divorce as adultery, and allowed only separation, not divorce, on grounds of *porneia*. Thirdly, the early church taught that Jesus allowed separation but not divorce.

On this third point, I am willing to be persuaded on the patristic evidence. I have no particular competence in this area, and am dependent on the views of others. However, it does seem to me too simplistic to assume that the agreement of the Fathers against marriage must necessarily be due to the teaching of the New Testament, and not to the ascetic ideals which prevailed in the patristic age. [p. 132](#)

It is Dr. Wenham's second point which is crucial, and on this I make three comments:

1) I am not sure why Dr. Wenham says that I assert an absolute identity of sexual morality between the Old Testament and the New. This is his phrase: I nowhere say this. I was discussing the Old Testament as 'background' to the synoptic divorce material, and it does seem to me that on this issue, as well as on others in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is drawing out and interpreting for his purpose the radical principles implicit in the Mosaic law, rather than abrogating or annulling. In both New and Old Testaments, I maintained, we find both the will of God for marriage as an exclusive and permanent love relationship, as well as recognition of the reality of divorce in a sinful society. I believe the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees allows this point. Gordon Wenham does not. I think he needs to show, not just state, why my model of the relationship between Mosaic law and Jesus' view holds at some places but not at others.

2) Gordon Wenham criticizes my assumption that 'divorce' in the synoptic material includes the right of remarriage. Indeed, were he to grant that assumption, I think Gordon and I would agree at almost every significant point. But I do think that it is a natural assumption, and that it is for him to show that Jesus is using *apoluo* to mean 'separate without right of remarriage' and not 'divorce'. As far as I am aware, such separation was unknown in Jesus day and if he was using the word in a new and restricted sense—particularly in a discussion about [Deuteronomy 24](#) in which remarriage (albeit restricted) was assumed—prompted by the disagreement in its interpretation between Shammai and Hillel (both of whom also assumed remarriage), I think it unlikely that Jesus would have been so understood without further explanation.

3) It still seems to me the most natural interpretation of *porneia* is as an exception to the general rule about divorce and remarriage. It is not clear to me why, in part of Dr. Wenham's essay, his argument makes the issue of remarriage the crucial one, while he wishes to restrict the reference of *porneia* as an exception to the rule about divorce only and not to the question of remarriage at all. I agree that Jesus does not want his disciples to divorce and remarry. But it seems to me that the *porneia* exception allows us to speak of 'lesser evil'. Dr. Wenham also allows remarriage to some divorced people (but not in church) in accordance with our Lord's compassion for sinners and his reference to men's hardness of heart. So the practical issue turns on whether or not the church should ever give its blessing to a second marriage. I say 'yes, sometimes', because though never [p. 133](#)

God's will, divorce is a reality in a sinful world, and the New Testament recognizes that reality in the exceptive clause. Dr. Wenham says 'no', because he believes Jesus never wants divorced Christians to remarry (though if they do, they are still welcome to Communion).

Both of us, it seems, agree about God's ideal for marriage, and about the sinfulness of breaking the marriage covenant (and, incidentally, 'which my covenant they brake' is part of the story of God's covenant with his people). I do not seek to encourage divorce at all, as I hope my discussion of reconciliation made clear. The practical question that we answer differently is how the church is best able to give institutional expression both to the will of God for marriage, *and* to the fact that sin (even this sin) can be forgiven.

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## Sex Role Stereotyping and the Education of Girls

Margaret Malcolm

*Reprinted from Journal of Christian Education, July 1981, with permission*

*In this article Margaret Malcolm points to the failure in the thinking of church and society to accept women as persons in the same way as men. The author discusses the conditioning of the sex role of boys and girls by the secondary school level of education and calls Christians to examine their attitudes to women in society and to their national educational systems.*  
(Editor)

In a topic such as "the education of girls" one is dealing with underlying issues which have been deeply rooted in our cultural traditions and, indeed, in the traditions of most races on this planet almost since time began. Present day expressions such as suffragettes, women's lib., feminists, the battle of the sexes, equal pay for equal work, all bring to mind the age-old tensions between the similarities and dissimilarities of men and women. They exemplify the fact that there are sex role stereotypes of occupational activity, of superiority and inferiority, of leadership and passivity, which only very recently have been questioned.

While not agreeing with all the suffragettes and feminists represent, I firmly believe that they have had some things to complain about; and mainly through their efforts, tremendous advances in recognizing women as people have been made in recent times—and needed to be. For example, as late as the end of last century women in our society were treated legally as second class citizens, without the right to vote, without the right to hold property and dispose of it, without the right to education, without the right to go to court, without the right to exercise their abilities in careers they themselves chose. All these rights have been won for women in our society only comparatively recently. Yet still, today, some of the old stereotypes and attitudes remain and Christian women and

girls, in particular, are often presented with these as being God-given patterns for their behaviour.

That this is not so is the fundamental contention of this article. It is contended further that the nature and quality of the education offered to girls in our society depends basically upon the resolving of this issue. If girls are regarded only as future helpmates, mothers and homemakers, their education will be vastly different from that offered [p. 135](#) to them if they are regarded as persons in their own right. The ambition of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, is noteworthy: “The first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being regardless of sex.”

I believe St. Paul would stand alongside her on this issue for did he not write: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The ideal of personhood, with all individuals of equal worth as persons—with different qualities, characteristics, abilities, responsibilities, but all of equal worth in their personhood—is, I believe, a basic Scriptural principle. But it is one which has very often been ignored, not only by the world around us, but by the church itself.

## STATUS OF WOMEN

Down through the ages the theme has consistently been the inferiority of women and the consequent demand for their repression in varying ways. The ancient Jew prayed to God, “I thank Thee that I am not a woman”. Even at the height of their culture, a low view of women existed in the Greek and Roman worlds and it was only in Greek art and poetry that women were heroines. Aristotle is said to have taught that women were inferior in every way, only a rank above slaves. Xenophon, the historian, recorded these prejudices and wrote that women were best confined to an “inside world”.

The early Church Fathers followed in the same line. Tertullian spoke of women as “the mothers of all ills”, Chrysostom wrote of women as “a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination”, almost, as Gladys Hunt<sup>2</sup> suggests, as if women were designed by Satan instead of made in the image of God. Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that “woman is a misbegotten male” and St. Augustine agreed with the Graeco-Roman tradition that woman’s sole function is procreation. And what the early church fathers taught, the Christian church through the centuries, often believed was the pattern that God had ordained.

But was it? Or was it rather a cultural pattern, the outcome of sin, a pattern of the world to which the church too easily conformed? I believe it was the latter and, moreover, that this cultural pattern started right back at the Fall. Disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden disrupted not only the man to God relationship, not only the man to earth relationship, but also the man to woman relationship. The key [p. 136](#) verse in this argument is “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you”.<sup>3</sup> A recent paper by Ross Palmer on this topic carries on’

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<sup>1</sup> [Galatians 3:28](#) (N.I.V.).

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted for some of the historical outline to Gladys Hunt, *Ms. Means Myself*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> [Genesis 3:16](#) (N.I.V.).



It is very true that from that day to this, violent passion, ruthless domination have characterised the relationships of the sexes in many parts of the world. Women are counted either as sex objects, there purely to satisfy the men's physical desires, or as more or less valuable chattels to work in the fields and increase a man's status in the community—possessions rather than people.

But notice very carefully that God is not putting His stamp of approval on this state of affairs. He does not even say in [Genesis 3](#) that He is causing it to happen as a punishment. Rather it is a plain statement of fact that this will take place.

And just as Adam is not expected to *let* the thorns and thistles grow in his vegetable patch because God said they would, so there is no reason why we should *accept* passion and domination between the sexes. Adam was to toil against the weeds and we too are to struggle against the distortion of human relationships wrought by sin. The Fall and [Genesis 3](#) give no ground for saying that women are Divinely ordained to be dominated by men. Rather, domination is the result of sin and to be fought against with the aim to restore the original partnership God designed us for.<sup>4</sup>

So in that garden, at the very beginning of our history, the unity of the sexes, the enhancing, the complementing the one of the other, which was God's original pattern was lost and instead domination and subjugation, superiority and inferiority became the characteristic attitudes. This was, indeed, not God's original perfect pattern. It came into the world as a result of sin and has remained in the world, as sin has remained.

My recognition of the validity of the above view is supported when I look at the attitude Jesus, the perfect man, untainted by sin, adopted towards women. It is very clear that Christ did not conform to all the rigid cultural patterns of his day as far as attitudes to members of the opposite sex were concerned. He moved about in the company of women with a freedom unknown to the teachers of his day. In an analysis of person-to-person healings or interviews in the gospels of Luke and John it is interesting to note that, apart from his time with his disciples, Jesus in Luke healed or talked with women on ten separate occasions and with men on eighteen occasions. In John, which is among other things the gospel of personal discourse or interview, there are four major sessions with men and four also with [p. 137](#) women. Even his disciples marvelled that he, a rabbi, should hold a conversation with a woman, the woman of Samaria, in public. But he did. And moreover to that very woman Jesus gave the first revelation that he was the Messiah.

The cultural patterns of that day further decreed that women could not be taught the scriptures—but Jesus did; that women could not bear witness—but Jesus deliberately commissioned a woman, Mary Magdalene, to be the first witness of the resurrection and bear his message to the disciples. In the incident of the woman sick for twelve years with the flow of blood Jesus allowed her to touch him. He spoke to her, and healed her. This was indeed a major break with tradition of his day when women in such a condition were regarded as unclean and untouchable. Unquestionably on these and on many other occasions Jesus sought to give women full dignity and freedom as persons. Their womanhood was no barrier.

Down through the centuries women have owed much of their increasing freedom from oppression and opportunities for development to Christianity; but when one reads the writings of the church fathers and ponders upon attitudes and actions of both men and women in many of our churches today, one is forced to see how the pattern re-established by Jesus of recognizing an individual's personhood, irrespective of sex, has tended to be over-ridden by the cultural patterns of the outside world.

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<sup>4</sup> An unpublished paper presented to the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship, Wellington, N.Z., 1973.

## SEX ROLE STEREOTYPES

It is perhaps in the recognition of sex role stereotypes that one sees most clearly the effect of these cultural patterns. A stereotype is a preconception. The reality of everyday life in relation to others is experienced (a) in face-to-face situations and (b) in typifications e.g. “man”, “Englishman”, “woman” and these are therefore imbued with the qualities a person typically gives to that group. So red heads have fiery tempers, old people are conservative, men are competitive, women are nurturant—these are examples of stereotypes.

Sex stereotyping is the process by which we attribute characteristics to individuals on the basis of their sex. It is a process through which we are predisposed to believe that an individual—because she is a woman, or because he is a man—will think and behave in prescribed ways and will occupy certain social positions in society. Sex role stereotyping is prescribing a social role to individuals on the basis of their sex.

Some say that sex stereotyping is an inevitable process rising out of [p. 138](#) inherent differences between males and females, arguing that differentiation of the sexes is due to in-born biological characteristics. Whether there are biological differences or not, biology alone cannot account for the differing social roles of men and women. It cannot be denied that there are differences in behaviour and attitude between boys and girls, and men and women. Social reality proclaims the differences in most daily interactions. It is questionable, however, what has brought about the sex differences. Maccoby and Jacklin in a monumental work *The Psychology of Sex Differences* investigated over 1400 studies in the United States of America. They report some male-female differences are based on impressive evidence, others are based on pure mythology and others are inadequately tested. They conclude:

We suggest that societies have the *option* of minimising, rather than maximising, sex differences through their socialization practices ... In our view institutions and social practices are not merely reflections of biological inevitability. A variety of social institutions are viable within the framework set up by biology. It is up to human beings to select those that foster the life styles they most value.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence of sex role stereotypes is reasonably well documented in New Zealand, particularly in education. Several analyses have been made of children’s books and readers showing the typical portrayal of men and women, boys and girls in them.<sup>6</sup> Men and women are shown as exhibiting differing norms of appropriate behaviour; men assume roles that require initiative, independence, objectivity, leadership and ability; women fill roles requiring following directions, passivity, nurturance and maintaining favourable relationships. It is claimed that these stereotypes are often formulated in the preschool years and are reinforced by much of the education system. In addition the research literature also indicates that men and masculine characteristics are more highly valued in society than are women and feminine characteristics. Hence both boys and girls between six and ten years express greater preference for masculine things and activities than for feminine activities; similarly between five to twelve times as many women as men recall having wished they were of the opposite sex. Is this any wonder when at

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<sup>5</sup> E. Maccoby and C. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Dunedin Collective for Women, *First Sex Second Sex—Images of Male and Female in Infant Readers*, Dunedin: Dunedin Collective of Women, 1973.

primary school level, as a p. 139 recently published piece of research<sup>7</sup> showed, the materials used to teach children the basic skills of reading reinforce the traditional role images for males and females and discriminate against girls by teaching them to identify with a role image that limits their development as individual persons? That is, indeed, detrimental to their social and psychological as well as their intellectual development. Similarly in another survey done of a secondary school and its English texts<sup>8</sup> it was shown that of 31 books studied 26 had male central characters, of the 386 pictures in the books only 51 included a female and of all the males in the books, 90 per cent were in leading rather than following roles while 71 per cent of the females were in following roles.

In schools sex role stereotypes are also perpetuated by stereotyped expectations about male and female performance in different subjects. One example will suffice. Are boys by nature better than girls at mathematics? Many girls would believe so. Yet research<sup>9</sup> seems to indicate that although boys do perform better generally in this subject at secondary school, at primary school there are no consistent differences in computation. This would seem to indicate that such differences as may appear are the product of schooling. The expectation that boys are more able in mathematics is certainly highlighted by some mathematics text books used in schools. Nearly all the illustrations show boys and men doing things. Very rarely are girls or women depicted, thus reinforcing the idea that skill in mathematics is not usually held by girls. Mr. R. W. Renwick, the New Zealand Director General of Education, has noted the risks of this.

Slightly more than half of the pupils in primary schools are girls. We must ask ourselves how far, as a result of unthinking conventional expectations about their future role as women, we are in schools subjecting them to another self-fulfilling prophecy?<sup>10</sup>

## EDUCATION OF GIRLS

In none of the above argument is it being maintained that women should not be involved in the traditional roles of mother and homemaker P. 140 if they so choose. Indeed for many this will provide them with satisfaction and fulfilment. What is being contended, however, is that for each individual there be recognition of personhood and that neither manhood nor womanhood be the determining factor. It is, therefore, with this broad general aim of breaking down sex stereotypes and recognizing personhood that I see the education of girls (and, indeed, also of boys) needing to be developed. The New Zealand Report of the Select Committee on Women's Rights presented in June 1975 put it well:

Much of the responsibility for perpetuating traditional stereotypes of men and women lies in the field of education. It follows that the education system could be used with effect to

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<sup>7</sup> Working Party document presented to Parliamentary Select Committee on Women's Rights, *run, john, run, watch, janet watch; a study of sex-role stereotyping in infant readers*, Wellington, April 1974.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Hattie, "Sex Stereotyping in Secondary Schools' Literature Books", *New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association Journal*, October 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Fennema, "Mathematics Learning and the Sexes: A Review", *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, May 1974.

<sup>10</sup> R. W. Renwick, *Women in Education*, man of the year address to Wellington Branch New Zealand Educational Institute, Department of Education, 1975 (mimeo).

break down these stereotypes and encourage a more enlightened view of the roles both sexes are capable of fulfilling.<sup>11</sup>

If this view of personhood is, as I argued earlier, the Biblical view, then I see a great need for Christians to examine the attitudes towards women which are woven into our society and perpetuated through our education system. Some of the great liberalising social movements of the 19th century—abolition of slavery and of child labour, for example, were begun and carried through by sincere, committed Christians. If Christians, both women and men, were prepared to seek the true Christ-like attitude to women and not rely on tradition and man-made cultural patterns of past and present then, in this matter also they would be seen as doing God's work of freeing from the shackles of sin. I believe it is a sad commentary upon the state of the church in these days that, more often than not, it is Christians who oppose the liberalising attitudes to women and non-Christians who promote them. The door is thus left open for the accompanying entrance of additional ideas and attitudes which spring not from the mind of the Creator but from that of the enemy of souls. The ideal of personhood, independent of manhood and womanhood, with the consequent breaking down of the automatic expectation of role related to sex is a true Christian ideal. The promotion of this could markedly change the education which is, even today, offered to girls.

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## **The Role of Theological Education in Church Planting among the Urban Poor A Case Study from Madras**

**Graham Houghton and Ezra Sargunam**

*Reprinted from TRACI Journal, April 1981, with permission*

*At the February 1981 meeting of the Association for Evangelical Theological Education in India, papers were read giving suggestions for how theological education could prepare pastors for work among the poor. Madras Bible Seminary, in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu, presented the following model, which maintains the primacy of evangelism over programmes of social concern. Reports of other models will be welcomed.*

(Editor)

At Madras Bible Seminary theological education has always been closely associated with church planting. The goal of the Seminary is to produce men of sound evangelical convictions, men with a consuming zeal to proclaim to all the redemptive work of God in

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<sup>11</sup> Presented in "*The Role of Women in New Zealand Society*", Wellington: Government Printer, June 1975.

Christ and men with a divine sense of urgency. At the same time an attempt has been made to captivate these ideals and express them in the world in such a way that measurable church growth is the result.

## **CURRICULUM AND CHURCH GROWTH**

In order to realise this objective we have designed our Seminary programme in such a way that our students are both intellectually and practically prepared for a ministry of church planting in the ranks of the Evangelical Church of India. Intellectual preparation takes place in the classroom. If students are not convinced of the biblical ground of church growth and do not cultivate a mentality of harvest it is unlikely they will do anything practical about it. This practical aspect of their education derives from a number of in-the-field experiences. Once students actually enter into the thrill of bringing men and women to Christ, of watching them grow in the faith, of preparing them for baptism and of seeing a new church building opened, they believe all these things are possible. **P. 142**

Most wonderful of all, they are entirely convinced that, given a similar set of circumstances, the process could be repeated. In short, they become ardent church planters. Many of the students have already had considerable church planting experience even before they arrived at MBS. A student, for example, considered too young to begin formal studies, is invited to join one of our evangelism teams, the objective of which is to establish new churches. By whatever route students come to us, they soon become conscious that our course is to produce church planters. Besides regular courses on church growth this philosophy permeates the total life of the school. Most of the faculty are pastors under appointment to the ECI and therefore are likely to convey to the students, of any class, principles of church growth and the burden of the ECI for the unreached.

At MBS, classes are conducted four days a week, i.e., Tuesday through Friday. Saturday evenings and Sundays are given to evangelism with a view to establishing churches. The specific goal of our student outreach is to begin at least two churches a year. Monday mornings, students gather in the chapel and present written reports of their weekend activities, at which time prayer is offered on behalf of all who have been contacted.

This is not a new format. From its beginning in 1953 MBS has given almost equal time to practical, in-the-field ministries. The results of these efforts have been significant. The initiative for many of our ECI congregations has been derived from the pioneer efforts of our Seminary students. Of those people approached with the claims of Christ, the most responsive have been those who are most conscious of need; that is, the recent migrants to the city, the unemployed, the sick, the lonely, the hungry, the oppressed, those gripped by the power of alcoholism, or those suffering the torment of demons.

It is the poor and broken-hearted that welcome the students, and in turn our students are more comfortable working among poor people. Perhaps they understand and can relate much better to this class of person as in many cases their own backgrounds are not entirely dissimilar. It is to those in the slums of Madras that we have sent our students. There is nothing unique or innovative about our methods. In the main they have been characterised by hard work and persistence. Even so there has usually been some point of contact with the area which provides us the reason to go there in preference to any one of the several other sections of the city with similar socio-economic factors.

We have relied initially on an intensive tract distribution effort that has attempted to place the gospel in every home in the area, not just **p. 143** once or twice but several times. Secondly, we have placed a strong emphasis on open-air preaching. It has been amazing how many contacts have been made and how many converts won through the



proclamation of the gospel on street corners. For one thing it announces our presence in the area and it invariably brings us into touch with the community. There are usually three or four categories of people contacted. Committed Christians, nominal Christians (i.e. those whose only awareness of Christianity is that they know they are not Hindus or Muslims), those who are open to the claims of Christ and those that are decidedly resistant to the gospel. It very often happens that the committed Christians immediately identify with our students and invite them into their homes to pray and to conduct Bible studies and worship services. However, experience has shown that no matter what denominational background such people have, it is extremely difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, to establish a church with such people as the charter members. Most of their problems are not related to faith but to church order and they very often find it difficult to adapt to new forms of worship. Our most lasting work then occurs among the nominal Christians and the non-Christians who, being aware of certain physical or psychological needs, are open to the claims of Christ.

## MESSAGE AND RESPONSE

The message our students proclaim is inclined to oversimplify the gospel. On the other hand, its power is perhaps in its very simplicity. By “oversimplifying the gospel” we do not mean it lacks theological content or is something less than that gospel spoken of in the New Testament, rather we mean Jesus Christ is presented as the panacea for all that ails mankind; if only men and women would come and believe in Him all their problems would be solved. The response to this from the Hindus is very much that of barter mentality. “If your God will heal my son of his disease, definitely my family will accept Jesus Christ”, or, “If I get a job, my whole household will surely attend church”. We cannot say that the sovereign God has vindicated our students in every case, but many have been the triumphs of the gospel. Men and women are healed, demons are cast out, drunkards have been set free and many prayers have been answered in a dramatic way.

Many who acknowledge the power of God and experience His touch in some way fail to keep their side of the bargain and soon forget the whole episode. But there are many for whom the demonstration of the power of God is a real confirmation of the gospel of p. 144 Jesus Christ. In such cases our students are invited to conduct family prayers or Bible studies in their homes. At this stage such people may genuinely be called enquirers. In some cases, perhaps most, a mental commitment to Jesus Christ has already been made even though the new believers may not identify at this stage with the church. As soon as we get ten or more families expressing real interest in worshipping together in one or other of their homes, the ECI, to whom MBS hands on all its fellowships of believers, begins to look about for a piece of land upon which to erect a church building. In many instances a student who shows a special interest or burden for a particular place is appointed to the area as the pastor upon his graduation.

The question has often been raised by those contacted as to the benefits of Christianity, that is, the material advantages of them becoming Christian. We have over the years never allowed our students to get too intricately involved in the day to day affairs of the people contacted. Firstly, we believe that the greatest agent for upward social mobility is conversion to Jesus Christ. That the highest form of social action is to be involved in a ministry of reconciliation which by virtue of its very nature brings about a total transformation in the life of the new-born believer in Christ. It is our thesis that if a man gives up liquor and gambling, his household will eat better food and be better clothed. Secondly, we have not felt we could make the time available to our students that is often necessary to deal with the innumerable problems of the poor. There has been

perhaps a certain frustration in not being able to go the second mile and take off a couple of classes to take someone to the hospital or to help another put new leaves on his hut. In such situations we have given precedence to students' studies, considering this to be choosing the best in preference to the good. At the same time we have felt that we were exposing our students to the real world, with the hope that they would come to grips with these living issues in the classroom and in a most relevant way continue to prepare themselves for that greater and more full ministry toward which they are moving. We have not considered this position to be a dereliction of duty but rather one of fundamental theological conviction and priority.

Thankfully, the story does not end there. Wherever there are critical needs the ECI has come forward. They have become involved in such things as providing food packets for flood victims, setting up certain poor families with buffaloes, goats, rickshaws etc. But even here, as interested as the ECI is in church growth, it has up to the present time maintained the primacy of direct evangelism over programmes of social concern.

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**Dr. Graham Houghton is Principal of Madras Bible Seminary. Rev. Ezra Sargunam is President of the Evangelical Church of India. p. 145**

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# Faith and Church

## GOD'S NEW SOCIETY: THE MESSAGE OF EPHESIANS

by John R. W. Stott  
(IVP, 1979), 291pp., £3.50, US\$5.95, paper

Abstract of reviews in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, June 1980, by M. Silva and  
*Churchman*, No. 1, 1981 by David H. Wheaton

"One of our chief evangelical blind spots, has been to overlook the central importance of the Church." Any book beginning with such a note deserves our warmest welcome and very close attention. This significant commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians stands out as a departure from the traditional evangelical emphasis on the salvation of the individual as the central theme of the book. He states, "nobody can emerge from a careful reading of Paul's letters to the Ephesians with a privatized Gospel", and he makes his emphasis the "vision of the renewed human community" (p.10) which is the theme of ch. [2:11-4:16](#). In the course of his exposition, Stott faithfully conveys the great concerns of the letter (e.g. "because God's people are called to be one people, they must manifest their unity, and because they are called to be a holy people, they must manifest their purity" (p.147) and courageously applies those concerns to the controversial issues facing us today.

Stott has that rare ability to focus on the major thrust of individual paragraphs without ignoring exegetical difficulties. For instance, he treats the complex argument of [2:16](#) thus: "This, then, was the achievement of Christ's cross. First, He abolished the law ... as a divine instrument separating men from God and Jews from Gentiles. Secondly, He created a single new humanity out of its former deep divisions ... Thirdly, He reconciled this new

united humanity to God ... First, He achieved it (peace); then He announced it ..." (pp.102–3).

For those who have been troubled by some modern ideas of how to understand the principalities and powers of [3:10](#) and [6:12](#), there is a thoughtful and stimulating treatment of the subject on pp.267–75 which considers these views with understanding before coming down in favour of the traditional interpretation of these forces as personal supernatural agencies.

The author tends to over-interpret the Greek tenses, a fairly common weakness, and the eschatological perspective of the Epistle may [p. 147](#) not be presented as firmly as one would like, but Stott is consistently sober in his exegesis and has been responsible in his use of modern critical work on Ephesians.

This commentary is highly recommended for lay persons and Bible teachers as an excellent aid to bringing this part of Scripture to bear on twentieth century life.

## **THE FAMILY AND THE FELLOWSHIP: NEW TESTAMENT IMAGES OF THE CHURCH**

by Ralph P. Martin

(Paternoster, 1979), 142pp., £2.60, paper

Abstract of a review by Max Turner in *Themelios*, September 1981

The book bears a glossy cover photograph of an informal 'breaking of bread' service; it has a catchy title, and an explicit prefatory remark stating that the purpose of the volume is to help Christians see the necessary place of the Church in God's design, and to take a positive attitude towards it. We should expect, then, a warm, popular level exposition informed by scholarship, but not encumbered by it. What we meet in the pages that follow is a perfectly competent coverage of the beginnings of the Church in the ministry of Jesus (ch.1); of the actual beginnings at Pentecost (ch.2); of what 'fellowship' means (ch.3); of the nature and purpose of charismatic gifts (ch.4); of the variety of patterns of ministry in the early Church (ch.5); of the so-called 'ordinances' (ch.6); of questions surrounding Church unity (ch.7); and of the Church's relationship to the State (ch.8). A final chapter explores various current but defective models for the Church (the Church as lecture room (in some Protestant circles); as a theatre (in Catholic circles); as a business corporation and as a social club) and highlights the significance of some biblical images that the Church must take more seriously (the Church as the Temple of the Lord; the body of Christ and the family of God). The latter is the most profound, for "the Church at its best reflects all that is noblest and most worthwhile in human family life: attributes of caring and mutual regard; understanding of needs, whether physical or of the spirit; and above all the sense of belonging to a social unit in which we find acceptance without pretence or make-believe" (p.124).

All of this (especially ch.9) *could* be useful in fulfilling the declared purpose of the book, and much in each chapter would be so. But the presentation of the issues is unfortunately dominated in places by [p. 148](#) questions which would be of more interest to modern NT scholars than they would to a young Christian, hesitant about the value of the Church. Such a person is hardly likely to be interested in e.g. Schweitzer's problem as to whether Jesus expected a Church at all, and he would find other sections very heavy going—the long word study of *koinonia* for example, though some might find this simply a more meaty and satisfying treatment of one of the book's central themes which helps to counterbalance some of the other sometimes frustratingly brief sections.

This work could certainly be of use to theological students as well as the educated lay-person, but if the stated purpose is to be fulfilled, it probably needs to be revised both to simplify it and to make it more directly relevant. Either this or a quite different and much bigger book would have to be written. Perhaps there is room for both.

## Theology and Culture

### JERUSALEM AS JESUS KNEW IT: ARCHAEOLOGY AS EVIDENCE

by John Wilkinson  
(Thames & Hudson, 1978), 208pp.

Abstract of a review by Clare Amos in *NEST Theological Review*, 2, 1980.

Those who have been fortunate enough to read such previous works of John Wilkinson as *Egeria's Travels* (S.P.C.K., 1971) will appreciate that he is a master of the use of diagram and illustration. His most recent work, *Jerusalem as Jesus Knew It* does not disappoint. The book contains almost an embarrassment of photographs, most of them not of the standard "Holy Land" type, and all well-chosen for particular emphases. The diagrams and maps are also extremely professionally drawn, and should serve as models for any future work in this field.

The work falls naturally into two parts. The first sets the background to the life of Jesus as a first-century Jew living in Palestine, a country ruled at that time by Roman envoys and client-kings. There is a good discussion of the geographical, cultural and political factors which helped to set the scene for the ministry of our Lord. In this section p. 149 there is much of considerable originality. This is particularly true of the observations on the correlation between geography and population, and even more in the author's description of the street-plan of Herodian Jerusalem. This he believes to have many parallels with street-plans of other cities in the Eastern Roman Empire. John Wilkinson's personal field-work undertaken during the years he lived in Jerusalem is in evidence here. Also important for this section, as well as for the second part of the book, are the works of Flavius Josephus which Wilkinson uses extensively though not uncritically.

The second part of the book deals with specific incidents in the life of Jesus and attempts to set them in their historical and archaeological context. As well as Josephus, sources for this section include the Mishnah, writings of early Church historians, recent archaeological discoveries made in Jerusalem, and information gleaned as a result of the current work of restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and naturally enough, the Gospels themselves. The result is a fascinating, vivid and even unusual picture of the King who rode on a donkey. At times, and rightly so, the author catches the reader up from the realm of history and archaeology to that of meditation and worship. One is not allowed to forget that the historical Jesus is also the Lord of earth and sky (p.175).

One problem that the author faced in writing this book seems to have been that of deciding the correct level at which to pitch his work. This has sometimes led to a certain unevenness. A wider question is to ask exactly for whom the book is intended. The students at St. George's College, Jerusalem? But who else? I could not help feeling that the kind of reader who would be prepared to tackle the detailed geographical and archaeological information which the book imparts would not need some of the very basic



material about the structure of the gospels and biblical criticism which the book also contains.

*Jerusalem as Jesus Knew It* is to be recommended for the interesting perspective it sheds on a scene which for some time has been dulled by familiarity.

## **HINDU ASTROLOGY—MYTHS, SYMBOLS AND REALITIES**

by Dr. A. P. Stone

(Select Books, New Delhi, 1981), 325pp., £6

Abstract of a review in *Patriot*, October 25th, 1981 (secular Indian newspaper). p. 150

Is astrology a science? This question has been examined in depth by Dr. Stone after years of research in ancient Sanskrit literature as well as on modern writers of both East and West. A devout Christian, Dr. Stone believes in the teaching of the Bible which denounces astrology and divination. "The present book", he declares, "looks at astrology from the outside. This is because I do not use astrology myself. The basic reason for this is the teaching I find in the Bible, a book I have come to trust."

Dr. Stone has delved into all the historical details in the development of Indian astrology, because the question whether or not something is a science is decided by looking at the way it develops in time, as has been shown by Professor Sir Karl Raimund Popper in his recent work pertaining to the philosophy of science.

After presenting some important changes that have appeared in Indian astrology over the centuries, Dr. Stone looks into the system of yugas, manvantaras, kalpas etc. which form the traditional framework of history. Five chapters are devoted to various aspects of the origins of Indian astrology, replete with Sanskrit quotations. Several questions have been dealt with: Did the Vedic rishi, Parasara, write a definitive work on horoscopes? Did astrology originate in divine revelation or in yogic experiences? Does astrology show effects of past karma? and so on. Dr. Stone explains a possible model of how astrology works and discusses the relationship between astrology and science.

The author's research convinces him that astrology is merely 'divination'. Not just one method of divination, but many. He says that even the alternative systems are frequently inconsistent, and "the responsibility for correct or incorrect prediction rests firmly on the individual astrologer." Dr. Stone considers it not quite correct to think of astrology becoming a science either, though he agrees that a whole new science is developing which Michel Ganquelin calls "a new science of cosmic influence".

How, then, does astrology work? Dr. Stone says that the synchronistic model is a small step in the right direction, without being correct in all its details. This model may provide the necessary concepts from the psychology of the unconscious (popularised by Dr. C. J. Jung) and with the help of religious concepts. Astrology rests on religion, karma, divine revelation and yoga, although these are not central to the *practice* of astrology. "Two things are important in practice: the religious preparation of the astrologer, and the religious activities recommended to clients," says Dr. Stone. That astrology cannot be declared a science, he declares, is proved by the 'divination model' p. 151 of astrology consisting of the multiplicity and inconsistency of its rules, the lack of explanation of the rules, its use of symbolic connections and chance events, the stress of the predictive capacities of the individual astrologer and the uncertainty of success. (Dr. Stone is a member of the TRACI Community, New Delhi—Ed.)

# Mission and Evangelism

## CONTEMPORARY MISSIOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION

by Johannes Verkuyl

(William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1978), clothbound,  
414pp. plus xiv pp., \$14.95

Abstract of a review by George J. Jennings in the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*,  
March 1981.

This opus of Verkuyl's marks its author out as a most capable leader and spokesman among his peers in the Reformed Church tradition. The wealth of information with its accompanying analysis leads the reader to conclude that it is more a modified encyclopedia than an introduction to or survey of missiological thought and personnel.

This is not to say that a novice in missiology will not profit from serious reading here but that such students may find it necessary to be guided through the labyrinth of historical and ideological pathways and persons brought within the book's horizon rather than have it used as a conventional textbook.

In the past generation or two, especially the period following World War II, many dramatic and profound alterations have characterised the science of missions. As the book's jacket correctly notes, the missionary enterprise is no longer unilateral; that is, it is no longer (if ever it seemed to be to ethnocentric Western mission personnel) a programme emanating from Western sources and carried only by Western missionaries elsewhere in the world. Increasingly, despite considerable and grudging reluctance among Western mission scholars, the missionary task is being accomplished with and not merely for individuals outside the West. Further, non-Western Christians have theological traditions to offer which are worthy of Western consideration. Verkuyl is to be commended highly in recognizing [p. 152](#) that missiology in today's post-colonial world is a universal endeavour with the emergence of missiologists from the so-called developing countries, even if his stance leans discernably towards European missiologists while neglecting North American contributions. Verkuyl centres his missiology on the unique Son of God, as we see in Chapter 4 "The Biblical Foundation". But he seems to wander a bit from this "Foundation" as he seeks to relate it to what he envisions as necessary in ecumenicity. It may be that those more familiar with the Reformed Church tradition will not experience the theological discomfort experienced by this reviewer; certainly the extremely conservative, or "fundamentalist", missiologists will sharply disagree with his ecumenical conclusions!

In a more positive vein, and in the author's awareness of contemporary conditions as in the Middle East, Verkuyl appropriately devotes a chapter on missiology in relation to Jewish people and the state of Israel. Verkuyl seems to be both cautious and correct when he suggests: "There is no better means of communication to be found anywhere than the means of personal friendship ... Genuine love always finds a way (to communicate the Christian message)," (pp.141-2), obviously a statement with wider application.

Comprehensive as Verkuyl's "Trends in the Theology of Religion" appears, it seems the author is unaware of the Christian anthropologist Charles Kraft, who though controversial among evangelical missiologists, merits inclusion in his analysis. Another area the reviewer considers inadequately dealt with is ethnological theory on social forms and dynamics, for example, distinguishing between "institution" and "association", between church structure and church dynamics. Finally, the book would have been enhanced by an index of subjects to complement the index of persons referred to in the

text. This would have aided the reader in sifting through the rich contents which comprise, when all is said, a book worthy of any missiologist's library.

## **NEW PATHS IN MUSLIM EVANGELISM**

*by Phil Parshall*

(Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506)

Abstract of a review by Robert Hess in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, July 1981.

One of the major steps in problem solving is the acceptance of the [p. 153](#) problem itself. This involves a frank admission that there is as yet no clear-cut solution to a certain dilemma. Phil Parshall addresses the task of Muslim evangelism with a warm understanding of Christ's mandate and also the sober realization that there has been little success in winning Muslims to Christ. Much of his well-documented book is an attempt to research the record of these failures and to analyze some of their causes.

In addition to his deference to respected authorities on Islam, such as Kenneth Cragg, Samuel Zwemer, authors of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, his own respected professors in missiology and many others, he brings eighteen years of intimate experience as an enquiring, concerned missionary to Muslims. His problem definition and the analysis of the current state of rural Islam in different countries are invaluable preparation for understanding. Best of all in his book, however, is the setting forth of suggested theories of communicating the gospel to Muslims. Parshall is respectful toward experts on intellectual approaches to Muslim understanding, but essentially he is a creative thinker in the area of contextualization.

Some of the features of his approach may be controversial, such as his dialogues with other missionaries about baptism, the use of the Koran, the Hadith, Muslim festivals and Muslim religious rituals. Like other sensitive Christians in foreign cultures, he is "acutely aware of the cultural conditioning of Christianity". A description of Paul's different approaches to his varied audience clearly establishes the biblical model for contextualizing. The author's frequent illustrations reflect his concern to understand a particular society from within, in contrast to only an external approach based upon a formal model. This concern leads him to quote, to review and to suggest several new forms of experimentation in adapting the Christian message among Muslims.

It is plain that Parshall has a firm grasp of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, both in doctrine and in experience. Of special value is the closing chapter, "Spiritual Considerations", where the distinctive means of grace are accorded the highest priority. Prayer, use of Scripture, obedience to the Holy Spirit, patience, faith, love are cornerstones to a monumental study of Muslim evangelism.

Parshall, by his own focusing, concentrates upon rural orthodox Islam. He does not treat at length major historical occurrences, nor the continued tensions within Islam itself. Little is said about Sunni/Shia differences or ethnic tensions. His treatment of the Sufis is enlightening, especially in writing of "bridges of communication". Doubtless much more could be written here, of both possibilities and [p. 154](#) dangers in adapting to Sufis. On the positive side they have historically been the growing edge of Islam and may also be the first major response to the gospel.

One would also like to hear more about the distinction between secularism and secularization. As the author demonstrates, the former is anathema to the Muslim. The latter, a scientific development, may become an effective apologetic for Christian missions if used by dedicated servants of Christ.

Many of Parshall's suggestions have been adapted in churches and methods among Muslims. Others require verification, remodeling and implementation. His appeal is for an unusually dedicated, informed and sensitive missionary approach.

## Ethics and Society

### GREEN FINGER OF GOD

by Maurice Sinclair  
(Paternoster Press, 1981), £2.60

Abstract of a review by Martyn Pennington in *Shaft*, Summer 1981.

The complaint is often voiced that we have yet to work out a "theology of development". One of the problems is that past efforts have tended to adopt what might crudely be classified as a "creation" approach or a "justice" approach, according to the political convictions of the author, with little attempt to draw the two together. Maurice Sinclair's book, which is based on the experiences he shared working on a development programme in the Chaco region of Argentina, makes refreshing reading because his thinking on development stems not from an academic political framework but from seeking God's wisdom in facing day-to-day problems. In an area which would be well rid of political preconceptions (he is at pains to point out that both Capitalism and Marxism are specifically Western in their intellectual origins, and are transmitted by intellectual elites whose education has been informed by Western culture), he has tried to apply the principles and guidance of the Bible to the specific social and cultural context of the project.

Nowhere is this claimed to be an easy undertaking. The Biblical doctrine of man, he argues, should lead us to place a very high value [p. 155](#) on language and culture; but how can God's revelation be applied across the cultures without being hopelessly distorted in the process? Special consideration is given to several areas (education, health, economics, community development and politics), and in giving this consideration, he throws much new light on some aspects. One example is where he draws out the prominence given in the Bible to peace and rest as part of development, concepts which tend to be at odds with the activism and deep-seated materialism of Western society. Another is where he points out, in a long chapter on the role of the State, that the calls by the Old Testament prophets for social justice are set not in a revolutionary but in a "law and order" context.

His approach is consonant with the increasing emphasis being given by some right-wingers to culture as a determinant of development, as in Professor Brian Griffith's London Lectures, but whereas their view is that development will only occur if the culture is right, Sinclair's is that right development will only occur if it is based on the culture. The way in which this problem has been tackled in the Chaco programme appears sensitive and conscientious. The humility shown in this book before the teaching of the Bible, and Maurice Sinclair's testimony to God's grace and support in a wide variety of difficulties, should help not only those addicted to the problems and challenges of overseas development, but all those Christians thinking about their role in society. Altogether, an inspiring book.

## THEOLOGY ENCOUNTERS REVOLUTION

by J. Andrew Kirk  
(IVP, 1980), 188pp., £2.95

Abstract of a review by Graham Dow in *Churchman*, Vol. 95, No. 2, 1981.

Perhaps it is a sign of the growing maturity and confidence of the conservative evangelical tradition that writers are emerging within it who can challenge their commonly conservative readership with a positive Christian evaluation of revolution. This volume is typical Kirk again, hard on the heels of his *Liberation Theology*: as close packed and clinical as ever, yet full of insights and the same wide-ranging guide to new fields.

The author says he has two aims: firstly to survey the terrain of revolutionary thinking as it has developed since the fourteenth century p. 156 until its diverse forms in the present day. This he does well. Secondly, he is trying to show in outline how one may use the Bible hermeneutically, for he is dissatisfied with the dogmatic constraints imposed by traditional evangelical methodology and its consequent failure to meet the social and political challenges of the day. This, however, he does less well, and one should consult the other book. Even there the answer is given only as a theoretical basis and not illustrated in practice.

The first three chapters introduce the discussion historically and with definitions. Kirk is always good on the history, but there is also a very neat summary of symptoms which indicate that a revolutionary situation is arising. We are then introduced briefly to Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr, Barth and Bonhoeffer, pioneers of a gospel expounded in relation to contemporary political reality. Perhaps in an attempt to do justice to the unresolved questions (an impossibility in the space) these thumb-nail sketches do not highlight sufficiently the incisive contributions of these giants.

Part two guides us through revolutionary theology in Europe, America and South Africa. In dealing with some of the more difficult exponents, such as Moltmann, the book demands too much prior knowledge for the non-specialist, yet is too brief for the specialist. Readers will simply have to glean what they can where the level of material happens to suit them. There are two useful appendices, one on the WCC, and one on violence.

The final section is directed at where we go from here, and the answer is given in terms of new hermeneutical method. Chapter nine zips through biblical themes relevant to an understanding of the place of revolution in God's purpose. This is left at a tantalizingly summary and seminal stage, and may well not help the reader who has not already begun to think along these lines. The final chapter shows the failure of all revolutionary theory to evaluate ends as well as means, and to reckon with fallen human nature. Here then lies the challenge to theology and there are great possibilities in a fresh approach to hermeneutics. But I long for a book from Kirk which will develop his method and illustrate its scope in dealing with present-day issues. p. 157

## Pastoral Ministry



## **GEORGE WHITEFIELD—THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE GREAT EVANGELIST OF THE 18TH CENTURY REVIVAL—VOL. 2**

by Arnold Dallimore

(Banner of Truth, 1980), £9.95 (Cornerstone Books, 1980), \$22.50, 570pp.

Abstract of a review by Sidney Lawrence in *Christian Graduate*, September 1980.

Readers of Volume 1 of the widely heralded new biography of Whitefield's life and times will greet with eager anticipation this long-awaited second volume as an outstanding literary achievement. At last a very thorough and extensive work has been done on one of the leaders of the 18th century revival whose greatness and significance have defied his previous biographers.

The author has succeeded in presenting facts and documenting them with historical proof in a manner that makes attractive reading. In a narrative that is alive and gripping, Dallimore takes us through the period 1741–1770 covered by this second and concluding volume. It was a period of turmoil. It opens with the doctrinal controversy with the Wesleys and the sadness of a sharp division in Methodist ranks and of valued colleagues parting company with him. There was personal bereavement, too, with the death of a son in his infancy. Mrs. Jonathan Edwards described Whitefield as “a very devout and godly man”, rising at 4 for prayer and preaching for 40 or more hours a week besides informal addresses and ministry to families in whose houses he stayed. His gift for oratory and powerful carrying voice, open emotion and God's unction upon him made his ministering of simple Bible truths wonderfully effective so that he became the man who pulled and held together the 18th century revival movement both sides of the Atlantic. He drew congregations of 10,000 and sometimes of 20,000 and 30,000, of humble people and members of the aristocracy, in almost every county of England and also in the American Colonies where at the age of 55 he burnt himself out in a passionate preaching of the gospel in a manner probably unequalled in the entire history of the Church.

Dallimore's treatment of the difficult area of the doctrinal conflict is in a good spirit and free from partisanship. He uses 18th century documents hitherto unknown and lets them present the picture as to [p. 158](#) what took place. He shows that it was Whitefield who was the one who first planned and organised the revival in the form that Wesley later followed. He also shows that although Whitefield could have continued to lead his branch of the work ('Calvinistic Methodism'), he chose, in order to avoid a life-long conflict with Wesley, to relinquish his position and let Wesley have the pre-eminence. 'Let the name of Whitefield perish, but Christ be glorified! Let me be but the servant of all.' Dallimore's discoveries call for a new authoritative biography of Wesley!

## **REVELATION DES ORIGINES (LE DEBUT DE LA GENESE)**

by Henri Blocher

(Presses Bibliques Universitaires, Lausanne, Switzerland), 244pp. (only available in French)

Abstract of a review by Gerard Nienhuis in the *IFES Review*, No. 1980/2.

This book presents a study of the first three Chapters of Genesis, with the aim of giving an interpretation of the biblical text which does not impose any assumptions derived from sources other than Scripture. The clear and beautiful prose is delightful to read and equally as suitable for the educated lay person as theological scholars.

The author not only carefully justifies his own interpretation of the text, but he also outlines the various rival views along with their weaknesses and strengths. This method

helps the reader to better understand, and often respect, even the eventually rejected views on the meaning of the week of creation, of the garden of Eden, of the distinction and the relation between man and woman, and of the fall. The result is a very balanced study that reveals the richness and the wonderful symmetry of the biblical account of the beginning of the human race. Many references to other parts of the Bible illustrate and emphasize the unity of Scripture in a powerful way. From the literary form of the text the author decides which one of the prevailing interpretations is most probable. He leaves the reader impressed with the refined symmetry in the structure of the week of creation, in which God first creates the various spaces limited by separations during the first three days, and then forms the hosts of creatures to populate these spaces during the last three days, thereby structuring and filling the formless and void world. He concludes that the literary procedure is a sufficient explanation of the form of the text, and that one [p. 159](#) is not compelled to find in the text a chronological account of God's work. Even though the literal interpretation is not excluded, it is not forced upon the reader by the biblical text.

## Theological and Church Education

### DISCIPLING THROUGH THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION

*Edited by Vergil Gerber*  
(Moody Press)

Abstract of a review by James Plueddemann in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1981.

Not many books on missions integrate evangelism, church planting, discipleship and leadership development. These areas are not focused in the area of TEE, but the book goes further than TEE into the deeper issues of the biblical function of the Church including some radical, yet biblical, implications for the training of pastors.

The two articles by Lois McKinney are enjoyable reading and encourage reflection on theological priorities and strategies. Vergil Gerber makes a major contribution by beginning to integrate TEE with discipleship, evangelism and the function of the church. Terry Hulbert's article should be discussed by strategists both at the mission station level and the world congress level. He points out that families are often neglected as a means of reaching and discipling people-groups. The nature of the church and biblical models for successful teaching are discussed by Ralph Covell. Both his articles have significant and disturbing implications for our current methods of theological education. Fred Holland points out the often neglected fact that the training of pastors should equip them to fulfill their biblical function as a part of the whole body of Christ. Theological educators need to more seriously consider the practical implications of such training. The case studies by A. Clark Scanlon, George Patterson and Avery T. Willis, Jr. may be the most useful and interesting part of the book. Missionaries need to see practical alternatives not only to residential schools, but also to the more typical forms of TEE.

Is the tightly structured, highly systematized, behaviouristic educational model used in many successful TEE programmes either biblically sound or culturally relevant? Even the less structured "contact [p. 160](#) learning" programmes seem to be more concerned with the outwardly observable cognitive and behavioural competencies than with the personal development and growth of the individual student.

Is TEE something we've forced down the throat of the national churches, with the hope that they'll eventually begin to enjoy it? It seems that many national church leaders prefer residential schools. Some see that missionaries start TEE programmes just when the national church is taking control of the residential schools. "Aren't they willing to work under us?" ask the national leaders. How many TEE programmes have died out soon after the national church has taken administrative control. I know of several. Why?

Even though the book may be more of a reflection of TEE in the 70s than a fresh approach for the 80s, Dr. Gerber as editor has provided a valuable service.

## **PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED**

*by Paulo Freire*

(Penguin Books, U.K., 1972; U.S., 1970)

Abstract of a review by Bob Ferris in *PAFTEE Bulletin*, December 1981.

Paulo Freire, born in Recife, Brazil, in 1921, experienced severe poverty after the economic depression of 1929. At age 11 he dedicated his life to the struggle against hunger. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's first work to be published in English (and his most complete statement of his thought to date), consists of four chapters. The first and fourth focus on the necessity and process of social revolution; the second and third deal with Freire's pedagogical theory and method. It is the fact that his pedagogical method is offered as the instrument of revolution that provides the connective sinew of the book.

As Freire sees it, oppression is a fact of life which is much larger than the political institutions of society where it is most obvious. The benevolent paternalist oppresses just as truly as the callous tyrant, since both rob man of his dignity, and thus his humanness. There is security in a dependency relationship, however, so the oppressed fear freedom just as really as their oppressors do. Liberation can come only as the oppressed discover that they too are persons, capable of altering their world, and thus become co-participants in authentic revolution. The "banking" concept of traditional education, [p. 161](#) the revolutionary "problem-posing" or "dialogical" approach to instruction leading to "conscientization" (development of world and self-awareness within the people) which is seen as the instrument of authentic liberation, are all identified, worked through and evaluated. The book closes with a plea for patience addressed to revolutionary leaders whose oppressed peoples are not prepared as yet to face a demythologised world or to genuinely participate in their own liberation. Revolution which does not spring from the conscientization of the people, asserts Freire, is not authentic revolution, and will only result in a new class of oppressors, and thus the need for a pedagogy of the oppressed.

The book is open to several criticisms. From a biblical perspective, perhaps the most serious is Freire's revolutionary objective. To bring persons to a realization of their humanness may precipitate rebellion, but cannot result in revolution. Our objective must not be the development and expression of humanness in Adam, but humanness as recreated in Christ. In Adam, a person views all structures as instruments of oppression, and liberation from structure as the re-establishment of humanness. In Christ, a person recognises that oppression of any kind is a result of sin and is hated by God. He also understands, however, that full freedom is never found in rebellion against structure, but in submission to God. So perceived, even oppression—evil that it is—can be a means of grace from an all-loving and omnipotent God.

The reader should be warned that Freire persistently employs Christian terminology in articulating his revolutionary theories. He speaks of "vocation" (p.20), "conversion" and "rebirth" (p.37), "salvation" (p.136), and "witness" (p.143), as well as the Christian virtues of love, humility, trust, faith and hope (pp.62–64). These terms are used in a Christian

sense, but emptied of Christian meaning by their materialistic and Marxist context. Their only significance is emotional rather than descriptive, and therefore deceptive.

As is often true of revolutionaries, Freire's work imbibes a romantic optimism which is unsustainable in real-world experience. Freire's revolution is not radical enough. Until human nature is changed by Christ, "restraints" will always be forged into bonds, and liberators will oppress.

In spite of its weaknesses, Freire's book possesses some commendable aspects. His metaphor of the banking concept is apt and a powerful instrument for analysis of traditional education. Freire is to be commended for drawing our attention to the oppressiveness of hierarchical patterns of instruction, the importance of mutuality in p. 162 teacher-learner relationships, and the developmental power of discovery learning (i.e. problem-posing in the context of dialogue). It is in no way necessary to endorse his view of social conflict and revolution to recognise the validity of these observations. They can be rooted even more adequately in a Christian view of persons than in Freire's Marxism.

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is not an easy book to read, nor did I find it an enjoyable book. But the most exciting outcome of reading it is to be provoked to teaching the lessons of liberation from a Christian world viewpoint. p. 163

## Journal Information

### *Publications Referred to in This Issue*

#### **China and the Church Today**

Published by Chinese Church Research Centre, 7 Kent Road, Flat A, Kowloon, Hong Kong.

#### **Christian Graduate**

See **Themelios**.

#### **Christianity Today**

Subscription Services, P.O. Box 354, Dover, NJ 07801, USA. Rates: \$18.00 p.a.; \$20.00 outside USA (22 issues).

#### **Churchman**

Published by Church Society (Anglican), 186 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BT, England. Rates: £5.50 p.a. (4 issues).

#### **Crux**

Published by Regent College, 2130 Westbrook Mall, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, V6T 1W6. Rates: \$8.00 p.a.; \$18.00 for 3 years (4 issues).

#### **Evangelical Missions Quarterly**

Published by Evangelical Missions Services Inc., 25 W 560 Geneva Road, Box 794, Wheaton, IL 60187, USA. Rates: \$7.00 p.a. (4 issues); \$20.00 for 3 years.

#### **IFES Review**

Published by IFES, 10 College Road, Harrow, HA1 1BE, Middlesex, England. Rates: £2.50 or \$5.50 p.a. (2 issues).

#### **Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation**

American Scientific Affiliation, P.O. Box 862, Elgin, IL 60120, USA. Rates: \$15.00 p.a. (4 issues); \$7.50, institutions \$25.00.

### **Journal of Christian Education**

Published by Australian Teachers' Christian Fellowship, 2nd Floor, 129 York Street, Sydney 2000, Australia. Rates: \$22.00 or £6.00 p.a. (3 issues).

### **Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society**

Secretary, Reformed Theological Seminary, 5422 Clinton Boulevard, Jackson, Mississippi 39209, U.S.A. Rates: \$12.00 p.a. (4 issues). **p. 164**

### **Missiology**

Council on the Study of Religion, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ont., Canada, N2L 3C5. Rates: Institutes: \$16.00 p.a.; Individuals: \$12.50 p.a.; Students: \$7.50 p.a. (4 issues).

### **NEST Theological Review**

P.O. Box 11-7424, Beirut, Lebanon. Rates: \$7.00 p.a. (2 issues); \$20.00 for 3 years.

### **PAFTEE Bulletin**

Editor, P.O. Box 6, Valenzuela, Metro Manila, Philippines. Rates: \$4.25 p.a. (4 issues).

### **Reformed Theological Review**

The Editors, Box 2587W Elizabeth Street, P.O., Melbourne, Vic. 3001, Australia. Rates: \$4.50 p.a. (3 issues).

### **Shaft**

Shaftesbury Project, 8 Oxford Street, Nottingham, NG1 5BH, England. Rates: £16.00 (full members); £8.00 (special category members) (4 issues).

### **Themelios**

Published by the British Theological Students Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. All orders for addresses in the British Isles and overseas to: Christian Graduate (available with Themelios), TSF, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GP, UK. North American orders to TSF, 233 Langdon, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. All other orders for addresses outside the British Isles should be sent to IFES, 10 College Road, Harrow, HA1 1BE, Middlesex, UK. Rates: £1.40 or \$3.50 p.a. (3 issues).

### **TRACI Journal**

Editor, E 537 Greater Kailash II, New Delhi 110048, India. Rates: \$5.00 p.a. airmail for Asia and East Africa; £8.00 elsewhere (3 issues).