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contemporary living.*

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# Editorial Between Scylla and Charybdis

The Greek myth of navigating between two rocks without being allured by the calling sirens of either has its modern counterpart for evangelical Christians. Fundamentalism and secularism are two alluring ideologies on which many a good Christian ship has foundered.

An evangelical is one who affirms the fundamentals of the biblical message and seeks by God's grace to live by them. How far he succeeds let others judge. But there is a kind of fundamentalism that is an ideological mindset and unwittingly brings to Christian faith a rigidity that is culturally conditioned and smacks of determinism. It is attractive primarily to those whose identity is threatened. Significantly, we are witnessing fundamentalist movements not only among some on the evangelical fringe, but also among some sections of Roman Catholicism in Latin America, in Islamic Iran, among some whites and blacks in South Africa and among the Sikh terrorists of the Punjab in India.

Secularism has its roots in both the European Enlightenment and in the reaction to medieval monastic life-style (only the monks and nuns are real Christians!). No doubt the process of liberation from religious authoritarianism is rooted in Scripture itself, but secularism is another thing. It is also an ideological mindset which can be identified with material consumerism, moral relativism and indifference to the realm of the spiritual and the supernatural. The result is the same—both fundamentalism and secularism ultimately end up in authoritarianism, bondage, fatalism and fanaticism. R. Bultmann's attempt to baptise secularism has ended up at best in disillusionment.

Klaus Bockmuehl in his profound analysis of this ideology awakens us to the fact of the disturbing extent to which secularism has pervaded our churches in the West, and is now penetrating the third world churches. In the heat of rapid expansion, many emerging churches are almost totally unprepared for this life-and-death struggle. The solution lies in an in-depth analysis of Christ's exhortation to be in the world, though not of the world. It is a call to leave our cultural ghettos and to live in the forms of the Spirit. It is a call to listen as well as to speak. 'Awake O sleeper! for Christ gives you light!'

(Editors) p. 8

## **An Exiled Community as a Missionary Community A Study based on 1 Peter 2:9, 10**

Valdir R. Steuernagel

*Printed with permission*

**INTRODUCTION**

The first letter of Peter is an old friend of mine. I remember the church in which I served as a pastor where I became deeply involved in a series of sermons on the letter. University students with whom I had contact as an itinerant minister are also before my eyes at this very moment. With all of them I shared the challenge of living as Christians in society. In this case it was a capitalist society based on profit and consumption. 1 Peter invited us to understand life as a gift of grace and became prophetic by denouncing a style of living absolutely rooted in the idea of consumption. A pilgrim theology was an exciting challenge to live under God and for others in a dimension of witness and service in love. Why does 1 Peter speak so much to my heart and theology? it may be because the letter is so close to the life and struggle of the church in the challenged and suffering context of Latin America.

1 Peter is in fact a pastoral letter and it has to be understood as such. Christian people who were living in different regions of Asia Minor received this letter as claim for resistance in a context of suffering. They were invited to remember from where they came, who they were and where they were going. Those Christians were called to affirm their community life but at the same time to go out and share with others, regardless of who they are, this marvellous gift of life.

1 Peter is a beautiful document that expresses the richness and struggles of the life of early christianity. In an astonishing way the message of the Lord Jesus Christ spread out and penetrated the Greek world, without asking for permission. In a period of 30/40 years after all this began, the empire and the gentile people began to perceive that they had to deal with a new reality called 'Christians'. The letter of 1 Peter reflects this new reality and shows the basic struggle of the Christian communities in their context of life as well as the reaction of the non-Christian, the outsiders, because of this new being in the society.

The different opinions about the authorship of the letter are well known. My personal option would be to credit the authorship of this letter, if not to Peter himself, at least, to the Petrine community whose [p. 9](#) most well-known representatives are Silvanus and Mark ([1 Peter 5:12, 14](#)).

In some ways the Christians had become a big family, whose members are spread out through the Roman Empire. The consequence of this fact is both joy and suffering. Joy because the Christians can experience that they are members of a large family. They are not alone. People in other places are witnessing to the same faith. Suffering because the 'outsiders' are perceiving the presence of this strange family in the middle of their society, and are beginning to react.

The first letter of Peter, said Barclay, 'is the fruit of love of the pastor who wanted to help his people who are living in difficult times and have to expect even more problems'.<sup>1</sup> We could add that it expresses not only a pastor's love, but also the love of a community looking carefully to other communities in a time of suffering.

The letter is a well-elaborated document that, based on a true apostolic tradition, manifests solidarity with the 'exiles'—Christians in Asia Minor. Such solidarity is evidenced in a call to resistance, reminding them that they were ransomed through Christ. It is also an affirmation of their election, a challenge towards a witness to the outsiders and the necessity of maintaining a strong community life, because this is the time of the end: 'By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it' ([1 Peter 5:12](#)).

## EXAMINING THE TEXT

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<sup>1</sup>\*Footnote missing. Refers to Barclay.

'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.' ([1 Peter 2:9-10](#)).

### The Text in the Context

According to the structure of the letter it is possible to perceive that [1 Peter 2:9-10](#) is exactly at the end of the first segment ([1 Peter 1:3-2:10](#)). While in the following segment ([1 Peter 2:11-4:11](#)), the author will deal especially with the Christian's life in society as well as life in the Christian community, the former segment had established the basis [p. 10](#) for that more ethical and pastoral emphasis. Verses [9](#) and [10](#) are a kind of link between both sections or in general terms, between the theological and the ethical pastoral accent. The beginning of v.[9](#) expresses again who these *oikos tou theou* are but the end of it says that what they are is a sign of mercy that has to be shared. It is fundamental to declare 'his marvellous light' to the outsiders because it is through this opportunity that they may also experience this mercy and become 'Gods own people'. The manner in which the Christians will express this witness is, in some way, alluded to in the following segment. But the theological basis for doing it was given first.

[1 Peter 2:4-10](#) is the specific pericope at which it is necessary to look carefully because it will help us to understand v.[9-10](#). John Elliott considers it fully appreciated when vv.[4-10](#) are seen as the 'appropriate climax to the entire initial paraenetic section. For here', according to him,

'the exhortation to holiness of living and brotherly love and thought of birth and nourishment from the Divine Word are gathered together and substantiated in a final pericope describing the electedness, holiness, and union of the believing community with the elected Lord'.<sup>2</sup>

The central motif of [1 Peter 2:4-10](#) is the election theme. However, the election has to be understood through Jesus Christ, described as 'living stone', 'rejected by men' but 'chosen and precious in God's sight'. The so-called 'aliens and exiles' are also elected and named 'living stones'. But this is possible just because of 'Him'. Through 'Him' they will worship the one who has elected them. Hence, because of Jesus and through his election as the 'cornerstone' these Christians are considered and proclaimed the elected people of God. The interpretation of vv.[9-10](#) is given through vv.[4-5](#). These verses are, in fact, a basic statement developed in vv.[6-8](#) and vv.[9-10](#). As in vv.[6-8](#) we meet Christ, the elect stone, in vv.[9-10](#) we find the faithful community, the elect race.<sup>3</sup>

The whole pericope of vv.[4-10](#) is strongly dependent on the old Testament even if it is interpreted in a christological perspective. Most scholars agree that the author assumed, at that point, some material from the Jewish Christian tradition, that was already used in its proper context. Obviously this material was adapted to the letter's goal, namely, to a community the majority of which were gentile Christians. [1 Peter 2:4-10](#), said Elliott, 'is a particularly graphic illustration of [p. 11](#)

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<sup>2</sup> John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*. An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 And The Phrase: *basileion ierateuma* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) p.199.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.146.

the manner in which sacred Israelite tradition had been appropriated to affirm the continuity and yet the novelty and unique identity and status of the eschatological people of God'.<sup>4</sup>

According to the purpose of this article, it is necessary to concentrate on vv. [9–10](#) in order to know better this faithful community and elect race.

### **'That you may declare'**

It was already seen that [1 Peter 2:9–10](#) is on a point of transition between the affirmation of God's mercy, and the natural, unavoidable opportunity to share concerning this mercy. The mere existence of the people of God evidences God's mercy to themselves and to the outsiders. What is, in fact, the difference between the Christians—the insiders—and the non-Christians—the outsiders? Is there really such a big difference between them? Yes and no! Yes, the difference is between life and death. The insiders 'have been born anew ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ' ([1:3](#)). They 'were ransomed from the futile way inherited from your fathers' ([1:18](#)). They were 'built into a spiritual house' through the precious cornerstone ([2:5](#)). On the other hand, there is not such a big difference between insiders and outsiders. Some years, months, maybe days ago they had been together in the same futile situation, 'inherited from your fathers'. The author of the letter reminds his 'beloved' Christian fellows that they lived in the darkness, without mercy, and were not people of God ([2:9](#)), like all others who are still outside. The only and big difference is God's mercy. The insiders do not have anything that is intrinsically better in relation to the outsiders, except God's decision in choosing them. However, God's mercy is not exclusive but inclusive. In order to demonstrate it to the outsiders it is so important that the Christians 'declare the wonderful deeds of him' to everyone. Therefore, the point of transition ([2:9–10](#)) has to be understood in a missiological perspective.

The author of the letter was really a courageous person. He went directly to the heart of the Old Testament and took the central concept of Israel's self-understanding and transferred it to the members of the communities to which he was addressing his letter: the idea of election. He became even more courageous when he applied all the tradition of being elected to people who are identified as aliens and exiles of the Dispersion ([1:1–2:11](#)).

What kind of people were they actually? Were they aliens because, [p. 12](#) as Christians, they were persecuted and had lost their roots in society? Should the word 'dispersion' be interpreted, as Cullmann said, in a 'Christian meaning: ... in the world Christians are foreigners; their true place is in heaven'?<sup>5</sup> It is again Elliott who gives much attention to the so-called *paroikos*. His basic point is that the receivers of the letter were not *paroikos* because of their faith. In fact; they had been such before they became Christians. That was their social class. According to Elliott's interpretation it is not possible to find the meaning of *paroikos* by looking at the Church itself or by spiritualizing the concept, but by looking at the social and economic reality of that people at that time. The Christian communities were formed by people who had already been outsiders in a sociological understanding, by virtue of their own social class. The fact that they became Christians made the situation even worse. If they, as strangers, went to the Christian community in order to find a 'home', now they were strangers twice because of their social condition and because of their Christian faith.

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<sup>4</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, p.226.

<sup>5</sup> Cullmann, *The New Testament: An Introduction for the General Reader*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p.105.

The addressees of 1 Peter were people who, as members of a small but increasing Christian community, were being persecuted for the sake of their faith and therefore had become aliens in a society in which most of them were already social outsiders. However, this is not the whole picture. They were not losers. They were winners. Even if they were considered strangers by their neighbours, in fact they had found home in God. Being aliens and exiles in this world can receive a positive evaluation if it is seen from the perspective of the writer who sees in those Christians the real participants of the most important event in history. They were not among those who had rejected the 'cornerstone'; instead of this they were 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people ...' ([2:9](#)).

Every one of these concepts is very rich in meaning to the Old Testament community. Indeed, the author of 1 Peter is using O.T. symbols in order to describe 'what it means to be church'. Therefore his use of the O.T. is very free. He chooses the concepts according to his understanding and applies them in conformity with his necessity. However, this procedure of the author 'does not play off the elect status of the Christians against Israel's rejection of the Gospel'.<sup>6</sup>

The author rejoices in the opportunity to look at the church of the Dispersion in Asia Minor and says to them that they are: [p. 13](#)

*A chosen race:* Their poor social condition will not determine their understanding of life anymore, even if they remain poor. They are people of a new race, directly chosen by God. The same God who had once elected Israel ([Ex. 9:6](#); [Deut. 7:6-8](#); [Is. 43:20-21](#)) is now electing these insignificant inhabitants of Asia Minor.

*A Royal priesthood:* Using [Exodus 19:6](#) (LXX) the author is referring to those Christians in a very special way. They are participants of a community of priests that worship God, through Jesus Christ. This royal community is in direct relationship with God, and its existence is completely dependent on Christ.<sup>7</sup>

*A holy nation:* This community is characterized as a nation and a holy one. No more a geo-political nation but a nation of exiles of the dispersion. People from different places and statements are all together members of God's nation. And since it is His, it has to be holy: '... but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct' ([1:15](#)).

*God's own people:* This is the very reason for the existence of this new race, community of priests and special nation. They exist only because God has chosen them and made them his own people. The O.T. community was familiar with these expressions ([Ex. 19:6](#); [Deut. 7:6-8](#); [Is. 43:20,21](#)), but it is a novelty that it was applied to another group people, a very special one, the people of Christ, the chosen cornerstone.

The author was not only courageous—he was moved, touched, excited. By using all this rich terminology he was going towards a climax: those aliens, the Christians, were 'God's own people'. What else could be said? As follows, the author moved his attention to the readers in order to transform them from being passive receivers to being active participants in that new story: 'that you may declare ...'. Such a profound experience and new understanding of life had to be announced.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald Senior, C. P., *1 & 2 Peter*, New Testament Message, vol 20 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980) p.36/37.

<sup>7</sup> Senior was probably right when he said that 'the epistle does not address the question of an ordained priesthood (p.36). Elliott also went in this direction when he said that [2:4-10](#) speaks neither for nor against a particular ministry or office in the church (Elect a. Holy, p.225). However though the letter knows about different functions in the church the idea of a priesthood leads the community in a nonhierarchist understanding of ministry.



The community of priests should express their gratitude in worship: 'to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2:5). But they would also announce their discovery and share their experience with the outsiders, the persecutors included. The discovery was Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. He was the real and the p. 14 only reason for all that profound change in history and life. However, by talking about him, they would share a personal experience of being 'ransomed from the futile ways', precisely with the 'precious blood of Christ' (1:18, 19). This is the experience of moving from darkness to the light.<sup>8</sup> From *not being* to *being* people of God, from being without mercy to living a merciful life.

The terminology used in v. 10 to express God's acceptance of those Christians as his people comes from Hosea, where 'God's relationship with Israel is expressed by a personal experience of rejection and acceptance of a woman and her children'.<sup>9</sup>

Here, according to 1 Peter, some Jews, but especially some gentiles, are accepted by God and transformed into an eschatological community through Jesus Christ. And this has to be announced.

Is it possible to put the nose outside the door, if the Christians are experiencing such a popular persecution and so strong a rejection by both Jews and gentiles? Hostility against the traitors to the imperial and common religions can be smelled in every place. Would it not be prudent to take care of the community itself during this time of difficulties? A case could be made that to answer this question is to touch at the secret of the life of the early Church. 1 Peter is not proposing a self-assured strategy. On the contrary, it is a challenge to the communities to go out and to share the gift of life.

In 1 Peter Christians are called to participate in and integrate the social order and to maintain exemplary conduct in society, By so doing the Christians will show that they are people, similar to others, who want to live in society and are concerned about their neighbours. The Christians will be able to do so even in relation to their persecutors, and even if they are misunderstood. In fact, they can do so because they are exiles of the Dispersion; they are free (1:1; 2:16). By being ransomed by Jesus Christ they became free—from themselves and from others. Whether they are accepted or rejected, continue to live or die, they are free. Free to be persecuted, to proclaim the wonderful deeds, to maintain good conduct, to 'honour all men, to love the brotherhood and to fear God' (2:17) in the name of Christ.

## A MISSIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

That the letter of 1 Peter has an undeniable missiological content has P. 15 already been seen. At this point the goal will be to summarize the mission perspective in three points. It was Senior, in his commentary, who mentioned the missiological content of the letter:

'One of the major contributions of 1 Peter is the robust sense of Christian mission he conveys. Even though these fragile communities are embedded in a hostile environment and suffering abuse, he does not prescribe reaction or caution. The Christians are not to flee the world but to participate in it (2:13). They are not to condemn or berate the world,

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<sup>8</sup> Goppelt pointed out that here we have a continuity from the O.T. Jewish tradition, used to refer to the fact of being called to faith as a move from the darkness to light (p. 153).

<sup>9</sup> Goppelt, p.154.



but to treat it with respect, even gentleness, all with the hope that in its own time, the world will join the Christians in glorifying God'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Mission and Identity**

In affirming the missiological content of 1 Peter, the writer makes no attempt to hide the tension-filled life of the communities and the temptations to a 'ghettoization'. It is the letter's goal to avoid confinement and to direct the tension towards mission. The author does it by reminding them of the heart of their faith—Jesus Christ, calling them to faithfulness, recalling them to brotherhood and challenging them to mission, because they are the elected people of God. Therefore, the strong accent of the letter regarding the identity of the Christians is not in contradiction with the call to go out. They are in fact very inter-related because there is no mission without identity. The identity given to them by God transforms them into *oikos tou theou*, even if the outsiders call them aliens. As *oikos* they have found a meaning for their life, as well as a place in a brotherhood and a task for the whole life: 'to declare the wonderful deeds of him' (2:9).

### **Chosen but not exclusive**

There is always a thin line between election and exclusion. An arrogant exclusiveness is almost the shadow of a healthy identity. However, a healthy identity is always an invitation for companionship. The history of Israel or even of the church could be seen from the point of view of the tension between 'be a blessing to the nations' (Gen. 12:2) and being satisfied with itself and promoting confinement: 'We have Abraham as our father' (Lk. 2:8). This conflict is certainly also experienced by the communities to which 1 Peter was written. Fortunately the letter is a document that helps to get balance between identity and mission: chosen, yes, but not closed to outsiders. Chosen for witness, in word and deed. p. 16

Werner Bieder, in his article *Grund und Kraft der Mission nach dem 1 Petrusbrief*, calls attention to the fact that word and deed are both dimensions of Christian witness.<sup>11</sup>

(a) The ethical aspect is an important part of the Christian witness but neither the only one nor enough in itself.

(b) Christians want to tell the story to those who are still outside, who are living in the same situation in which they formerly lived and from whence they were redeemed. Based on their own experience Christians believe in the conversion from paganism to faith and want to be prepared to give reason for their faith.

### **Mission is an exercise of the community**

The letter of 1 Peter is a strong community document. In the theological understanding the Christian faith is conceived and articulated in terms of *génos*, *ethnos*, *láoos*, *oikos tou theou*. In the pastoral dimension, the Christians are reminded not only about the suffering in other places (5:9) but also that they have to stay together in difficult times (4:8–10). And last but not least, mission is also conceived of as a task to be exercised in a communitary dimension. In word and deed, in joy and suffering, it is the privilege of the community to 'declare the marvellous deeds of him' until he comes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Senior, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> Werner Bieder, *Grund u. Kraft der Mission nach dem 1 Petrusbrief*, Theologische Studien. 29 (Zuerich: Evarig. Verlag A. G. Zollikon), p.6–9.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to remark that the strong eschatological expectation is not understood as a motif for indifference or escape from the world as it so often occurred in the history of the Church and in our days.

This communitary dimension has already been mentioned. It would be important to discuss the relation between *paroikos, oikos tou theou* and the ethical household approach of the letter. At this point our purpose is to detach the corporate from the individual understanding of Christian life, a natural and corporate comprehension of mission from a specialized department-mentality as well as to call attention to the fact that the life of the community itself had a missionary dimension:

‘The love and service that binds the Christians together as God’s household are the most potent witness they can offer a world starved for meaning’.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The pictures are mixed before my eyes. Chile, Peru, El Salvador, P. 17 Nicaragua, Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia ... I feel as though a piece of me were in each place. The struggle for life in the Christian communities in Asia Minor, but also the starving of all the people of that world are brought to me by the letter of 1 Peter. However, the picture of the ‘favelas’, ‘barreados’ or ‘villas miseria’ in Latin America is much more fresh before my eyes. The cry of the Christians from the Presbyterian Church in Callqui, Peru, whose six young men were killed by soldiers of the Marines in front of the church, can still be heard. Would it not be the case that 1 Peter helps us to look to Latin American reality also, in order to ask about the Church’s task in society, the identity of the Christian communities and the call to mission? What would be the secret of such a powerful letter that is able to be a sign of hope in spite of its old age? Could we not invite 1 Peter to visit Latin America in order to share its relevant understanding of life with a continent that is thirsty for meaning and hope? What would the author of the letter say to us?

In the north area of Peru called Ayacucho, the evangelical church has been facing serious problems and its life has been threatened. Ayacucho is a ‘Departamento’ occupied by the military because of the presence of the ‘guerrilheiros del Sendero Luminoso’. Firstly the Christians had a privileged period: whoever had a church ID was left free by the military inspections. Many people learned that and went to church; some ‘guerrilheiros’ went too. Hence, when afterwards the military killed some people, ‘guerrilheiros’ or not, sometimes the IDs and those people’s documents were found together. The Church got into difficulties: it was suspect now and began to be persecuted by the military. Then the church began to criticize the ‘guerrilheiros’ and they reacted saying that they would kill believers unless they stopped criticising them. What could the Church do? How might it exercise ministry? What does it mean to be a witness in such a context? Persecution and suffering are, at least, good words to describe their situation.

In Chile things are quite different. There the evangelical Church has been giving support to the military government during the last ten years. Presently, the economic, political and social situation is so bad that the people are not able to tolerate it anymore. The Catholic Church, perceiving this situation, is beginning to criticize the government. The official reaction refuses the Catholic Church’s ‘intervention’, and is becoming more violent towards the whole society. Should Chile be a kind of Babylon in our days? What does it mean to be a Church with a prophetic role in such a context?

There is no claim for justice without persecution and suffering in a p. 18 situation of oppression, violence and injustice. We cannot compare, in a simple way, the situation of the church in Pontus, Galatia, Cappodocia, Asia and Bithynia with that in Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Colombia, Nicaragua ... The suffering is quite different and the reaction against

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<sup>13</sup> Senior, p.7.

the Christian faith certainly comes from different segments of society, but the principal motif will be the same: witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution calls down suffering.

Probably 1 Peter would say to us that suffering is a common point between them and us. Even if the reason and expression of suffering is different, he would assure us that Christian witness produces reaction, discipleship calls down persecution, and persecution, in spite of suffering, is a sign of faithfulness and a reason for joy because it is an opportunity to share Christ's sufferings.

*Persecution and suffering* are, in fact, symptoms of violence and injustice. However, Christians are not called to flee, but to participate in the world in order to offer a new system of values with a new message. This has to be expressed in the midst of society itself, exercised in the life of the Christian community, as a model and an invitation to be imitated. Thus, the new message will be proclaimed. Jesus Christ, the rejected stone, is the cornerstone to the *hope for the world*. There is hope because of his death and resurrection. There is hope because he will come again. While the Christians are waiting for his coming they are called to plant a seed of hope that may be irrigated with suffering and tears, but will certainly grow, because it was planted in the same soil that first received the blood of Christ. A small plant can be born from that seed, but it will be recognized as God's special bush of hope, as once the Christians in Asia Minor were declared the people of God. Therefore perhaps 1 Peter would say to us that we have to be ready to be small and weak, but strongly rooted in the experience of salvation. The same experience transformed the Christians once in *oikos tou theou*, although they were a persecuted minority.

The reality of being a spiritual house, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, will renew life constantly and challenge the Christian community to go out through the world with the message of Christ, with the hope that everyone in every place will 'offer spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (2:5). This would be the real and final fiesta.

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## Where are the Deborahs and Baraks?

Donna Strom

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*In response to Margaret Malcolm's call to relate biblical teaching to biblical practice in her article, 'The History of Women in the Church' (January 1985 issue of Evangelical Review of Theology) Donna Strom offers us a case study in biblical practice with special reference to the Church in India. Wanted: women theologians and theological educators! Only two of the 42 members of the Theological Commission are women. We need many more.*

(Editors)

Balance is an essential principle of God's creation: the balance of day and night, earth and sky, sea and land, summer and winter, plants and animals. World ecosystems involve an incredibly complex balance, which man is only beginning to understand.

In India shopkeepers use balance scales, which we carefully watch lest our purchase not equal the iron weights. Imbalance in any area of life indicates error.

In the beginning God also created a balanced image of Himself—male-female (humankind)—to whom He gave the authority and command to fill, rule over, and subdue the world ([Gen. 1:26-30](#)). God's likeness could not be encompassed in nor His work accomplished by only one sex. There had to be balance.

After the Fall, God did not change His creation command to man and woman to rule the world, as some allege. Instead He repeated and enlarged upon it in [Genesis 9](#), [Psalm 8](#) and similar scriptures. However, sinful disobedience has itself produced a grotesque imbalance in the world. On the one hand, men and women have together overdone the 'increase-in-number' bit, until overpopulation threatens our very existence. On the other hand, women in particular (except for a rare Margaret Thatcher or Indira Gandhi) have generally disregarded the remaining two-thirds of God's command: together with men to rule the earth and subdue its evil. The resultant chaos is not God's plan; He has a better way, illustrated in His Word.

### *Togetherness*

The story of Deborah ([Judges 4](#) and [5](#)) depicts a wife and mother who ruled her nation, and together with Barak (not her husband) delivered it from oppression. Neither she alone nor the man alone could have [p.20](#) done the job, but in a beautiful example of mutual interdependence they worked together according to God's creation plan.

The events of Judges follow a pattern summarized in chapter two. After Joshua's death following the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites turned away from Jehovah to false gods. In punishment God allowed a pagan nation to invade and oppress them until they cried out to Him in repentance. Then God raised up a judge to deliver them, but as soon as the judge died, they returned to idolatry and again were conquered. This process was repeated many times over a period of 200 years.

Deborah, a prophetess, became the fourth judge during the twenty years of oppression by Jabin, king of the neighbouring Canaanites. His army, commanded by Sisera, had 900 chariots—likely with blades protruding from wheel-hubs to cut down foot soldiers—while Israel had only swords. So plunderous were the enemies that farmers feared to till their lands, trade ceased, and the roads were deserted. (Like Cambodia and Lebanon today?)

Through Deborah God told Israel to revolt under the leadership of Barak. As they drew Sisera's forces to battle in the Kishon valley, God sent a storm of rain and hail to flood the river and mire the chariots in mud. Barak and his 10,000 soldiers destroyed the entire Canaanite army, and Israel had peace for forty years. During that time the incredible Deborah filled a three-fold role of prophetess, judge, and wife.

### *Prophetess*

According to the *Davis Bible Dictionary* a prophet/prophetess is 'an authoritative and infallible teacher of God's will'. The person is chosen by God from among believers to speak His words to the people, who are then obligated to obey the commands as from God Himself ([Deut. 18:18-19](#)). The prophet/prophetess is a predictor, interpreter, and proclaimer of God's truth as taught by the Holy Spirit, and is a messenger and shepherd.

These servants of God are both men and women ([Joel 2:28](#); [Acts 2:17](#)). Many women in Scripture besides Deborah proclaimed and taught God's Word: Miriam ([Exod. 15:20](#)), Hannah ([1 Sam. 2:1-10](#)), Huldah ([2 Kings 22:12-20](#)), Lemuel's mother ([Prov. 31](#)), the

virgin Mary ([Luke 1:46–55](#)), Anna ([Luke 2:38](#)), Philip's four daughters ([Acts 21:8–9](#)), Priscilla ([Acts 19:26](#)), Lois and Eunice ([2 Tim. 1:5](#); [3:15](#)), Phoebe and others ([Rom. 16](#)).

In the early 1900s, when headhunting animistic Mizos of northeast India first embraced Christianity, previously subjugated women, learning of these many scriptural examples, began to preach and teach [p.21](#) alongside the men. Thus the Gospel spread like fire through the bamboo jungles, until today the half-million-strong tribe is almost completely Christianized.

According to [Joel 2:28](#), [Acts 2:17](#), [Romans 12](#), and [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#), prophecy is one of the gifts distributed among *all* believers, male and female. Deborah's work clearly illustrates the use of this gift.

First, she received messages directly from God (as did all prophets until completion of the written canon). Deborah said to Barak: 'Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel has commanded ... the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman ... the Lord has gone out before you' ([Judges 4:6, 9, 14](#)).

Second, Deborah commanded men through God's messages. Summoning Barak as general of the army, she told him where to go, how many soldiers to take, and where to get them. Without hesitation Barak did exactly as she said.

Third, Deborah understood and interpreted God's purposes, recording her own and Barak's leadership roles in His work, recognizing the importance of helpers, and rebuking shirkers ([5:7–24](#)).

Fourth, knowing God's Word, Deborah confidently predicted the future: the gathering place of the Canaanite army, their vulnerability, the crucial battle day, and the enemy's defeat. In all this she spurred Barak to action, but noting his hesitancy, she foresaw that the honour of final victory would go to another ([4:9, 14](#)).

Acknowledging God's sovereignty and power in the battle, Deborah and Barak gave Him the glory in a great song of praise (chap. [5](#)) similar to that of Moses and Miriam in [Exodus 15](#).

How wonderful to see men and women working together with God without thought of sex differences! Barak and 10,000 men respected Deborah as God's mouthpiece and obeyed her, even requesting her physical presence. Otherwise a whole generation would have continued in slavery.

About a century ago in India Pandita Ramabai at Kedgaon and Amy Carmichael at Dohnavur, with the help of a few concerned men (and against strong opposition of others), began to rescue enslaved temple prostitutes (called 'servants of god'), child widows, and abandoned girl babies, setting up homes and teaching them of Christ. Today thousands of such women, liberated from living death, are serving the Lord throughout the land.

In our generation how many millions remain slaves to sin because few Deborahs interpret, proclaim, and act upon God's Word? Certainly Deborah was an exceptional person, just as Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and all biblical leaders. But Scripture exhorts [p.22](#) Christians to follow the example of the prophets/prophetesses ([Heb. 6:12](#); [13:7](#); [James 5:10](#)).

Many of the greatest theological truths of Scripture were given directly by God to women to convey to the world: the Incarnation ([Luke 1:30–55](#)), the essence of God ([John 4:23–24](#)), Christ's Messiahship ([John 4:25](#)), eternal life ([John 11:25](#)), the Resurrection ([Matt. 28:5–7](#)), and others. Godly women of Scripture should be models for Christians today, who have in their hands God's holy Word—His direct message—to apply and pass on to this generation and culture. But where are the prophetesses? Is the evangelical Church ignoring or suppressing the gifts of half its members?



Since Israel was a theocratic society governed by direct divine guidance, the religious leader often ruled as chief executive. The Israelites placed highest confidence in Deborah as God's representative and brought before her their chief problems. In the hill country north of what is now Jerusalem Deborah held office under a palm tree. To this central place all Israel resorted, as to a supreme court ([Judges 4:4-5](#)).

In 1981 Americans considered highly innovative and newsworthy the appointment of a woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, as a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. But Deborah was Chief Justice over 3000 years ago!

Deborah was a confident decision-maker. She not only settled disputes between Israelites, but also made momentous decisions of national and international import. Requiring great physical and emotional stamina to lead her nation in war and peace, she prayed: 'O my soul, march on with strength' ([5:21](#)).

Some people belittle 'emotional women leaders—as if feeling has no place in important decisions. But Christ Himself displayed womanly compassion and emotion. So did Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Dwight Eisenhower, and other great leaders. Right decisions cannot be made from coldly objective attitudes, such as those of Hitler and Stalin. Deborah cultivated that balance of tenderness and strength which characterizes godly leaders.

Deborah was no 'arm-chair' leader. She left the comforts of home to help enlist and train an army. She accompanied them the long distance up to Mount Tabor, risking her own safety to lead them to the battlefield. But does this mean that women should go to war? God no doubt expects people to use their common sense and send those best qualified for a particular need. Women have long been in our defence [p. 23](#) services in medical and other capacities. Deborah did not go into battle, but supported the foot soldiers as far as possible. In these days of nuclear, germ, and gas warfare no one will escape involvement.

What Deborah's example obviously teaches is that women should not be excluded from any levels of decision-making, religious or political. God's creation pattern established balance, and without the feminine perspective representing half of humankind, organizations and nations can neither fully discern nor fulfil God's purposes.

### *Wife*

Deborah was also a wife and mother ([Judges 4:4; 5:7](#)). Whether or not she had children of her own, she was a mother to Israel. How blessed for a nation to have a leader with the heart of a godly mother!

Like most mothers Deborah had a sensitive nature, shown in her ballad of [Judges 5](#). She was saddened to see her oppressed people unable to farm and trade. Her heart went out to the leaders who had tried unsuccessfully to throw off the heavy yoke ([5:9](#)).

But like a good mother, Deborah was not blind to the faults of her family. She exposed the real reason for their problem: the sin of idolatry ([5:8](#)). She rebuked publicly the indifference of selfish, lazy tribes. She did not condemn the oppressors, but put the blame where it belonged—at home.

Today too many leaders try to blame others for their problems. Much emotional talk about world poverty, for instance, blames richer nations and multinationals, ignoring the local causes of exploitation by the wealthy and powerful, widespread corruption, class discrimination, waste, and indifference to the poor and handicapped. Let us get to the root of the problem—sin in the human heart—which only Christ can solve.

In a similar example, many preach and write against the evil of abortion, but rarely do they mention the root cause: the sin of promiscuous or irresponsible conception of new life in the first place. Abortion, like cancer, will never be eradicated until its cause is.

Christian men and women together could accomplish far more by attacking this horrendous sin at its *root*.

Deborah not only preached and prayed; she spent long days judging, counselling, and serving her people. Though a wife and mother, she widely taught God's righteousness to her nation, which thus reaped peace and prosperity.

Some time ago in a seminar an influential preacher was exhorting women to stay at home and tend children. One asked, 'What about women who have no children or whose children are grown?' The [p. 24](#) reply: 'They can decorate their homes!' Yes, too many women decorate themselves and their homes—while teenagers go on drugs, millions starve, and the world sinks further into crime and war. Why not, like Deborah, obey God's command to counteract evil in neighbourhood and nation?

Deborah's husband, Lapidoth ([Judges 4:4](#)), must also have been a very godly, unselfish partner. Obviously, he did not expect his wife to be a decorative mistress-cum-servant. Rather, he must have seriously shouldered his responsibility as head of their home, enabling her to carry out her prophetic ministry.

According to Scripture, if a woman chooses to marry, she defers to her husband ([1 Pet. 3:5](#)), just as anyone joining an organization places himself under its leader. The wife is not to take over the authority of 'a man' (singular—her husband—[1 Tim. 2:12](#)), but nowhere does the Bible teach that women as a class are to be ruled by men as a class. Deborah undoubtedly followed the pattern of 'holy women of the past' ([1 Pet. 3:5](#)), but this did not prevent her from being God's mouthpiece and making top-level decisions.

### *Implications for the Church*

Barak, Deborah, Lapidoth, and 10,000 soldiers furnish an exemplary pattern of men and women using their gifts together to accomplish God's purposes. God distributes His gifts 'individually just as He wills' ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)), and not according to physical differences, whether of colour or shape.

When God said it was not good for man to be alone ([Gen. 2:18](#)), He did not refer only to the marriage relationship; He spoke in the context of working and ruling in the world. The Apostle Paul highly praised his female co-workers ([Rom. 16](#)), while at the same time citing the advantages of singleness for both men and women ([1 Cor. 7](#)). The teaching of some that man's work is to rule and woman's to replenish is an obvious fallacy, since both are needed for reproduction. Women are equally responsible to control the world and subdue the evil around them, and God will hold them equally accountable.

Neither Deborah alone nor Barak alone could have delivered their nation from idolatry and slavery. With billions in the world today still slaves to sin, the Church desperately needs the help of all its women and men in all phases of its outreach. Let us not merely envy the Mizos for the rapid and total Christianization of their tribe in this century. Let us follow their example: they enlisted, trained, and used all Christian potential, male and female, doubling outreach through the Church and producing strong Christian homes. [p. 25](#)

The Bible espouses neither feminism nor 'masculinism', but a togetherness that is largely lacking in Christianity today. Thus this appeal is not primarily to women but to present Church leaders. How much money, energy, time, or even thought does your church/denomination give to training women, who could reach for the Lord at least half of any given population? How many women do you involve in your seminars, workshops, conferences, and consultations on evangelism and church growth? Are your boards, committees, and assemblies one-armed, one-legged bodies? If you do not develop and use the spiritual gifts of Christian women, you are cutting in half the potential assets for the church growth you profess to seek. If you ignore or bury the talent of half your people, will God judge you like His unprofitable servant in [Matthew 25](#)?



Many have asked, 'Where are the Deborahs?' But a more relevant question today is: where are the Baraks, Lapidoths, and 10,000 men who will allow God to use His Deborahs? Male-only (like female-only) administrations limit themselves to half the available wisdom, perception, and creative thinking of God's own image and likeness: humankind. Christians are obligated, not to perpetuate sin-caused distortions in society, but to restore as far as possible God's creation balance.

## A QUESTION FOR INDIA

Several have recently asked, 'What should women do in the Church?' India has an increasing number of educated and gifted Christian women. What are they doing?

First, I looked around the churches. A few help with music, Sunday Schools and women's meetings. Large numbers work full time in schools, hospitals, orphanages, leprosariums and homes for the poor. Next I searched through Christian magazines and books. Most are by men and for men; seminars and conferences picture mainly males; a few articles feature women in the home.

Then I scanned Indian Church History—and a heartening fact emerged. Christian women changed the face of India in their lifetimes. Women introduced education for girls. Isabella Thoburn founded at Lucknow the first college for women in Asia. Dr. Clara Swain founded at Bareilly the first hospital for women and children in Asia. Dr. Edith Brown in Ludhiana and Dr. Ida Scudder in Vellore started the first medical colleges for women in Asia, and today women comprise nearly 20% of India's doctors. I have already referred to Pandita Ramabai and Amy Carmichael's pioneering of homes for orphan girls, [p. 26](#) widows and *devidasi*-s. Countless unsung heroines manage our social institutions.

But what should women do in the church? 750 million other religionists can also do social work; only believing Christians can preach the Gospel. Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the world's largest church in Seoul, Korea, attributes its growth to an emphasis on small groups and cells. He says, 'We tried to get leading men to start meetings in their homes. We found this was not workable. Many in business got home late at night. They did not have the energy to accept another responsibility. Then God showed me that we should use women as cell leaders.' (*Christianity Today*, May 1984)

If in Korea's male-oriented society women could be chosen, trained and recognised by the church, could this not also be done in India? Only twice in 35 years have I seen a woman lead worship and another read Scripture, while men preached and gave the benediction. How lovely, I thought, that men and women can serve together according to God's creation pattern. ([Genesis 1:26-28](#))

As Indian and other Asian Christians lead the way towards a biblical theology increasingly relevant to Asia, could they not include definitive biblical teaching on the dignity, equality, and mutual responsibility of both sexes? Restored balance could make immeasurable impact, not only on church growth but on society as a whole.

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# Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

N. A. D. Scotland

For sixteen hundred years or more<sup>1</sup> Christian people have professed the faith of the Apostles' Creed which includes the statement that Jesus was 'conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary'. In making this affirmation Christians have made two assertions. First, their belief that in some way not fully enunciated in the Biblical narrative the Holy Spirit supplied the male element in Jesus' conception (the Virgin conception). Second, when Mary gave birth to Jesus she had not known any human sexual relations ([Matthew 1:25](#), the Virgin birth).

Not until the advent of German Liberal theology in the mid-nineteenth century was there any serious doubting that this article of creedal faith might not be literally true.<sup>2</sup> The nineteenth century doubters of the Virgin birth were for the most part a small circle of University professors and theological dilettantes. Now suddenly a century later a new populariser of these liberal views has arisen in the shape of the Bishop of Durham. What are we to make of Bishop Jenkins' forthright statements that the Virgin birth has no substance in history and cannot be regarded as a necessary article of Christian belief?

## DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

In the first place perhaps we ought to try and understand the issue from the standpoint of a liberal theologian who finds himself unable to make the basic affirmation that the New Testament is reliable in what it tells us about God and in particular of his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. For many scholars perhaps the most fundamental objection to the Virgin Birth lies in a conviction that the birth and infancy narratives are not historical in 'genre' but rather 'midrashic'<sup>3</sup> and that therefore to treat them as history is a category mistake. 'Mid-rash' was the name given to a later Jewish literary genre which was essentially a commentary on a passage of scripture but which frequently extended **P. 28** beyond the meaning and intention of the original text. For example, Philo wrote a midrash on [Genesis 4:1](#) about Isaac and Moses in terms of a virgin conception. However, it needs to be recognised in that particular instance that he was writing allegory in which the women represented virtues. Hence his statements were not to be taken as indicating that these two persons were literally virgin born.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is not known at precisely what date the Apostles' Creed reached its final form but Rufinus gives the complete text in one of his writings in AD 385.

<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Birth of Jesus was under early challenge but from those outside the Christian Church such as the Jews (Trypho for example) and from the Ebionites. See for example, Gresham Machen J., *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (James Clarke, 2nd edition, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> See Spensley B. E., 'Christological Motifs in Luke's Gospel' (Unpublished M. Phil thesis, Leeds University, 1978) p.81.

<sup>3</sup> See Spensley B. E., 'Christological Motifs in Luke's Gospel' (Unpublished M. Phil thesis, Leeds University, 1978) p.81.

Some scholars, notably Daube<sup>4</sup> have propounded the view that Luke was writing a midrash based on the story of Ruth. He grounded his contention on an examination of Rabbinic exegesis of the Ruth text 'Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord ...'<sup>5</sup> However even if Daube's suggestion is acknowledged to have some force, there are plainly other elements of the Lucan narrative which are not rooted in the traditions about Ruth. Other scholars have suggested similarly that the Matthean narrative is midrashic<sup>6</sup> but it seems clear, as R. T. France has asserted,<sup>7</sup> that [Matthew 1-2](#) is not strictly speaking midrashic in genre.<sup>8</sup> It has echoes of the technique and mentality of midrash but it 'is not ... commentary on any part of the Old Testament.'<sup>9</sup> R. E. Brown in his comprehensive study, *The Birth of the Messiah* takes the view that the style of exegesis (not the form) in both the Lucan and Matthean infancy narratives is midrashic.<sup>10</sup>

In his essay France goes on to make the point that later Christianity gave 'pious elaboration' to the Matthean narrative. The story of the Magi, for example, gradually developed in form to include descriptions of the Kings and to specify their number as three.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless France stressed 'the fact that later Christians felt free to elaborate earlier tradition does not prove that Matthew or his predecessors also did.'<sup>12</sup> It is apparent that Matthew has woven Old Testament texts into the fabric of his account but it doesn't make sense of the situation then to assert that he constructed fictional fulfilments of them. The only apt conclusion of the matter would seem to be to assert with France: 'The description ... 'Midrashic' ... does not entitle us to import into our understanding ... a whole passage labelled midrash which includes [p. 29](#) the imaginative creation of ostensibly historical details.'<sup>13</sup> France sums up forcefully: 'Indeed I would go further and affirm that in the absence of any other probable starting point for these traditions, it is *prima facie* likely that they are what they purport to be, records of actual events.'<sup>14</sup>

One difficulty which is sometimes set against the Virgin Birth is that Matthew's account quotes [Isaiah 7:14](#) 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel'. In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament however the word is actually 'young woman'. Some have argued from this fact that therefore the Virgin Birth is manufactured out of an unfortunate mistranslation of Isaiah. However, if this argument

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<sup>4</sup> [Ruth 3:9](#). See Daube D., *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, London 1956 pp.28f.

<sup>5</sup> Spensley B. E., *op. cit.*, p.80.

<sup>6</sup> France R. T., 'Tradition and History in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew' in France R. T., and Wenham D., *Gospel perspectives* (JSOT Press, 1981) pp.243f.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.245.

<sup>8</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Brown R. E., *The Birth of the Messiah* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1977) p.561.

<sup>11</sup> France R. T., *op. cit.*, p.246.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p.247.

<sup>13</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.255.

is felt to invalidate the Matthean narrative it certainly cannot impugn the integrity of the Lucan passage which makes no reference to Isaiah.<sup>15</sup>

Another problem arising from the biblical material are a number of passages in the New Testament which have been taken to suggest that Joseph was in fact Jesus' father. For example, both Matthew and Luke give genealogies which only trace Jesus' descent through Joseph. The point has been made that if Jesus was descended on the human side only from Mary then he was not of the household and lineage of David. In addition there are several passages in which Joseph is explicitly referred to as Jesus' father. For example, when Mary was looking for Jesus on the occasion when he lingered behind in the Temple she said: 'Your father and I have been searching for you.'<sup>16</sup>

Regarding the genealogical issue several things can be said. The Lucan genealogy<sup>17</sup> carries the suggestion that Joseph was not Jesus' father *de facto*. In addition, it is quite likely that the word 'begat' in the genealogy implies legal succession rather than actual parentage. Furthermore, there is a real possibility that Mary herself was also a descendent of David. Some commentators have inferred this on the basis of Gabriel's words in [Luke 1:32](#). The fact that Joseph is referred to as Jesus' father is not as serious an objection as might at first be imagined, for when Joseph married Mary he would have been Jesus' legal father both in the eyes of the law and as far as public opinion was concerned. [p. 30](#)

Perhaps a more serious source of doubt regarding the doctrine is that of explaining precisely how it was that the Holy Spirit supplied the male element in Jesus' conception. The attempt by the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* in which he asserted that the Holy Spirit penetrated the hymen of Mary's womb as a ray of sun penetrates the atmosphere, illustrates the problem. However, the fact that biblical narrative is silent as to the precise manner of the conception cannot be taken as sufficient reason to deny the reality of the event.

A further non-biblical objection to the Virgin Birth is the problem which it poses regarding the passing down of inherited personality characteristics since it is known that a new born infant inherits two sets of chromosomes one from each parent. This being the case we have to explain how it was that Jesus didn't inherit sinful characteristics from Mary. Roman Catholic theologians have sought to grapple with this difficulty by the construction of a 'Mariology' which insists that Mary was herself 'sinless'. Such a doctrine however does not seem to find support in New Testament narrative.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand Protestant theologians have, on occasion, suggested interesting devices to get round this same problem. Karl Barth for example, suggested that 'sininheritance' is only passed on by the male parent. This objection says in effect that the Virgin birth does not solve the problem of how Jesus was born perfect man. There is, it would seem, no easy counter to this objection. Nevertheless to assert that Joseph was the father would simply compound this particular problem rather than diminish it.

It has been argued that the doctrine of Jesus' virgin birth arose because it was common practice among the ancients to attribute a special birth to individuals whom society came to venerate. For example, Plato was said to have been virgin born. However this fact

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<sup>15</sup> This raises the question as to whether Matthew and Luke wrote independently of one another. Most scholars are of the opinion that they did write independently. See for example Brown, R. E., *op. cit.*, p.35 who asserts this to have been the case on the basis of marked differences.

<sup>16</sup> [Luke 2:48](#).

<sup>17</sup> [Luke 3:23](#).

<sup>18</sup> [Luke 1:47](#).

cannot of itself be taken as sufficient evidence for denying the historical substance of the Virgin Birth.

## GROUNDS FOR BELIEF

In view of these factors the question arises: on what grounds is it still possible to affirm the traditional understanding of the Virgin Birth? Emil Brunner rejected the doctrine of the miraculous birth of Jesus and asserted it to have been a purely natural event. Nevertheless he asserted: 'The doctrine of the Virgin birth would have been given up long ago were it not for the fact that it seemed as though dogmatic **P. 31** interests were concerned in its retention'.<sup>19</sup> Whatever else the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is concerned to do it is certainly concerned to preserve the fact that Jesus is at the same time both God and Man.

One of the immediate problems confronting the person who denies the Virgin Birth is the question of when did Jesus assume God-status if indeed he ever laid it aside? If Jesus was not fully divine at the moment of his entry into the world (i.e. at birth) then it is necessary to suppose that divine status was achieved at some subsequent point. This necessitates what is technically termed an 'adoptionist' Christology. 'Adoptionism' asserts that Jesus began his earthly existence as a mere man but at some later moment in time (usually his baptism) the divine power descended upon him and God 'adopted' him as his Son. Such teaching which featured in some of the early Christian communities in the second and third centuries was rejected by Catholic theologians and the General Councils of the Church.

It is true that there is no account of the Virgin Birth in the Gospels of Mark and John nor is it found in the preaching of the early church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Nevertheless no alternative or contradictory explanation is given and there is very early evidence that the early Christians believed Jesus to have been Virgin born. Aristides was one of the earliest defenders of the Christian faith. In his *Apology* which he wrote about AD 140 he gave a summary of Christian belief which includes the following lines.

The Christians then reckon the beginning of their religion from Jesus Christ, who is named the Son of God most high; and it is said that God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew Virgin took and clad himself with flesh, and in a daughter of man there dwelt the Son of God.<sup>20</sup>

Justin Martyr, another early apologist, wrote his defence of the Christian faith about AD 170. He described Jesus as 'the first-born of every creature; who became man by the Virgin ...'<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately when all these issues have been considered the point has to be made that there are only four alternatives regarding the male element in the birth of Jesus. Either Joseph was the father, or some other man was the father, or some form of parthenogenesis occurred, or the Holy Spirit supplied the male element.

If Joseph is taken to be the real father then he and Mary must stand **p. 32** convicted of telling bare-faced lies which resulted in the creation of stories which have subsequently misled generations of Christians. It needs to be borne in mind that the writers of the New

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<sup>19</sup> Brunner E., *The Mediator* (Westminster, 1967) p.324.

<sup>20</sup> Aristides, *Apology* (c.AD 140) cited by Wolfson, H. A., *The Philosophy of the Early Church Fathers* (3rd edition revision, 1970) p. 186.

<sup>21</sup> Martyr J., *First Apology*, Chapter 33 in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers* (Eerdmans, 1979) Volume 1, p.174.

Testament were Jews. They knew the ninth commandment and the seriousness of breaking it, an offence punishable by the death penalty. The view that Joseph was the father doesn't have probability on its side.

On the other hand some have supposed that some other man was Jesus' father as Joseph and probably the Jews had initially suspected. This means that Mary had been unfaithful to Joseph during the betrothal period. Such was a serious charge attracting the death penalty in the Old Testament and Joseph determined on a quick divorce until persuaded to do otherwise.

In recent times some theologians have put forward, albeit tentatively, the suggestion that the birth of Jesus was achieved by some form of parthenogenesis. One thing which can be said in response to this view is that parthenogenesis is a process which is only known to occur among invertebrates and lower plants. In reality parthenogenesis in human beings has no precedent. As Dr. David Whittingham of Carshalton stated: 'We know from our work in mice that an embryo doesn't develop after parthenogenesis unless it has the proper complement of male chromosomes.'<sup>22</sup> If on the other hand we assert some form of divine parthenogenesis we might just as well opt for the New Testament and historic Christian belief that Jesus Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

In the final analysis the whole doctrine of the Virgin Birth probably boils down to a question of how we view the New Testament narratives. Do we regard them as containing large sections of fictional material in which poetic license has obscured historical fact or do we see them a reliable vehicle which communicates the plain truth about God in a manner that the ordinary man can understand without confusion? Presumably if God is God it is reasonable to assume that he would organise things in such a way that the record of his coming to men would not be misleading. One thing is plain: in asserting this doctrine we are not concerned with possibility or likelihood. If God is God, all things that are in keeping with his nature have to be possible. Indeed the Lucan narrative says as much: 'For with God nothing will be impossible.'<sup>23</sup>

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## Hope in a Hopeless World

Naim Ateek

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*These exegetical studies of two passages from Romans are extracted this time from a Middle-East context. There the hopelessness of the situation often leads one either to presumption*

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<sup>22</sup> Turner G., 'Frankensteins or Saviours?' *The Sunday Telegraph* 26 May, 1985.

<sup>23</sup> [Luke 1:37](#).



*or despair. The studies reflect how Christians there are hoping against hope solely on the basis of God's Word. Coming from the pen of a pastor rather than an academician, the expositions have a cutting edge showing the Bible's relevance in the midst of Asian suffering.*  
(Editors)

## **MEDITATION I:**

### **Introduction:**

Appropriately for us Christians in the Middle East (ME), the theme which has been chosen for the IV General Assembly of the MECC and the celebration of its 10th Anniversary is *the Living Hope*.

Each of the meditations which I will be giving, will deal with one aspect of this theme. We will begin with a reading from Holy Scriptures. After its brief elucidation and exposition, we will move on to apply it in the experience and life of ME Christians. The aim of these meditations is, therefore, to speak to our concrete and relevant situations in life. May the Holy Spirit of God touch our minds and hearts as we meditate together.

### **'The Paradox of Hope' (Romans 4:18-25)**

Before we meditate on this passage, let us recall the background story of Abraham in the Old Testament.

Abraham was almost 100 years old. Sarah, his wife, was nearing 90. God gives a promise to Abraham that Abraham will be the father of many people and nations and that his seed will be multiplied greatly. Abraham expresses frankly and realistically his situation to God. He tells the Lord that since he and his wife Sarah have no children of their own, his servant will inevitably inherit them. The Lord assures Abraham that it will not be the servant who will inherit but a son. The words of promise were—'your own son shall be your heir'. God asked [p. 34](#) Abraham to look at the stars of heaven and then told him 'so shall your descendants be'. Abraham believed God and the Bible says that God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness for him.

With this background in mind the passage becomes clearer:

18-19. Here is the Paradox of hope for the Christian. 'In hope he believed against hope'.

Abraham had all the right reasons for despair. He was old, verse [19](#), 'when he considered his own body which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old ...' His wife Sarah was old, '... when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb'. Everything around him signalled the absence of hope. It was for him and his wife a situation of utter hopelessness.

What did he have, however, on the positive side that made him hope?

1. God gave him a promise (vv. [18](#) and [20](#)).
  2. Abraham continued praising and glorifying God (v. [20](#)).
  3. Abraham's faith in God's ability to keep His promise did not falter (v. [21](#)).
- v.22. That is why God considered Abraham a righteous man. A man who was walking rightly with Him. A man who has fulfilled the demands of the relationship between him and God.
- v.23. St. Paul makes the application of Abraham's story to his readers and by extension to us today. The story of Abraham can be our own story. His intimate relationship with God can be our own story of intimacy with God. We too can be considered righteous before God. There is, however, a difference which has been the consequence of the death and resurrection of Christ.



v.24. The question therefore is this: What should we do so that God would consider us righteous before Him?

1. We must believe in God who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ.

v.25. 2. We must believe that Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

In other words, we are made righteous before God by the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ died for our sins and Christ was raised to make us righteous before God.

The experience of Abraham is shared by us ME Christians, though with certain differences. For Abraham it was a matter of birth of a son against all medical and natural odds. On the positive side, he had God's promise, he never ceased to give glory to God, and above all else, he had an unshakeable faith in the power of God who would keep that promise. Many of the problems which Christians face in the ME are as great and seemingly insurmountable as the birth of a child to [p. 35](#) a 90 year-old mother. But we have more than a promise from God. The promise has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. The Lord has come. The incarnation has become a historic event. Even more, the Lord has died for our sins and what is even more which has become the epitome of faith is that the Lord is Risen. Therefore, in the face of all the great odds which work to destroy the Christian presence and witness in our countries, the Churches of the ME do not lose heart. In the midst of gloom, despair, and utter hopelessness, the Christian still hopes and still clings to God in hope.

This is the paradox of hope—'In hope the Christian believes against hope.'

Let me summarise this study by mentioning three important conclusions:

1. The resurrection of Christ is the central, focal, and pivotal point of hope. We have a living hope because we have a living Lord. St. Peter wrote 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' ([1 Peter 1:3](#)) St. Paul wrote in [Romans 1:4](#) that Christ was designated Son of God in power ... 'by his resurrection from the dead' ... The resurrection of Christ becomes the vantage point. One can look because of the resurrection as through a telescope backwards and forwards into history and see clarity and meaning. It is the resurrection of the Lord that caused the early Church to come alive in the power of the Spirit. The resurrection was the total surprise of God to the world. The early Church looked backwards at the life of Christ through the resurrection and discovered him as Lord and Saviour. It looked to the future and the eschaton through the resurrection and saw the living hope of eternal life. Christians could not and cannot see the future, but because of the resurrection they have always been able to affirm it.

2. Faith cannot be separated from hope. 'In hope he (Abraham) believed ...' Hope as one great Church theologian said is the 'inseparable companion' of faith.

'Faith believes God to be true, hope awaits the time when this trust shall be manifested: faith believes that God is our Father, hope anticipates that He will ever show himself to be a Father toward us: faith believes that eternal life has been given to us, hope anticipates that it will some time be revealed: faith is the foundation upon which hope rests, hope nourished and sustains faith ... (hope) invigorates faith again and again with perseverance' (Calvin). As Moltmann put it, '.. in the christian life faith has the priority, but hope the primacy ... without hope, faith falls to pieces, becomes a fainthearted and ultimately a dead faith. It is through faith that man finds the path of true life, but it is only hope that keeps him on that path.' [p. 36](#)

3. The source of both faith and hope is God.

Today in the ME we are confronted with different myths of hope. Many people believe that hope lies in progress and technology. They say that progress will ultimately solve man's problems. Some see the hope in total self-confidence and self-sufficiency. When people place their hope in such things, their faith in God has certainly declined. And when the false hope vanishes, their lives become opened to a process of inner decadence and disillusionment. We are daily witnessing in the ME the perpetual hopelessness of conditions and persons. Our hope can only be based on the Risen and Living Lord, the Alpha and Omega. Our hope is based on a trust in God who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. This is the Christian theological foundation of hope. This is the paradox of hope, 'In hope (the Christian of the ME) believes against hope'. This is our hope. May we continually cling to it.

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope'.*

*(Romans 15:13).*

## **MEDITATION II**

### **Hope in the Midst of Suffering (Romans 8:18-25)**

Chapter 8 of Romans is one of the great chapters in the New Testament. St. Paul deals with the victorious life of the Christian. The life of the Spirit.

Just before our passage begins, Paul has said that all those who are led by God's Spirit are children of God. These can call God 'Abba'—Father, i.e. the most intimate and personal address of a son to his father. Moreover, Paul says that if we are children of God; then it goes without saying that as children we will be heirs. We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided that we suffer with Him. For suffering in this world is the inevitable part and parcel of life on earth. The assurance, however, is that having suffered, we will be glorified with Christ.

- v.18. St. Paul continues by saying that 'yes' we will suffer. But suffering in this present life is nothing when we compare it with the glory and splendour which is in store for us.
- 19-22. It is not we only who are awaiting the glory, but even nature, indeed, the whole creation is waiting for its freedom. There is the conscious realization that we live in a world that has gone radically wrong. Man's sin has brought upon him its inevitable consequences. It did not, however, end there. It has affected all the created order. The whole [p. 37](#) universe has been subjected to decay because of sin and will have to be set free. So although nature has been subjected to decay it is not without hope. It will share in the glorious liberty of the children of God because Christ has won for us that liberty.
- v.23. Not only nature groans for liberation; we too who have received a taste of the Spirit of God, who is living and working within us, wait for the final victory. We wait for the final adoption. Our experience of being sons of God is genuine but it is incomplete. Christ has won the war against sin and death, but side battles are still being fought and will continue to be waged as long as we are in these mortal bodies. We long for the end when the victory will be completed and our full sonship is realized.
- 24-25. In this hope we are saved. This hope that Christ has won the victory. Christ has beaten Satan under His feet. Through His death and resurrection He has

accomplished all. The final consummation is, however, not yet realized. That is why we wait patiently. That is why we look to the future in hope.

This passage deals with two important subjects significant for the life of Middle Eastern Christians, namely, suffering and hope. There is suffering in the world. People as well as nature suffer. Christians who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them also suffer and groan. Many times suffering can lead to hopelessness. According to Joseph Pieper hopelessness can assume two forms—that of presumption and that of despair.

Presumption is the premature anticipation of fulfilment. Why has God not acted yet! Why has He not come! Why doesn't He do something now! Such unanswered questions have led many Christians in the ME to hopelessness.

The second form of hopelessness is despair. Despair is the premature anticipation of non-fulfilment. Despair is when people say 'nothing will happen'. 'Nobody can do anything about this situation.' 'God is not going to act.'

Both presumption and despair cancel out hope. St. John Chrysostom has said, 'It is not so much sin that plunges us into disaster; it is rather despair'. Oscar Wilde put it in a similar way when he wrote in 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' —

We did not dare to breathe a prayer  
Or give our anguish scope!  
Something was dead in each of us,  
And what was dead was Hope.

The message of the Risen Lord to the Churches of the ME is to cast down the shackles of hopelessness. Hopelessness cripples the Church p.38 of Christ. Hopelessness dooms it to inactivity. It turns it into a mere organization and saps out its life as an organism. It tolerates its survival as an institution but deprives it of any vitality. It makes it a museum rather than a living library. Hopelessness petrifies and fossilizes the Church. And if we want to be honest with ourselves and before God, this is a painfully true picture of many of our Churches. We must reiterate the words of St. John Chrysostom, 'It is not so much sin that plunges us into disaster; rather it is despair.' In other words, it is not the evil which we do, but the good which we do not do. When we do not do the good, that implies hopelessness. It is not as though we and our churches in the ME were bad and sinful; the tragedy lies in the fact that many of us are living in hopelessness. Theologically we have conceived the original sin to be Adam's desire to be as God. The great temptation which many of us face is not that we want to be as God, but in failing to be what God wants us to be—instruments of peace and reconciliation, holy vessels in witness and unity so that the world might believe.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, we must long to be what God wants us to be. And let us heed the warning of St. Augustine, 'What we do not long for, can be the object neither of hope nor of our despair'.

Hopelessness has become for many of us a haven against disillusionment. It is a shield to protect us against disappointment. We call it realism-realistic thinking. We have become the followers of Camus who said, 'thinking clearly and hoping no more'. Hope on the other hand ventures with God. And those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is. They confront it, challenge it, and contradict it, even to the point of suffering. This is not a call to revolution, but to unity and witness.

Let us continue our journey of faith, having hope as our companion. Let us sustain our hope in the Risen and Living Lord who holds all things in His hand. In this God we put our trust and we wait patiently for him, for 'those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ...'

*'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.'*

[Romans 15:13.](#)

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# The Cross as Evangel in Mission

Chun Chae-Ok

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*Seen in the light of the modern Korean missionary movement and against the background of Jewish/gentile approaches, this article is a typical Asian way of looking at the central element of the Christian message: The Cross. The writer's challenge, evolved out of her context, is convincing—namely, Only a Cross-bearing Christian can preach the Cross of Christ.*

(Editors)

## INTRODUCTION

The Korean church has been recently more on world Christian news for its rapid expansion. There may be varied approaches for attempting to understand the Korean church growth. This article is one of the attempts to understand it from a mission strategy point of view. It points to suffering as a means of church growth.

Understanding and interpretation of the meaning of suffering and pain are vitally related to the depths of one's own world view, with the basic components of his faith, and with his experience of God with the backgrounds of his theology. As it is one of the central themes and questions throughout history, there have been efforts at defining its meaning and providing possible answers to it. Firstly, many have taken the position of fatalism, especially in the subcontinent of Asia where Hinduism and Islam prevail. They see suffering as something inevitable and accept it with total submission. They live with it, through it, and almost for it. They do not see that there is something which points beyond suffering. It is a completely negative attitude toward suffering. This school of thought is so predominant in the life of Asia that it has affected all realms of thinking which depict the Asian philosophies. It is not looking forward and far-sightedly towards the future, but, rather, lives in the past. Secondly, some have interpreted the law of cause and effect. All suffering comes because of sins which are committed through human desires. One deserves suffering because he sins. This concept is present in the Jewish world view. Thirdly, another school of thought which one can more readily accept is that of suffering for the sake of training and education. Suffering teaches something which nothing else can teach. It is a necessary ingredient for growing toward a mature and wholesome personality. It is almost like a compost for producing a beautiful creation whatever p. 40 it may be as near to an ideal person whom the Creator intended to produce. It seems to be a reasonable solution, but its interpretation has its problems. Fourthly, there is

suffering in atonement', suffering with positive participation in the light of Christ's suffering and his mission which he has set for completion and consummation until the time in the eschatological sense. It is true to say that one's own interpretation of the meaning of suffering is taking the most important place in living out one's faith.

The paradoxical truth in Christianity is that the cross is the very centre of the Gospel, i.e. the good news for the world which is suffocated with suffering and pain is represented by the symbol of the cross. Couldn't there be an easier way for bringing the message of the Gospel to the world? Was it the only way that God could think of—the way of the Cross?! In Islam Mahomet killed others, but in Christianity Jesus led his followers to die. This is the way! Therefore, all the possible questions and problems do find solutions ONLY when we understand the meaning of suffering in the light of the Gospel and interpret the cross as the highest glory. The meaning of the cross as the Evangel is the ultimate answer and the key to the solution of suffering. In understanding the meaning of the cross, we can find meaning in everything. Why did Christ die for His mission? 'Death was inherent in his mission as the bearer of the forgiveness of God to men. The encounter of the divine grace and human sin has the nature of collision, and as such it necessarily involves suffering. The cross marks the climax of this suffering' (Leon Morris: *The Cross in the New Testament*, p.376).

Therefore, in this paper the following three aspects of the meaning of the cross as the Evangel in mission are dealt with:

(1) The meaning of the cross for the Jewish concept; (2) The meaning of the cross for the gentile concept; and (3) The meaning of the cross for the Christian's missionary mandate. With this background material, an effort for a conclusion is made.

## **II THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE JEW**

### **(a) The Jewish Expectation of the Coming Messiah**

The Jewish people as a nation had a great longing for the coming of the Messiah but they put him to death on the cross. It was due to their different understanding of the Messiahship from that of Jesus. Their image of the Messiah was the combination of the perfect prophet, the perfect priest, and the perfect king who are depicted in the Old Testament. They expected a period of the ideal reign, reign of peace [p. 41](#) and prosperity which they had a glimpse of through the Davidic reign. Even the disciples of Jesus were not free from this concept of the Messiahship. No wonder that it was a great disappointment for them when Jesus decided to take the way of the cross. Therefore, they had to lament, saying, 'But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel' ([Luke 24:21](#)) after the event of the Jesus crucifixion. Even before the ascension, the disciples did not get over that idea as is clearly revealed in the following verse: 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' ([Acts 1:6](#)) They wanted the Messiah as the deliverer who would bring the political freedom from the Roman authority and oppression and as one who would reign in glory and authority as their national leader. After the three-year school of Jesus' training, they were not free from the grip of their own image of the Messiah. The Jews expected the Messiah who would restore the nation and it was unthinkable that the Messiah could take the cross as the means of restoration. Jesus spoke repeatedly of the necessity of suffering in being the Messiah: 'Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' ([Luke 24:26](#))

He broadened the meaning of the Messiahship. It is not for the Jews only, but also for the whole world. He is not the mere immediate deliverer from the present situation of the world, but the eternal Messiah who will reign over both the material and the spiritual



world. But this Messiahship could only be fulfilled by means of suffering—the way of the cross.

### **(b) The Old Testament Concept of Suffering**

(1) There is suffering which is caused by a natural phenomenon. It does not come through any personal moral involvement and responsibility. This suffering has nothing to do with personal guilt or sins. Man is not directly morally responsible for it. Disasters, famines, and natural catastrophes are examples. This is suffering which man cannot account for and which is beyond the human realm. Nevertheless, it is a fact.

(2) On the other hand, God did bring suffering to the people of Israel because they did not obey according to the law of God. This brought the guilt and the result of certain sins on them. God's punishment was a reality in the history of Israel. For example, the exiles of the Israelites. 'Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt: You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.' ([Amos 3:1-2](#)) It is a fearful [p. 42](#) thing to be forgotten by-God; being rejected by Him and given up by Him brought a curse on them.

(3) There is a more positive aspect of suffering. Job suffered as a righteous man. It is a mystery why suffering is allowed for the righteous in unexplainable ways, but it comes to dedicated believers—God-fearing people. The kind of suffering Job had to confront was physically and spiritually painful. His own family and his close friends no longer stood by him. He became completely alone in his struggle to be loyal and faithful to God, the Truth. It is amazing to note how Job came to grips with himself through his suffering: 'Then, Job answered the Lord: I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge: Therefore, have uttered what did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.' ([Job 42:1-3](#))

(4) Substitutional suffering should be included. It is seen through the lives of the O. T. prophets. The eighth century prophets were certainly the ideal examples for this. They identified themselves with the people of the nation in their plight and destiny; they struggled with them for them to convey to the people. Whether in the homeland or in the lands of exile, they willingly suffered in order that the people might open themselves to the instructions by which they could live. Here, a kind of prototype of an ideal missionary is depicted. Of course, they were not concerned directly for other nations, but rather exclusively for the Israelites. Nevertheless many from other neighbouring nations were attracted to their message. We see a type of missionary mandate in their ministry in that they attempted to lead their own people, the Israelites, to the way which God intends them to take for life—for true life.

(5) The suffering servant ([Is. 42:1-7](#), [Is. 49:1-7](#), [Is. 50:5-6](#), and [Is. 52:13-53:1-12](#)) is one of the highlights in the Old Testament in glorifying suffering for the purpose of redeeming work. 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.' The servant is seen by man as despised and rejected. Then, the servant is seen by God as the Redeemer. What a contrast! His death is regarded by man as a tragic failure, and yet it is lifted up high by God as a glorious success. It is a reality both in the Old Testament and the present time that a man—a true servant of the Lord—is bound to be seen in a paradoxical way: man sees him as despised and rejected and yet God accepts him completely. [p. 43](#)

### **(c) The cross as the stumbling block**

The cross was a symbol of utter failure, weakness, and curse according to the Jewish concept. 'But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ...'. ([1 Cor. 1:23](#)) The Jewish disappointment in Jesus as the Christ was based on their own understanding of what the cross was to them as something of weakness. It was not according to the signs which they were seeking after and the Greeks also found that it was not within their understanding of wisdom. But, in reality, the cross was the power and the wisdom of God. It was a stumbling block to them because they did not know the mysterious power to be released through the cross which is the climax in the Scriptures for revealing the power of God. As was the custom in their days, they regarded the Cross of Jesus as the total expression of the curse on Jesus and failure as the Messiah. Therefore, they joined in readily for rejecting and despising him who was hung on a cross along with the Roman authority.

#### **(d) The cross and understanding of the Early Church**

The centrality of the message which the Early Church spread around from Jerusalem was the cross: the apostles took pain to explain the meaning of the cross, its power, and its glory to the Jews first and to the Gentiles, too. They explained the life of Jesus Christ within the framework of the cross and in the light of resurrection. This kerygma was the common preaching material of the early missionaries and recognized by them in the Early Church. In *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, 1936, Michael Green makes a point of the fact that there is over-emphasis on kerygma which is as if it were a bunch of fixed preaching material. Rather, he takes kerygma as one of the great N.T. words—to proclaim, to tell good news, and to bear witness—which he expounds in his chapter on the Evangel (Michael Green: 1970, *Evangelism In The Early Church*, p.48). In Mark, the cross and the resurrection are central. The cross does not mean that Jesus had to be weak or was weak. It was the other way around. It was the climax of God's expression of powerful acts in Jesus. It was 'according to the Scriptures': in [1 Cor. 15:1-8](#), it is mentioned that the event was according to the Scriptures, i.e. referring to the O.T. covenant and promise. Peter, the apostle, said in Acts in his pentecostal sermon that the Jews crucified and killed Jesus by the hands of lawless men. However, it was necessary for their sake for the work of atonement. The Book of Hebrews speaks of the cross as the means of the eternal heavenly sacrifice of Christ ([Hebrews 9:12f.](#)). Christ as a high priest entered into the Holy place taking his own blood [p.44](#) to secure the eternal redemption for all men. The perfect and ideal priest became his own sacrificial material. The Early Church had no shadow of doubt that the cross was essential according to the Scriptures, for the life of witness, and as the method of communicating the Evangel.

### **III. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE GENTILES**

#### **(a) Universalism**

The missionary theme of universalism affirms that the people of God bear witness that Yahweh is their God, but at the same time he is God and King of the whole world. It is true, too, in the New Testament, especially in the books of Mark and Luke in which the word Jesus uses meaning *to save* is used more than the term, Messiah. Although it does appear that Jesus was exclusively concerned for the Jews and hostile toward the Gentiles in his mission task, ([Matt. 10:16ff.](#)) the cross and suffering of Jesus Christ have far-reaching effects for all men, for all ages, and once and for all.

Adolf von Harnack stresses that that mission to the Gentiles, which is only possible through the work of the cross, was outside of Jesus' concern. Max Meinertx points out that



although Jesus confined his ministry to Israel, he had envisaged a future inclusion of the Gentiles. This came out clearly after his resurrection, i.e. universalism in mission through the work of the cross. The work of the cross was not limited to Israel. Ferdinand Hahn takes the view that even though Jesus directed his work toward Israel in the beginning, his emphasis was to God's people as a whole. 'Jesus was concerned with a great new promise of salvation. He did not turn back to the idea of gathering the holy remnant, as was the widespread tendency in the Judaism of the time, but took up again the Old Testament concept of God's people' (Ferdinand Hahn: *Mission in the New Testament*, p.30).

In [Matthew 8:5-10](#), a non-Jew comes for help. In [Mark 7:24-30](#), the Syrophenician woman receives help and has confidence in Jesus. Jesus does give a solution to the woman who has hope in him and will not give in readily to his refusal. His miraculous acts of help are also related with his high praise for the faith of the Gentiles. The Gospels highlight Jesus' marvel at these Gentiles who came to him.

### **(b) Gospel of freedom**

The gospel of Mark was speaking to an age (the Early Church period) when there was an expectation by the Jewish nation of vengeance on the Gentile nations, especially the Romans. They believed the final [p. 45](#) destruction of the Gentiles was that 'No Gentile will have a part in the world to come', the ancient teaching of the nation. The ultimate destiny for the Gentiles was thought to be hell. 'There is no ransom for the Gentiles ... since the Holy One has given the nations of the world as Israel's substitute, as an atonement for their life ([Is. 43:3ff.](#)). Jesus is not the Messiah of Israel's expectation but rather, he shows that he is interested in bringing the Kingdom of God.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' ([Is. 61:1-2](#)).

The freedom which is mentioned in the above passage did not come without the cross which Jesus had to take up as the highest price for such freedom. This is the witness of the four gospels. This salvation is freedom from sin, death, Satan, the Law, and the wrath of God.

### **(c) Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Jesus does not exclude the Gentiles from sharing in forgiveness and reconciliation—salvation through Him. Since it is offered to all people, they all are responsible to him in the last times. He says that all nations without any exception will stand before the throne of the Son of Man ([Matt. 25:31ff.](#)). Although Jesus does make differentiation between Israel and the other nations in God's redemptive purpose, he points to the fact that in the last day, there will not be any distinction between Israel and the Gentiles.

Jesus had the authority as revealed in his title—the Son of Man—for his redemptive activity and Lordship over all peoples including the Gentiles. The Son of Man in [Daniel 7:13-14](#) has power, kingdom, and authority, and all peoples and nations shall serve him. As the term is drawn from the above reference, 'there came one like a son of man, and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion,' it supports the concept of forgiveness and reconciliation for the Gentiles as it draws all people together to serve Him. He denies himself as Christ equating with the son of David, but rather thought of himself as the servant of Yahweh who would bring truth to the nations as mentioned in Isaiah.

The attributes of his sovereignty imply that the Gentiles are equally privileged in experiencing forgiveness and reconciliation. His death on the cross was for many and Gentiles are not excluded from his purpose. 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by [p. 46](#) the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life' ([Rom. 5:10ff.](#)). This means that there is a complete answer in the cross of Christ for reconciliation among social, religious, and national differences. 'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ...' ([2 Cor. 5:18](#)).

#### **(d) New Self-Evaluation and New Self-Discovery**

The cross of Christ provides a new self-evaluation and new self-discovery. 'And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised' ([2 Cor. 5:15](#)). Christ came to give a new value for man. When we participate in this death on the cross with our confession of faith in him, he leads us to find new meaning, new values as a new creation.

### **IV. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS FOR THE MISSIONARY MANDATE**

#### **(a) Taking Up One's Cross for Christ's Sake**

There are several levels in taking up a daily cross. One of them is bearing pain of body or mind (William N. Kerr: *Suffering as an Element in the Strategy of Missions*, p.7). There is a constant conflict within one's own inner self. Paul in [Romans 7](#) speaks of something of the pain and agony. 'I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members' ([Rom. 7:22-23](#)). Paul in [Galatians 2](#) writes that he has been crucified with Christ. 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' The same person cries out that he dies every day ([1 Cor. 15:31](#)).

This is the most basic attitude and experience in missions. It is one of the paradoxes taught by Christ. We have died with him and yet we need daily dying. The early missionaries took this path; there was no life and growth of that life without daily dying for Christ's sake.

This involves doing one's best to be approved as a workman of God. This kind of dying is not automatic, but is possible and rewarding through vigorous self-discipline in the power of the cross.

#### **(b) The Cross and Obedience**

There is human wisdom which controls the body and mind of the people of the world. Their purpose of life, their goals, and their standards are directed by the common wisdom. That depicts those [p. 47](#) outside the experience of the Cross. Then, there are those who have already known the whole counsel of Christ and the purpose of His coming into the world. They know the purpose of their daily living and the purpose of their whole existence, and yet they are not yet conscious of the fact of using their own means and methods in trying to achieve that purpose. They want to devote themselves to the expansion of the Kingdom but seem to be intoxicated by the fact of their consciousness of their dedication and obedience to the cause of the Mission. Here, Christ can offer comfort as he would to those in suffering in pain of body and mind.

It is a salient feature among the Old Testament prophets that they knew suffering in every part of their being because of their calling and ministry as the prophets of the time. Paul also speaks constantly of suffering which leads one to take the path of self-denial

within the context of his missionary vocation. 'The story told in Acts speaks for itself. We are told that it was an integral part of missionary preaching to the first churches that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God' (Michael Taylor: *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, p.47). His long list of suffering of various kinds deals with the mission. It was far more than merely physical hardship, but rather there was an agony of something like travail for the establishment and the growth of churches in Asia Minor. Suffering is inescapable and inevitable for the apostles.

Utter obedience to the cause of the mission and dedication to the person of Christ make it possible to rejoice in sufferings and pains. Suffering is almost a mark of those who are truly called out by God for His assignment and approved by Him for the task. Think of anyone in the Scriptures and in the history of the Church who did not know this experience. Before a person comes to this stage in his experience, it is meant still for the Christian in general to suffer. When suffering is without rejoicing, then it is not truly within the Christian experience. 'This implies a koinonia in suffering which both links together the sufferings of the individual Christian with those of Christ and binds the sufferings of the whole body together. St. Paul shares that he suffers in Christ's suffering during his mission' (Michael Taylor: p.54). In [2 Cor. 1:5-7](#), he writes:

If we are afflicted it is for your comfort and salvation: and if we are comforted it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken: for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. [p. 48](#)

### **(c) The Cross and Cultural Background**

God does work within the framework of the existing structures and modes of living in different parts of the world. This does not apply only to a group of people or a nation, but He is always willing to work out His purposes even in an individual's life in harmony with his physical and psychological make-up. Sometimes, however, there is overemphasis on the message and the messengers rather than on the reception of the message. The history of missions testifies to the fact that missionaries were so completely taken up by the divine task and the content of the message that they did not always see the importance of the receptor's cultural backgrounds.

The cross which Jesus accepted is a supreme example in his bringing himself down to where he could make God's love known in the very best way for all men. The means of the communication seemed to be shocking because it took the form of death and yet it left an eternal effect on those who came to participate in it.

Then followed his disciples, not taking their crosses in a physical sense, but in spiritual depth. It is only by understanding the meaning of the cross that missionaries overcome their own cultural environment in order to identify with their receptors. True identification with the people who have totally different world views is painful and humanly speaking implausible. It is not possible without daily dying to one's ideas, customs, and values. The cross of Christ is the basis for this painful procedure.

### **(d) The Cross and the Fulfilling of the Task of the Mission**

'Our age calls for cross-bearing Christians who have not only a faith for which to live but one for which to die as well. There must be a reassessment of the place of suffering in the labour of the Gospel' (William Kerr: *Suffering as an Element in the Strategy of Missions*, p.4). In general, missions today give an image of comfortableness and privilege. It does not matter primarily how much missionaries have given up, but what their receptors think of them. There is a need for coming together at the foot of the cross where cross-

bearers can experience oneness as the body of Christ. It appears that at present the body is disjointed.

William Kerr speaks of suffering in passion for the perfection of the church and the accomplishment of its mission. But, this is not a solitary suffering, but rather it is sharing of the fellowship with Christ. In the two-fold task for 'discipling and perfecting' it is inevitable for members of the Church who are called for witness to go through agony of pains which Paul speaks as 'in travail' ([Gal. 4:19](#)). The One who did [p. 49](#) come for the redemption of man had to take this way: Love means pain. He suffered for his task even unto death. Without this deep involvement, there is no genuine transformation for man. "The "kerygmatic" responsibility of the church is inseparable from its "koinoniatic" character. Only a Church of cross-bearing Christians can preach the cross of Christ' (William Kerr: p.8).

In the short history of the Korean Church, the element of suffering physically and spiritually is experienced. Although the Korean Church's suffering is not comparable to the Early Church, it is a painful experience.

## V. CONCLUSION

The redemptive work through suffering which Christ had undertaken is complete. No one else can add to it or be a part of it. That is once for all for all people and for all ages. Yet, there is suffering which Christians can take part in for mission in order to be a part in the mission of Christ.

The cross of Christ was the total expression of God's love for man. He got involved Himself in that painful process of bearing the cross; it was the manifestation of His love for the world. It is significant that He came down where people are and took the form of a most humiliating death—death on the cross. 'It is willingness to serve and sacrifice, to forgive and make allowances, to share and sympathize, to lift up the fallen and restore the erring ([Gal. 5:25ff.](#), [Rom. 12:9ff.](#), [1 Cor. 13:4ff.](#)) in a community which owes its whole existence to the mercy of God and the sacrificial death of Christ' ([Phil. 2:1ff.](#), [1 Cor. 8:11](#)) (William Kerr: p.9). The model for missions is the mission of Christ. Through the cross, there is also a need of suffering for the missionary involvement today.

Looking back Over a century of mission history in Korea, genuine growth of the Church was possible through the suffering of individual cross-bearing Christians whether nationals or missionaries. In a way it can be said that, 'Suffering is the element of mission strategy' (A. R. Glasser).

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# Secularization and Secularism Some Christians Considerations

Klaus Bockmuehl

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*This profound paper on the 'special problem of Contemporary Christianity', namely, the question of the secular, touches the nerve-centre of the modern attitude to God, religion and morals. With its well-researched historical perspective on the subject, it convincingly shows various ways secularism and secularization have seeped into current thinking and life-style. One might miss an exhaustive treatment on the theme, such as e.g., saeculum as a concept exclusively used for an outlook limited to 'this age', in contrast with mundus, used for world in a spatial connotation as Harvey Cox and others have done; but the article gives an adequate alternative to such a this-worldly emphasis. The conclusion forcefully brings out Church renewal as an antidote to secularism—renewal in prayer, fellowship and proclamation.*

(Editors)

To clarify its understanding of the secular and to define its attitude to it, should be a primary concern of the Christian Church in the present situation of society and culture. Bryan Wilson, the British sociologist of religion, marvels at the perspective of a theologian who declares: the problem of ecumenism is the order of the day. An independent observer would have thought 'that the problem of secularization could much more suitably have been chosen as the special problem of contemporary Christianity'.<sup>1</sup> And indeed it is. A Church that was destined by its Founder to be evermore in a process of consolidation and expansion, must be disturbed by experiencing uncertainty of heart and dwindling numbers in many places.

However, the Church in the West where these developments primarily occur, does not seem to have given much serious thought to the problem, with a peculiar kind of belief in providence, some authorities persuade themselves that secularization, the movement away from the Church to the world, is essentially, or at least can be interpreted as, a salutary move somewhat comparable to the Incarnation or *kenosis* of Christ. Others, Evangelicals among them, focus their attention on the future of their respective groupings, and seem to be well content if they add to their numbers even when the p. 51 overall state of Christianity deteriorates. Others again fight Evangelicalism as their foremost enemy, regardless of the general ascent of secularism. As against this, the sobering observation of the sociologist points to the fact that secularization and secularism touch on the question of the very existence of religion and its institutions, and, as the figures show, especially in areas traditionally Christian. What then is secularization and secularism and how should the Church respond to them? Attempting to answer these questions, we shall first study the nature of secularization, secularism, and the secular, then consider its prospects, and finally try to determine possible responses to it.

## I

### THE NATURE OF SECULARIZATION AND SECULARISM

#### Historical Observations

As we look at the meaning of secularization and secularism, it seems to be insufficient to merely sketch the history of the concept which may not cover the history and extent of the subject-matter itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society. A Sociological Comment* (1966), Harmondsworth (U.K.): Penguin 1969, 151.



Karl Helm, who together with J. H. Oldham and the participants of the International Missionary Council's meeting in Jerusalem 1928, was one of the exponents of an early phase of awareness of the problem, addressed himself to the question why secularization and secularism would spring up and become so intense and extensive especially in the areas covered by Christendom. Helm felt this was due to the fact that Scripture allowed for creation, the world, to be an entity and agent by itself, vis-à-vis, though in relationship, with God, whereas in other religions it is merely an extension of the deity and thus cannot act on its own. Only where there is a duality of God and world, God and man, can there develop a dualism, a corruption of the original and intended community.<sup>2</sup>

This may be part of the explanation although it would not explain why secularization and secularism did not also, and with the same intensity, originate in Judaism and Islam which share the presupposition of the transcendence and aseity of God or, not allowing for the Incarnation, hold to it even more vigorously.

In Christendom, there is the additional matrix of the medieval antithesis between the holy and the secular. Monastic theology, e.g., can hardly be beaten in its fierce contrasting of the 'angelic' contemplative life of monk and nun, and the drudgery and uncleanness p. 52 of the ordinary Christian in the world. It is well known how the monastic ideology ravaged the traditional doctrine of the Christian life, until the monastery was the Church, taking the vows of rebirth and the second baptism, and the monk the only true Christian, leaving nothing for the believer whose walk was 'in the secular'.<sup>3</sup>

Out of this juxtaposition of Church and world, *sanctum* and *saeculum*, grew the process of secularization. It begins, in the Middle Ages, with the withdrawal or dismissal of the individual monk or priest from the monastery or the ranks of the clergy as an act of 'secularization'. During the Reformation monasteries and Church estates come into secular hands and become secularized. In the peace negotiations ending the Thirty Years' War in 1643 the French delegate suggests the 'secularization' of certain Church territories. The year 1803 sees the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and at the same time the alienation ('secularization') of the remaining ecclesiastical territories with which Napoleon meant to compensate the princes whose lands he had taken for himself and the members of his family. We observe thus, on the level of laws and institutions, an ever-growing circle of objects drawn into the process of secularization on this primary level.<sup>4</sup>

A similar development may be observed on the level of the history of ideas and knowledge. F. X. Arnold<sup>5</sup> points to the philosophical school of Averroism in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris in the thirteenth century which postulated the liberation of philosophy from the supremacy of theology, and the disjunction of rational and revealed truth, speaking of 'twofold truth', and already held to almost the whole catalogue of tenets of modern unbelief.<sup>6</sup> The intellectual movement of the Italian Renaissance continued this effort and in the famed *Principe* of Machiavelli practically proclaimed the secular. ization

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Helm, *Der Kampf gegen den Säkularismus* in: H. H. Schrey, Hrsg., *Säkularisierung*, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft 1981, 112ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Klaus Bockmüehl, *Säkularismus und christlicher Glaube*, Porta-Studie 8, Marburg: SMD 1985, 8f.

<sup>4</sup> Hermann Lübke, *Säkularisierung. Geschichte eines ideenpolitischen Begriffs*, Freiburg u. München: Alber 1975, 23ff.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Xaver Arnold, *Der neuzeitliche Säkularismus*, in H. H. Schrey, *op. cit.*, 140f.

<sup>6</sup> C. Colpe, Art. Averroismus, in: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd. edition, vol. 1 (Tübingen: I. C. B. Mohr 1957), 796f.

of political ethics. Thomas Hobbes and Hugo Grotius established the framework for a secular conception of political theory p.53 and the law, and Adam Smith as well as Karl Marx, his immediate counterpart, very effectively did the same for the whole world of economics. The materialists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century from Holbach to Haeckel looked after the secularization of the philosophy of nature whereas historians of the said period claimed the same for their own field of endeavour.

It has been frequently observed, however, that the secular viewpoint is largely independent of the empirical argument both in the natural sciences and in history. Rather, it is very much the consequence of an existential attitude, voluntative secularism. O. Chadwick pointed out that 'the onslaught upon Christianity owed its force ... not at all to the science' (e.g. of the nineteenth century). It was made 'not in the name of knowledge, but in the name of justice and freedom'.<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx reacted against the concept of creation (and voted for the theory of a self-generation of the universe) precisely for reasons of human independence and autonomy. In his early notebooks he picked up on the argument forwarded by French materialist D. Holbach who, resurrecting the pre-Christian critic Lucretius, described religion as man's undignified subjection to, and worship of, the deities of nature, lightning and thunder, and correspondingly heralded Prometheus, the ancient symbol of rebellion against the gods.<sup>9</sup> Sharing Marx' refusal to distinguish between religions, Feuerbach, Bakunin the anarchist, and Büchner the materialist of the end of the nineteenth century, all think in similar lines.<sup>10</sup>

The nineteenth century is yet remarkable for another development in the thrust towards secularization. The Enlightenment in the second half of the 18th century was the undertaking of the intellectual elite. Voltaire among others refused to talk atheism 'in front of the maids' because he took the view that religion upheld the morality of servants which could only be profitable for him.<sup>11</sup> The same attitude prompted the notorious edict of 1788 written by F. W. von Wöllner, the Prussian minister, in which enlightened pastors were constrained from preaching anything in discord with the teaching of the Church, notwithstanding their own personal convictions. Secularity of views here is a private matter, of the individual, not of the public mind; neither the masses nor the institutions are as yet secularized. The situation is quite different at the end of the nineteenth century, at least in the European p.54 continent which seems to have pioneered the development. As Chadwick has shown, this is quite likely due to the victory of Marxism over the other schools of thought within the European workers' movement. Workers took a long time to be convinced that social renewal could only be achieved over the defeat of religion. But with the ascent of Marxism, socialism as well as the liberalism of the bourgeoisie, became the vehicle of secularism. Thus Chadwick can say: 'Marxist theory is the most influential of all symbols for the process of secularization in the 19th century.'<sup>12</sup> Different from the Enlightenment, secularism a century later has reached the general populace; it is one of the ideas which, as Marx had it, 'become a revolutionary force as soon as they grip the masses'. The final de-institutionalization of religion is then only a matter of time.

### Definitions

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<sup>8</sup> O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx-Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, New York: international 1975, 102, 30f.

<sup>10</sup> As noted by E. Fackenheim, *op. cit.*, 57, 59 and O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 59, 171. 11.

<sup>11</sup> O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> O. Chadwick, *ibid.*, 69, 79.



Although ‘... the range of meaning behind the term secular’ can include all sorts of things, e.g. ‘assimilation to established power, an overtly materialist doctrine, hedonistic indifference, religious propaganda based on psychic utility’, even the phenomenon that the bishop is a warrior,—‘we have the paradox of secularization always with us’,<sup>13</sup>—we can, on the basis of the historical survey, nevertheless attempt a definition of the concepts under consideration. Taking into account the different aspects, one might say that secularization is the withdrawal or emancipation of social institutions, world views, and individual lives from instruction by, or responsibility to, ecclesiastical or divine authority.

It is important to keep in mind the secularization both of the social institutions and public life (which sociologists primarily seem to study<sup>14</sup>) and of the world of ideas, human consciousness and ‘ideation’<sup>15</sup> (which historians seem to be more concerned with). It is also important to perceive the process of secularization as a mass departure of individuals from church and religion. Just as statisticians can, as it were, give us, a day-by-day breakdown of the growth of Christianity in certain countries, so we must think of the loss of faith as p. 55 a concrete process made up of the decisions or attitudes of individual people even if it should not be marked by visible actions as in baptism.

It seems that secularization and secularism differ one from another in that secularization denotes an actual *process* of ‘becoming worldly’—it can be thought of in terms of singular and plural—whereas secularism denotes the *programme*, the intention of worldliness, or ‘the will to secularization’ as a practical world view.<sup>16</sup> As such—and similar to other—isms—it is unified (we don’t tend to think of secularism in the plural) and limitless in its thrust.

Secularism in itself seems to be the ‘positive equivalent’ to atheism, a *de facto* atheism, a forgetfulness of the things of God, as compared with the belligerent denial of God in atheism proper. It is rather an attitude on the other side of atheism, of ‘let’s get on with the job’, the practical stance which Marx and Engels advocated berating their atheist mentor Ludwig Feuerbach who never seemed to be able to leave religion alone, once he had effectively criticized it. Secularism is the proposition to live ‘without God in the world’ ([Eph. 2:12](#)).

We are now in a position to also interpret the final distinction given in the definition above, and in the course of this determine the meaning of ‘the secular’. The distinction between ecclesiastical and divine authority in the working definition given is indispensable. Many authors fail to distinguish between the two, a failure which creates havoc in the apperception of history as well as in communication about contemporary concerns. We are faced with a cluster of problems that need careful sorting out.

To begin with, the Latin root word of the term ‘secular’, *saeculum*, occurs not infrequently in the Vulgate translation of the New Testament, taking the place of the Greek *aion*. One particular occurrence, [Tit. 2:12](#) (... *abnegantes impietatem, et saecularia desideria, sobrie, juste, et pie vivamus in hoc saeculo* ...) shows that the term can be used both in a negative (‘worldly desires’) and a morally neutral sense (‘live in the world’). In this it resembles the notorious ambiguity of its synonym *kosmos/mundus*: the world as fallen world and as God’s creation and object of His love.

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<sup>13</sup> David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, New York, etc.: Harper Colophon Books 1978, 272f.

<sup>14</sup> B. Wilson, *op. cit.*, 14, 256; D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 288.

<sup>15</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books 1969, 107; *Idem*, *The Heretical Imperative. Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books 1979, 24.

<sup>16</sup> H. Lübke, *op. cit.*, 95 fn. 11.

In toppling the monastic antithesis of the secular and the holy, the Reformation recovered the Christian relevance of the life of the laity in the secular world, e.g. in one's civil vocation. Overcoming the monastic abandonment of the life of the normal work-day, the Reformers moved from the holy precinct into the marketplace not in order to live there an unholy life, but to claim it for the holy God. As is [p. 56](#) well-known, Luther in the course of his career changed from the Augustinian doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of this world, to his own teaching which distinguished between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of God, the realm of salvation and the realm of creation, Gospel and Law, church and state. The secularization that took place during the Reformation (Luther's adversaries accused him of making the whole of Christianity 'profane') was therefore a denial not of the divine ordinances, but of ecclesiastical tutelage and dominion over the life of society. Breaking away from Rome (and from some imaginable Protestant clerocracy as well) was quite different from breaking away from God and His commandments.

That this distinction seems to be overlooked most of the time can also be seen in that many authors, Catholic as well as Protestant, make the Protestant Reformation out to be the beginning of the modern process of secularization. Some do it on the account that the Reformation broke Christian unity (and thus created the movement towards modern pluralism and the consequent possibility of confessional or religious neutrality). They do not, however, interpret the earlier schism of Christendom into the Eastern and Western Church, in a similar manner. Others credit (or debit) the Protestant Reformation with the invention of the modern principle of moral autonomy.<sup>17</sup> The whole debate of secularization and secularism revolves indeed around the question of autonomy. But for the Reformation it was an autonomy of the secular as over against ecclesiastical authority, not as over against the authority of the divine commandments. The secular was not emancipated and dismissed to decide according to its own discretion (that is a modern concept, originating with accommodation to subsequent secularism), but it was made subject to a different set of rules 'Andersgesetzlichkeit', not 'Eigengesetzlichkeit'.

Luther occasionally (e.g. in 'The Bondage of the Will') enhances the role of human reason in earthly concerns, in order to denounce it the more regarding the questions of God and salvation. He elaborates, as it were, on the famous dictum of [Eccl. 15:14](#) (also pursued by Thomas Aquinas): 'God made man from the beginning and left him in the hand of his own counsel.' But, as at least our forefathers were well aware, the text continues: 'He added His commandments and precepts. If thou wilt keep the commandments ..., they shall preserve thee.' *That* is the framework of God's 'Kingdom at the left hand', His order of preservation which is to determine the life of society. [p. 57](#)

Of course, one can take the view that Martin Luther was rather a proponent of the Renaissance and its thrust toward secularity. But that does not fit with the historical observation, again and again emphasized by Troeltsch and others,<sup>18</sup> that in terms of Social Ethics the Reformation, both in the Lutheran and the Calvinian versions, very much represents a continuation, not a 'Copernican revolution' of the medieval synthesis. It is also a fact that the secularization of the mind (and later of the state), in recapitulation of the ideas of the Renaissance, originated in France and Scotland, and not in Luther's native Thuringia.

Indeed, the Lutheran doctrine of the Two Kingdoms is to be considered as a viable third option between a hierocracy and the always inevitable secularism as a reaction to

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<sup>17</sup> H. Lübke, *op. cit.*, 42, 47; expressly so: P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> Cp., e.g., Gerhard Ritter, as cited in H. H. Schrey, *op. cit.*, 3.

it. The Two Kingdom doctrine clearly taught to distinguish between 'Christianity' and 'Churchianity'. It would allow for a pluralism of confession within one and the same state, 'one nation under God, not under Catholicism or Anglicanism or Presbyterianism'.<sup>19</sup> It is able to distinguish between de-confessionalization, the dis-establishment of a church, and the demise of the divine laws. It would also stand well with the desirable secularity of a state that was previously (or still is) confessionally Muslim or Hindu; indeed, it can serve as a common framework for people from different religious communities living together.<sup>20</sup> The recognition of the Reformational doctrine of the Two Kingdoms would also go a long way to remove the painful uncertainty of high and low in the United States concerning the separation of state and church. The Fathers of the Constitution seem to have been well aware of the difference between a de-confessionalized and a secularist state.

We therefore have to distinguish throughout between two types of secularization, between emancipation from ecclesiastical tutelage, and withdrawal from one's responsibility to the Judgement of God. The former is the intention of Reformation, the latter the programme of more recent centuries. Only the latter is an unlimited proposition, and can thus be called secularism.

## II

### PROSPECTS OF THE SECULAR AND OF SECULARISM

Our own time seems to be widely dominated by the mindset of **P. 58** secularity. One finds it difficult to tell what there is still left to be secularized. Before we can come to suggest a Christian stance vis-à-vis these developments, it is necessary not only to survey their past, but also to probe into their future insofar as it seems to be prefigured in earlier events, or as it already unfolds in the present. Certain evolutions are discernible, on the levels both of mass psychology and social structures.

#### Two Phases of the Secular Mindset

The progress of the secular mind seems always to begin with a mood of euphoria. We have the testimony of exhilaration in the heyday of Enlightenment at the beginning of the second half of the 18th century. The same mood seems to have pervaded Western culture around the turn of the 19th to the 20th century when the educated elite consciously linked up with the Enlightenment and its optimistic view of human nature. Owen Chadwick quotes an advertisement for the Encyclopaedia Britannica of 1898 that exalts 'the wonderful story ... of modern progress in the arts, sciences and industries' and promises to 'tell how the light was spread'. Spirits are waking everywhere: how glorious to be alive! Humanity is seen to be potentially almighty. However, these sentiments do not last. The atrocities of the French Revolution and its tyrannical pursuit of virtue have a sobering effect. Later, it is surprising to see, e.g., how the mood of French historiography changes between the optimism of Michelet and the dejection of Hippolyte Taine, and how the public reception of Darwinism turns sour.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 63, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Cp. J. Wesley Ariarajah's postulate, in: *Lesslie Newbigin, The Other Side of 1984*. Questions for the Churches, Geneva: WCC 1983, 75.

<sup>21</sup> O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 153, 210.

The First World War had similar effects. The evangelists of materialism around the turn of the century made way for culture critics who brooded over the relativisms and meaninglessness of the technological age. Karl Heim observed the sobering of mood in the leading scientists.<sup>22</sup> Generally, many people already felt at the time, that the 'Roaring Twenties' resembled dancing on a volcano ready to erupt, and they tried to, as Thornton Wilder characterized the mood, 'eat their ice cream while it is on their plate'. One theologian at the time captured the cultural climate in a startling manner: 'Fear of God has died. But a new fear replaces it, fear of everything ('Weltangst') ... Adoration of culture turns into disdain. The dark gate, to which all secularization leads, is pessimism'.<sup>23</sup> Man, having abolished God, now clamours about being a 'cosmic orphan'. p. 59

Peter Berger, the eminently readable sociologist, who has a wakeful eye on intellectuals, observes at one point that they 'are notoriously haunted by boredom'. For whatsoever reason, Berger feels that on the other side of secularism, 'there is no telling what outlandish religiosity, even one dripping with savage supernaturalism, may yet arise in these groups ...'<sup>24</sup> Ultramoderns develop a new belief in fate, turn to superstition in search for 'meaning', and make enlightenment perfect in a new obscurantism.<sup>25</sup>

The most remarkable instance of such a change in mood is the recent collapse of secular optimism in Western Europe. Whereas the sixties, with their booming economy, sported an exuberant mindset of confidence in limitless progress and human abilities, after the first oil crisis, the public awakening to seemingly intractable ecological problems, a period of economic decline and the renewed perception of the threat of nuclear war have completely changed the picture. Today visitors from overseas marvel at the weariness and melancholy, the doom and gloom that rule over Europe. Problems may be far greater in India or in Latin America, but it is 'Euro-pessimism', 'the disappearance of hope' that characterizes the old countries. People speak of themselves as the 'no future generation'. All creativity is gone. Man has lost his moorings—after faith in God has been discarded he is now also through with the belief that he was to have in himself. Sartre's prophecy of 'Huis clos' and 'La nausée' is fulfilled. One wonders what happened to the 'principle of hope' and the 'theology of hope' which were hailed in the sixties—could they have become 'old hat' in less than twenty years?

Disorientation and despondency again give rise to new eccentric faiths. David Martin observes: 'Amsterdam ... one of the most secularised areas in Holland ... at the same time is besieged by minor cults'.<sup>27</sup> People begin to meddle again in witchcraft and necromancy.

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<sup>22</sup> K. Heim, *op. cit.*, 123.

<sup>23</sup> H. Schreiner, as cited in H. Lübke, *op. cit.*, 89.

<sup>24</sup> Peter L. Berger. *A Rumor of Angels. Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books 1970, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Manès Sperber, *Die vergebliche Warnung. All das Vergangene ...*, Wien: Europaverlag 1975, 207.

<sup>27</sup> D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 197. This pertinent observation presents us with the opportunity to dwell on the opinion voiced not infrequently that sociologists were their advertisement of secularization. Secularization was not irreversible. Did Berger himself say that people were unimprovably religious, and that there always be the need of defining one's identity, and thus a place for religion? Also, parallel to secularization there was a process of resacralization underway, in the forms, of re-Islamization in certain parts of the world or, indeed, of the influx of Eastern religions into Western civilization. Therefore, the overall development need not be understood as a change from religion to no religion but from one religion to another: coming society would only be post-Christian, not post-religious. This is exactly David Martin's point. But surely a Christian theologian cannot feel relieved and happy at this different prospect? For him, the one development is as bad as the other. What can be learnt from these observations is merely that Christian proclamation should not

p. 60 Astrology is 'a burgeoning industry in the most "advanced" countries of the west'.<sup>28</sup> Where God and man have been abandoned, humanity discovers that the cult of Satan is next: it begins to dominate whole sectors of cultural expression, as, e.g., in the rock scene. Secular society quickly becomes a victim of fear and superstition as people have lost their anchorage in a ground that does not shift with the moods of the day. These perspectives make the question 'After secularism what?' mandatory.

### **'Anomie', or: The Prospects for the Social Structures**

The same question is well worth asking also in view of the social-structural consequences of a secularity that denies any allegiance to God. Secularism proves a terrifying solvent of social bonds. Secular sociologists today are the foremost witnesses to the quality of religion as providing both identity and bonding, as well as to the effects of the loss thereof in a largely secularized milieu. 'That religion has been a carrier of identity is axiomatic'; it also stipulates organic solidarity and looks after the 'coherent relation' of one's social and personal identity 'to a whole'.<sup>29</sup> Sociologists are aware of religious ethics as the running endorsement of the ancient teaching 'God said to them: "Beware of all iniquity" and commended to everyone his neighbour' ([Eccl. 17:12](#)).

It is even more remarkable that modern sociology, beginning with Emile Durkheim, should have chosen a term—*anomie*—for the secular dissolution of social bonds that figures prominently in the eschatology of the Gospel: 'Because *anomia* (lawlessness) will abound, the love of many will grow cold' ([Mt. 24:12](#)). Sociologists, philosophers and historians see this disintegration of the social network in the progress of secularization, e.g., in the field of economics where emancipation from the traditional directives of religious ethics and the renunciation of the proprietor's responsibility before God has resulted in the theory and practice of an utter individualism, with the resulting fragmentation of society and overt acts of unmitigated class warfare bringing misery over millions of p. 61 people.<sup>30</sup> Others observe the ominous rise of nationalism concurrently with the maturing of secularity, another fragmentation for which the world has already had to pay dearly in two world wars.<sup>31</sup> The desacralization of religion can quickly turn into a sacralization of politics.

In more recent times we are faced with a mounting disintegration of the family, the social unit which sociologists fifteen or twenty years ago still thought to be highly resistant to the acids of secularization. But here, too, social disorganization is under way.

The overall result is 'anomie', an atomism of social life which we only now recognize as the contents of the prophecy in the arts, music, painting, and literature of the first half of the 20th century that are dominated by the same principle (can we still speak of any sizeable creation of art in the second half of this century, except in reproduction?). This *anomie* expresses itself in the abolition of moral consensus which is at first perceived as the opening up of individual freedom. Liberals like J. Stuart Mills postulate that the individual must and can be trusted to be himself responsible for his morality. But what, if others, like F. Nietzsche, come and proclaim, that not only religion, but also morality is

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blindly treat all people simply as secular moderns and, on the basis of some theory of secularization, ignore their quest for the transcendent and proclivity to religion which will always resurface.

<sup>28</sup> L. Newbigin, *op. cit.*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 77, 83, 88, 108, 205.

<sup>30</sup> L. Newbigin, *op. cit.*, 11, 22.

<sup>31</sup> H. Lübbe, *op. cit.*, 77; O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 131.



'opiate for the people', only designed to stifle the genius?<sup>32</sup> How shall we then live together? Where there are no absolute values, all behaviour is arbitrary, and Adolf Eichmann and Mother Teresa only represent different individual predilections.

Nietzsche knew that secularism and anarchy go together, in the same way as faith in God and belief in structure: 'I fear we won't get rid of God as we still believe in grammar ...'<sup>33</sup> Only the dissolution of all structure, social or otherwise, seems to be able to give man that total autonomy that will supposedly facilitate the ultimate self-realization and gratification that he feels entitled to.

Enlightenment took individuality, a prominent boon from the inheritance of Christianity and severed it from its organic links; it turned into individualism, an uncontrollable cancerous growth, just as brotherhood is being blown up into collectivism. A paradigm of the whole development can be seen in the evolution of types in the philosophical school of the 'Young Hegelians' after their rejection of Hegel's synthesis of Christianity and culture. Each position, as it were, coagulates in the stance of an individual person, the whole presenting p. 62 an instructive genealogical tree: D. F. Strauss combines the apex of Bible criticism with the veneration of humanity, L. Feuerbach the overall criticism of religion with the worship of the I-Thou-relationship. Next the Bauer brothers are atheists and anarchists, and the end product is Julius Stirner's philosophy of 'solipsism', neatly expressed in the title of his book *The Only One and His Property*. The road that began with Enlightenment must be completed with Stirner; in its beginnings, the life of Rousseau granted already some glimpses of the end. The historian James Hitchcock shrewdly observes: Insofar as 'the ultimate demand of the secularised individual ... is absolute personal moral autonomy', 'the most fundamental disease of the modern psyche is solipsism, the need for an empty universe to be filled by an infinitely expanding self.'<sup>34</sup> Stirner's *The Only One and His Property* can also be seen as the secret of Adam Smith's Political Economy divulged. The logical conclusion, as we cannot afford to depopulate the globe for the benefit of the Only One, must be civil war, be it a cold one. One can already understand Marx's desperate scramble to evade the consequences through the proclamation of socialism.

However, the logic is not only one of theory. We are beginning to feel the palpable burden of the rising spiritual and material costs of social disintegration, of the international order as well as of the family, in terms of social expenditure which the taxpayer has to answer for. There comes the moment when people are no longer willing to bleed. Attempts at setting up new goals on the basis of this worldly human responsibility fail. The consensus of perception concerning mechanics and the 'How to' of science cannot be repeated regarding morals and the 'What For?'<sup>35</sup> This impasse of pluralism which comes to sense that no social system can exist without a basic commonality of norms, can of course be countered by growing institutionalism. More blatant than this, and sometimes replacing it, can be the emergence of an unsurmountable public desire for a new ideological re-integration, if necessary, by force. Robespierre may

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<sup>32</sup> O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 28ff., 232.

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, K. Schlechta, Hrsg., vol. 2, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft (1966), 960.

<sup>34</sup> James Hitchcock, 'Self, Jesus and God: The Roots of Religious Secularization', in: P. Williamson and K. Perrotta, eds., *Summons to Faith and Renewal Christian Renewal in a Post-Christian World*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books 1983, 29, 35.

<sup>35</sup> H. Lübbe, *op. cit.*, 70.



serve as a classical example for the reversal of secularization into sacralization.<sup>36</sup> Re-integration comes with the suggestion of a 'salutary' dictatorship which will make the decisions of renunciation and frugality for us which we can no longer bring ourselves to. It is the type of the beneficent dictator who steps in when, facing the confusion of goals and values, a majority p. 63 begins to feel: It cannot go on like this. The imminent change of mood is sometimes recognized in the shifting place of the concept of freedom. Most prominent as a slogan at the outset, it becomes obsolete, almost a *pudendum*, before the advent of the benevolent dictatorship, just as confidence in the potential of man will be replaced by the induction of fear and a feeling of powerlessness vis-à-vis of pressing social problems, serving the same ultimate purposes of the impending dictatorship.

Sociologists are only too aware of these historical consequences of 'anomie'. At the end of his study of 'Religion in Secular Society' Bryan Wilson, the Oxford sociologist, himself reveals a remarkable change of mood. All through his book he sounded as though slightly sneering at the demise of religion and fending off any sign of its meddling in public affairs again, as if to say 'the secular world can do very well without it'. Towards the end he becomes quite thoughtful. He observes that Christianity has brought into our culture 'the extension of kin-group and neighbourhood affectivity into generalized and impersonal goodwill', also 'a strong internalized sense of impersonal individual honesty', as well as 'disinterested devotion to one's calling'—all qualities which render much social control dispensable and may well have been decisive to make our present culture possible.

Now when the liturgy, the theology or the social life of the Church deteriorate, then that concerns the Church only. However, with ethics, things are different. Those moral qualities now appear 'as a type of moral capital debt which is no longer being serviced'. Therefore, 'whether indeed our own type of society will effectively maintain public order, without institutional coercion, once the still persisting influence of past religion wanes even further, remains to be seen.' What can be seen already and must be further expected, is the increase of crime and public disorder.<sup>37</sup>

Wilson's colleague David Martin comments on the disorientation in the wake of European secularism: '... the extension of pluralism can create the conditions under which either the older forms of integration will try and re-establish themselves in control, or the pluralistic tendency will be pushed dangerously close to anarchy and atomism, or the monism of the Eastern European system will come to seem attractive by virtue of the ideological vacua and disintegrations which p. 64 have been created ... Anarchy in any context is frequently a prelude to totalitarian re-integration.'<sup>38</sup>

The state must then take over the enforcement of morals and replace God as the guarantor of the morality of social life, i.e. the state must become totalitarian. It must try to inspire awe and reverence and must establish a secret police which if possible would know everything and could read the thoughts of the heart, just as God did, becoming the replacement of conscience as the representation of the objective moral law within the individual subject.

One can already determine what ideology would be favoured by such a state. It must be socialism or nationalism, as attempts to recover social cohesion and to legitimise

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<sup>36</sup> O. H. von der Gablentz, as cited in H. Lübke, *op. cit.*, 123f.

<sup>37</sup> B. Wilson, *op. cit.*, 254, 261ff.—It is very doubtful whether the 'influx of Eastern religions' will continue to provide social bonding through 'impersonal goodwill', a sense of civil vocation and concern for the public square with which Christianity originally endowed Western civilization.

<sup>38</sup> D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 164, 89, cp. 46, 90, 188.

outward enforcement of the commonality of life, or preferably a mix of the two. The German reintegration of 1933 gives all necessary instruction.

It is thus the secular sociologists who today seem to be most aware of the threatening corollaries of secularization: less religion must logically mean more coercion. They substantiate William Penn's dictum: Nations must be governed by God, or they will be ruled by tyrants. If that is the truth that can already be gleaned from the pages of recent history, then secularism is the enemy not only of religion, but of humanity.

The problem that surfaces everywhere in these explorations is the old question of whether there can be legality without morality, and whether there can be morality without religion. Concerning the first half of the question, the secularists of a hundred years ago were convinced that one could not (as J. Stuart Mill has proposed) leave the basic moral decisions in the hands of the individual on a large scale. They therefore demanded that morality be taught in schools. Then, of course, they ran into the problem of motivation. Their materialist world view and a natural history of accidents would not support the quality of mercy. It could not rule out Auschwitz. Nietzsche derided D. F. Strauss in his later attempt to combine a naturalist world view of causality and contingency with the exhortation to humanism and brotherhood. Marxism still labours with this dilemma. Voltaire had quietly endorsed the necessity of faith as the foundation of morality when he refused to 'talk atheism in front of the maids'. Kant examined, as it were, the problem under laboratory conditions, and decided that morality must always lead to religion and rely on religion.<sup>39</sup> One p. 65 French intellectual, F. Brunetière, as Chadwick relates, went through this argument existentially in the course of his life, beginning as an atheist, but returning to the Church under the conviction that 'society cannot dispense with religion in its acceptance of moral axioms.'<sup>40</sup> It cannot dispense with it because responsibility, the backbone of morality, is a theological concept, and the group or the state cannot serve as its point of reference.<sup>41</sup>

### Cycles of Apostasy and Conversion

In our historical survey we have met with several examples of the different stages of development, e.g. the optimism of the Enlightenment, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, and in the decade of the sixties. We have witnessed repeated periods of social disorientation and decay. Karl Helm thought that the mindset of secularism was an age-old problem, only compounded in Christian culture.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, already the Psalmist was faced with a milieu ignoring God: 'Help, Lord; for there is no longer any that is godly; for the faithful have vanished from among the sons of men'. ([Ps. 12:2](#))

What we observe, is perhaps the 'natural' process of moral corrosion in a fallen world, a tendency to corrupt ([Eph. 4:22b](#)) which would finally tear down humanity if it was not for measures of divine preservation, disinfection, expurgation and renewal. These are measures which may be well perceived of as visible historical counterparts to the renewal of creation praised in [Psalm 104:30](#): 'You send forth your Spirit ... and You renew the face of the earth.'

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<sup>39</sup> Frederick Copleston, S. J., *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6: *Modern Philosophy*, pt. II: Kant, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books 1964, 135.

<sup>40</sup> O. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 243.

<sup>41</sup> Cp. H. H. Schrey, *op. cit.*, 130.

<sup>42</sup> K. Heim, *op. cit.*, 110, 112, 123. However, Helm felt in 1930 that Christians were approaching a final battle of the spirits, *op. cit.*, 127.

These measures are of different kinds. Not only the dispersion of mankind, [Gen. 11](#), but also the calling of Abraham in [Gen. 12](#) must be seen as God's response to man's rebellious undertaking exemplified in the Tower of Babel. As we look into recent history, sometimes the secularist exultations ended in wars, of an ever more terrible scale. Perhaps there is the other possibility of a culture, a nation, a creative minority, returning to the mercy of the Eternal God. Christ's parables of the Mutinous Tenants and of the Prodigal Son seem to indicate this double outcome of secularization. We would then be faced with a cycle of apostasy and conversion as already experienced by the people of Israel at the time of the early Judges.

In the light of this, the most advanced group of people would then [p. 66](#) be those Russian intellectuals who, having gone through the empty promises of rationalism, through nihilism, the Marxist re-integration of society, finally through the utter disillusionment and mortification of an ageing Marxist society, and who are now in growing numbers turning to the orthodox Christian faith. Of them we have recently been given a first glimpse in Tatiana Goricheva's disturbing and fascinating book *Dangerous to Speak of God*.<sup>43</sup> Through their witness, western society is once more given the grace of an opportunity to choose between the Road of Light and the Road of Darkness.

### III CHRISTIAN RESPONSES

#### Available Responses

How have Church and theology in modern times responded to their new environment of committed secularity that does not allow for any further input by religion, but thinks it can 'do without God as a working hypothesis'? There are a number of responses already tried and available, and we are in the lucky position that we can look at them with the eyes not only of the theologian, but also of the sociologists of religion, quasi outside observers who, too, have already examined the options.

Bryan Wilson distinguishes three organisational responses of Christianity to contemporary secularization, i.e. of the churches, the denominations, and the sects. He sees the mainline churches withdrawing into esoteric pastimes like reform of the liturgy when public proclamation and interaction is no longer welcome, or trying to buttress their flagging strength by way of mergers (the ecumenical movement, object of Wilson's special scorn), or bureaucratization. Denominations may have a different past, but appear to be longing for the same future that the churches are already displaying. Only the 'sects', a concept which Wilson understands in sociological instead of religious terms, i.e. as small groups sustaining a high level of commitment, identity, and life together, may as yet have a true future and a contribution to make to society in general.

P. Berger looks at the 'possibilities of religious affirmation', i.e. the intendable theological attitudes, and discusses Deductionism (the 'neo-orthodoxy', e.g., of Karl Barth), Reductionism (Bultmann) and [p. 67](#) Inductionism (Schleiermacher). We will look at these options and P. Berger's meanderings between them in due course.

First, however, we need to consider the position which Berger, perhaps due to his mainline church orientation does not set apart and describe in itself. It is the position of *withdrawal*. This attitude can be fed by the earlier Anabaptist tradition which teaches believers to separate from society and live the Christian life in the small circle of disciples,

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<sup>43</sup> Tatjana Goritschewa, *Von Gott zu reden ist gefährlich. Meine Erfahrungen im Osten und im Westen* (1984), Freiburg etc.: Herder 1985.

perhaps even in physically separate settlements. Some strata in Evangelicalism hold to a similar view, only allowing for occasional forays into the world in order to save individual believers as 'brands plucked from the fire'. The same attitude can also develop as a reaction to a previous over-involvement in society which has seen high hopes of a Christianization of the world frustrated, and now withdraws into private life refusing to give any further moral leadership in the public square.

All these attitudes of withdrawal appear to forget the duality in the meaning of the biblical concept of 'world'. The prophets do not shrug their shoulders saying: atheism and destruction are the course of this world; I told you so. They enter, as it were, the cosmic courtroom as God's representatives, in order to argue with the world. Jonah has to learn mercy with Nineveh as God Himself feels it. Jesus sheds tears over Jerusalem; he does not wash his hands of its transgression. The true Christian attitude is characterized by difference, not withdrawal, and by radiation. Christians are supposed to be not only a 'light in the Lord' ([Eph. 5:8](#)), but also the 'light of the world' ([Mt. 5:14](#)) and 'lights in the world' ([Phil. 2:15](#)). In a similar vein, the view of 'snatching from peril' must be complemented by the perspective of bringing presents and gifts, 'the glory and honour of the nations' ([Ps. 72:10](#); [Rev. 21:26](#); cp. [Mt. 2:11](#)) into the Kingdom of God. Defence against secularism needs to have as its correlate the employment of all creational human abilities in the service of God ([2 Cor. 10:5](#)).

The second available attitude is the one of *surrender* to secularism. Peter Berger shares many shrewd observations of this stance for which secularism in its initial glamorous pose of self-confidence becomes not so much a contention, but an assumption, the unquestioned critical standard by which the Christian tradition is then examined and found wanting.<sup>44</sup> J. Hitchcock, the historian, thinks that far more damage is being done by this attitude of church dignitaries and theologians who openly espouse the cause of secularism, ridicule or destroy the tenets of the Christian faith, and nevertheless retain their respectability in church and society.<sup>45</sup> Berger points to the self-defeating effect of such a degree of accommodation that is equal to surrender: if a person can have all alleged benefits of modern worldliness as such, why bother to buy them with an additional Christian label?<sup>46</sup> That could only appeal to those who still struggle with inherited Christian sentiments, a special group that must logically die out in the near future.

Next comes the response that Berger characterizes as *Reductionism*, i.e. an accommodation of the message to the standard of secularity, at the expense of the integrity of the message. Berger here deals very energetically with the programme of demythologization set forth by Rudolf Bultmann which he sees as the 'strategy of orderly retreat' of theology before the forces of modernity. He rightly criticizes the uncritical acceptance at the outset of some assumed standards of modernity to which the biblical material must be subjected: 'secularity here is taken as (cognitively) superior'. Therefore demythologization implies secularization. With a perceptiveness and circumspection not always characteristic of modern theologians, Berger concludes that the critique of religion as human projection by Ludwig Feuerbach 'hovers over every ... programme of secularizing the religious view of reality (including the programmes of thinkers who are

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<sup>44</sup> P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 167; J. Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, 28f.

<sup>45</sup> J. Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> P. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, 19ff.

unaware of Feuerbach)'.<sup>47</sup> Close to Bultmann stands F. Gogarten who taught us to understand secularization as a legitimate development from Christian origins, as it were, 'christening' the secular as long as it does not idolize itself again which he sees as being the case in secularism as distinct from secularization.<sup>48</sup> Harvey Cox in his panegyric of the new freedom of 'The Secular City' took his cue from Gogarten. Both Bultmann and Gogarten concede in so many words the 'proper autonomy' of the secular, thereby showing that they have abandoned the Reformational understanding of the two Governments of God.

Gogarten's thesis, proposing the end of hostilities between Christianity and secular culture, was widely acclaimed although some of its earlier consumers like the Protestant H. Thielicke and the Catholic J. B. Metz later had second thoughts about this seemingly unlimited emancipation and authorization of the secular.<sup>49</sup> One could have p. 69 taken a warning from the observation that Gogarten wrote already very much on the same lines when he accommodated his theology to the advent of National Socialism.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 92, 102, 99, 111; cp. *A Rumor of Angels*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> H. Lübke, *op. cit.*, 120f.; P. Berger on Gogarten: *The Sacred Canopy*, (151), 165, cp. *A Rumor of Angels*, 9ff.

<sup>49</sup> For H. Thielicke, see his *Theologische Ethik*, vol. II, 2, Tübingen: I. C. B. Mohr 1958, 244 and 733f., for J. B. Metz: H. H. Schrey, *op. cit.*, 30, 32.

<sup>50</sup> At this point we may perhaps comment on the exaggerated claims of some sociologists (esp. among those representing the 'sociology of knowledge') to be able to trace, e.g., theological developments back to certain underlying socio-economic processes, as suggests Peter Berger: 'One may say, with only some exaggeration, that economic data on industrial productivity or capital expansion can predict the religious crisis of credibility in a particular society more easily than the data derived from the "history of ideas" of that society' (*The Sacred Canopy*, 151). This claim covers not only general associations, as between industrialisation and urbanisation on the one hand, and secularization on the other, but also the ability 'with embarrassing clarity' (*ib.*, 164, cp. *A Rumor of Angels*, 11) to date particular theological events like Bultmann's programme of demythologization and Gogarten's 'new attitude to the secular world' of 1953 as consequences of the West German currency reform of 1948 and the ensuing recovery of the economy. Also, Barth's attitude in 1934 as expressed in his pamphlet *No! Response to Emil Brunner* is here seen as 'appropriate' to a socio-political situation as given with the monolithic ideology of un-Christian National Socialism.

However, Karl Barth proclaimed what one might see as his antithetical stance to culture not after 1933 when it would seem 'plausible' but in 1922, in the heyday of cultural pluralism. Rudolf Bultmann wrote his essay on 'New Testament and Mythology' in 1940, under the economic restrictions of the early war years. Friedrich Gogarten developed his understanding of the Reformational Two Kingdoms doctrine as the autonomy of the secular already around 1930 before he applied it, as he did, to the events of 1933. If there is one thing 'embarrassingly clear' it is the lack of detailed coincidence between major theological advances and socio-economic factors determining them. Indeed, those advances may, as antitheses or as continuations, perhaps yet be better understood in the context of the history of theology. The study of Kant seems to remain just as important as the perception of socio-economic milieux.

In addition, one should be hesitant to look at the general history of secularization solely in terms of a one-directional determination of the (religious) superstructure by the (socio-economic) basis, or else one might be led to a vulgar historical materialism which Karl Marx himself did not espouse. It has been pointed out, for instance, that the rural provinces of the North of Germany would seem to be far more 'secular' in terms of low figures of church attendance, than the highly industrialised and urbanised land of Württemberg in the South where Pietism traditionally has a strong presence. Moreover, in the United States the 19th century, the century of industrialisation, was certainly not at the same time the century of secularization. By the middle of the 20th century Christianity seems to be no less accepted than a hundred years earlier. Of course, some sociologists, might marshal the facts in order to uphold their general findings, and denounce North American Christianity as superficial and all hollow inside, to make it as secular as the European situation. I reject that facile solution on the basis of my own observation and comparison of both continents. There are great quantitative and qualitative differences. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that those differences disappear over time.



Peter Berger himself has become a case in point for this stance of accommodation through reductionism. In his earlier, more sociology-oriented book, *The Sacred Canopy* (1966), he had disposed of Bultmann and Tillich as quite unacceptable theological reductionists. p. 70 At that time, he criticized Schleiermacher's 'Speeches on Religion' for exactly the same reason, i.e. the 'defensiveness' vis-à-vis the seemingly definitive 'truths ... of secular reason, outside the Christian sphere', which, 'rather than the sources of his own tradition, now serve the Protestant theologian as arbiters of cognitive acceptability.' That is the same as with Bultmann: 'Theology adapts itself to reality presuppositions of modern secularised thought.'<sup>51</sup> In his later book, *A Rumour of Angels* (1968) Berger attempted to recover ground apparently lost to the secularists, through the presentation of a quite remarkable kind of natural theology with which he, setting out from general human experiences like order, play, hope, moral damnation and humour, tried to inductively argue for transcendence. In the third book of this trilogy, *The Heretical Imperative* (1979), he is back to claiming the special religious experiences which Schleiermacher based his theology on and in general throws in his fortune with this hero and prototype of all modern liberal theology.

Berger now believes in an inductionism of 'controlled accommodation'. Although he is aware of having entered a procedure which 'all too often ends in reductionism ...'<sup>52</sup> It does, in his case too. It would have been good had he also consulted Schleiermacher's *Two Letters to D. Lücke* in which the great theologian expounds with all desirable clarity that he is indeed engaged in a 'strategy of orderly retreat' from the advances of a modern world view, and willing to alleviate the Christian baggage of objects like the Old Testament as well as doctrines like creation, the divinity of Christ, the miracles in the Gospel, etc. etc. Already in his 'Speeches' Schleiermacher had, prefiguring the decisions of Bultmann and Gogarten, 'renounced' all claims of religion to co-determine anything that belonged to the fields of metaphysics and morality. Peter Berger, however, in his recent book, goes far beyond Schleiermacher. Not only does he now vindicate the modern resemblance, earlier deplored, of religious truths and consumer articles in a super-market, maintaining that we moderns must 'pick and choose' (whence *The Heretical Imperative*),—he now also proposes to stock the products of the other religions ('My understanding of "ecumenicity" has expanded very greatly'<sup>53</sup>), and he does so even if it means that he can no longer carry items like the 'once-and-for-all' and the 'no-other-name', i.e. the exclusive attributes of Jesus. Give up historical Christianity, retain religion—that is the outcome of 'controlled accommodation'. p. 71

In view of this, one is almost eager to reassess the virtues of Berger's further model of 'Deductionism' (representing Karl Barth and 'neo-orthodoxy') and to explore James Hitchcock's statement that attempts by the church to mollify usually have the opposite effect, 'while paradoxically a firm purpose ... often makes the church more credible even in the eyes of the skeptic'.<sup>54</sup>

### Desirable Responses

Having surveyed the main specimens of available responses, we would like, in conclusion, to add a few remarks concerning further desirable responses.

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<sup>51</sup> P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, 159, 167; also: *A Rumor of Angels*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 59.

<sup>53</sup> P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, X.

<sup>54</sup> J. Hitchcock, *op. cit.*, 28f.



1. It seems to be necessary to expose the mechanism of secularization and secularism so as to reveal their inherent pitfalls. The recognition of a diffuse and hidden peril is of immense value. It needs to be said that secularism is the adversary of the Gospel, that it will never engender love of God and love of neighbour, but only love of self, and that there is no future for faith in its appeasement. Such an analysis of secularism and its working can act like a necessary disinfectant.

2. However, we propose at the same time that a 'response' should not merely be shaped by the analysis of the opponent, be it in terms of accommodation or rejection. The 'response' should in no way be a reaction, not determined by the milieu but by the Word of God. Taking example from Barth's *Theological Existence Today* in the political crisis situation of Germany in 1933; Christian proclamation must in the last analysis go on 'as if nothing had happened'. Accommodation is strictly a matter of form of speech whereas the difference of the contents of the message, the incommensurability of the Gospel with any secular epistemology, must be upheld. The church, furthermore, must not withdraw from the world but, according to its marching orders in the New Testament, aim for holy living even in unholy places ([Eph. 4:17ff.](#); [Tit. 2:12ff.](#)).

3. On this basis, three transactions are necessary to sustain Christian identity and outreach: prayer, sustenance of the fellowship, and proclamation.

(a) The first task is to strengthen the centre of Christian identity, i.e., a person's relationship with God. This is done through prayer. Prayer is the expression of respect for, and love of, God, clearly the extreme [p. 72](#) antithesis to secularism. In prayer, the Christian holds up humanity and the course it is taking.

Prayer engenders steadfastness and independence and yields the necessary orientation. The German author Ernst Jünger noted in the days of the turbulent dissolution of the National-Socialist Empire: 'What could one recommend to help people, especially simple people, to avoid conformism with, and standardization by the system? Nothing but prayer. This is the point of leverage, even for the humblest ... It yields uncommon gain and tremendous sovereignty. This is also true apart from all theology. In situations where the most clever ones fail and the most courageous look in vain for ways out, you sometimes see a man quietly counsel the right and do what is good. You can trust that that is a person who prays.'<sup>55</sup> Prayer helps to recover perspective and teaches us what Os Guinness has called 'a basic requirement of contemporary discipleship': to be 'ready to "think globally but act locally"'.<sup>56</sup> Perspective comes as a fruit of perceptive prayer and is as such the prerequisite of ministry to fellow believers and to the world.

Moreover, prayer needs to be followed up ([2 Tim. 2:19!](#)) by a life of sanctification, by the willingness to 'live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world' ([Tit. 2:12](#)), i.e. to live differently from the rest, to stick to God's absolute moral standards and not yield to general permissiveness, to live conscientiously, and yet not turn one's back on humanity, to withdraw from evil although not from people. There can be no Christian life without the struggle against secularism, a struggle against the will to autonomy and the forgetfulness of the things of God, which characterizes the *Zeitgeist*, and the daily battle to awaken to Him and to the hallowing of His name.

(b) *Diligite dominum agite viriliter, et confortetur cor vestrum*, 'love God, act bravely, and He shall strengthen your hearts', is how the Vulgate translates [Ps. 31:24f.](#) The whole psalm speaks confidently of the possibility of courageous action in an alien environment and reminds one of Paul's words of encouragement for his brethren in [1 Cor. 15:58:](#)

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<sup>55</sup> Ernst Jünger, *Strahlungen III*, München: dtv 1966, 14, cp. 27f.

<sup>56</sup> Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File. Papers on the Subversion of the Church*, Downers Grove, Ill.: Intearsity Press 1983, 233.

‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, inasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.’ The second task, combining the interests of identity and outreach, concerns the ‘strengthening of the brethren’ ([Luke 22:32](#); [Acts 14:22](#) etc.). It endeavours to ‘fan the flame where you find it’, to support any [p. 73](#) discernible movement in the direction of faith, and to strengthen Christian commitment.

This will find expression in the conscious cultivation of cell groups, small circles which support those purposes. Bryan Wilson felt that any good that might still come from religion would come from ‘the religion of the sects’ by which he seems to have meant the unpolluted Christianity of small groups of committed people not associated with the churches. He may have underestimated the network of such groups *within* today’s churches and denominations, successors of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* of early Pietism and of Wesley’s ‘bands’, which successfully countered institutional torpor and the dissolution of social bonding. David Martin seems to have been fascinated with the widereaching effects of Haugeanism, the corresponding movement within the Norwegian church.<sup>57</sup> Faith here proves once more not only the guarantor, but the source of salutary human relationships.

(c) Finally, proclamation. This concerns Christian outreach. In the first place, it is the calm re-announcement of the reality of God, both of his righteousness and mercy, to a secularity forgetful of these facts. In a secular environment religion may perhaps still be allowed as a topic, but the question of God (like death) has almost become a *pudendum*. It is of utmost importance that individuals, as well as society as such, be faced, in a matter-of-fact way, with the question of its relationship to God. It is the task of the Church, to announce God again to ‘a crooked and perverse generation’ ([Phil. 2:15](#)). The Church is to remind the world that God ‘has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained’ ([Acts 17:31](#)) and that this Man, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, at the same time is the one ground of our salvation. We therefore support Bishop Newbigin’s plea for ‘a genuinely missionary approach to post-Enlightenment culture’.<sup>58</sup>

In the pursuit of these tasks the Church will be the light of the house ([Mt. 5:15](#)) which she shares with the rest of humanity. The Church will act like leaven in the dough, and resemble the mustard in its surprisingly abundant growth, making it the nesting-place for many. In the pursuit of these tasks, as well as in the work of their creational callings, Christians will not only ‘help to build the temple of the Lord’ ([Zech. 6:15](#)), but, in the meantime, also unwittingly participate in God’s own work of sustainment of His creation.

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<sup>57</sup> D. Martin, *op. cit.*, 34, 69.

<sup>58</sup> L. Newbigin, *op. cit.*, 31f. (without the subsequent confusion created by the author’s call for dialogue that can lead to conversion either way).

# The Use and Misuse of Religious Language: An Exercise for Teachers

Ian Mavor and Others

*Reprinted with permission from Journal of Christian Education, July 1985*

At many points, religious education deals with people's beliefs and with issues of faith. It is suggested in the present article that it will improve classroom communication and help students in clarifying their own beliefs if the language patterns used by teachers acknowledge the belief elements in many religious utterances which on the face of it purport to be presenting generally accepted facts. For this purpose, a worksheet has been developed in the Queensland Religious Education Project for use in training and briefing teachers of religious education. The worksheet provides practice in distinguishing between fact-type and belief-type statements. Note that the issue is not whether a statement is true or false, but what kind of a statement it is.

## THE WORKSHEET

- a. *Indicate beside each of the following sentences which of them are statements of belief (B), and which are statements of fact (F). A fact-type statement is one which could be verified by normal methods of scientific and historical research or which is a reporting of personal experience.*
  - i. God planned that people should care.
  - ii. Some of the basic problems of the early Christian community were learning to love and serve one another and the varying customs among different members.
  - iii. Prayer gives me a feeling that someone really me.
  - iv. Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. From the time he was young he was specially favoured by the Lord.
  - v. The Father of all Spirits woke the Sun Mother and sent her to cover the earth with plants and to bring to life birds and animals.
  - vi. Everyone has sinned.
  - vii. Knowledge can help us to spoil the environment—or it can help us to take care of God's world. [p. 75](#)
  - viii. Most Christian churches keep Sunday as a day for meeting together to worship God.
  - ix. Rama, as a human form of the god Vishnu, performed many heroic feats.
  - x. The good that you do will not be treated with ingratitude, since God knows those who act piously.
- b. *Write some statements about heaven and/or hell which you could make to a group of students, of whom some are believers and some non-believers. [Space provided].*

## FACTS AND BELIEFS

Of fundamental importance in effective communication is the way in which teachers speak about beliefs, whether their own or those of others. Belief statements in this context are those about which differences of outlook are found within the community, which in

religious education includes statements about God, claims about Jesus or other religious leaders, interpretations of the Bible and views on the authority of the Bible.

In speaking about Jesus, a distinction is to be made between saying that he was crucified at a particular time or place and saying that he was the Christ who died for the sins of the whole world in accordance with God's plan. The first statement could be the factual reporting of any observer and is potentially open to historical research. The latter statement presumes a belief about who, ultimately, Jesus was and thus is of a different kind.

Students from religious education classes often express two seemingly contradictory criticisms about their teachers:

- (i) Some are seen as pushing one view and being unwilling to listen to what the students think, feel or believe; and
- (ii) other teachers are seen as failing to give a clear indication of what they themselves believe or what they are trying to achieve.

There is a simple but effective way out of this dilemma. It is a method that is already used by most teachers in general social interaction and yet its use in the classroom seems to take practice. Adults talk to other adults who may have a different point of view, there are simple social protocols or manners which avoid any appearance of 'pushing ideas down someone else's throat.' This is a way of showing respect for others and allowing them the freedom to share their views in return. It is done adding qualifying phrases to the [p. 76](#) comments about beliefs, such as, 'It seems to me', 'I think ...' or 'In my church ...'

Even those teachers who see students as deserving of the same respect as adults, however, can still find it hard to change their way of talking in religious education. They may acknowledge that they do not like it when others appear dogmatic with them about religion, yet they find themselves either doing that with their students or becoming non-committal when they try to be more open.

The problem seems to arise partly from the way most people have experienced religious education themselves in the past, which leads to the assumption that 'that's the way it's meant to be done'. This seems to be happening when staff teachers who teach very creatively in other subject areas revert to speaking at the students and moralising when they teach religious education. The style used in printed curriculum materials for religious education often helps to maintain this same problematical tradition.

## **THE PROBLEM OF PRESUMPTION**

In essence, the problem has to do with teachers, speaking presumptively. This means that their way of talking presumes that their hearers are believers who necessarily agree with them. Such presumption is shown by talking about issues of belief as if they are simple matters of fact to which no alternative view can be offered.

The use of such pronouns as 'we', 'us' and 'our' to create an appearance of shared belief between the speaker and listeners may be another form of presumption. Of course, there are times when the use of 'we', is a valid expression of having reached agreement or having shared experiences. At other times these language patterns represent an attempt by one person to speak for others when there is no acknowledged consensus. Such presumption tends to create resentment in those who do not share the view expressed.

Among the more obvious forms of this language problem are such statements as 'We go to church', 'Because we love Jesus we don't do things like that, do we?' and 'We should care for our bodies because they are God's gift to us'. Teachers would do well to pause and

ask themselves who it is that 'we' represents. If it is meant to be those present, it is possible to check whether the views expressed are shared by all.

Some teachers seem to be hoping that beliefs will somehow 'rub off' onto students if they are said with great conviction and without any recognition that they are beliefs. In other cases religious words seem to p. 77 be 'dropped' into sentences to make it sound like a religious education lesson. One result is that some students answer 'God' or 'Jesus' to almost any question because that seems to be what the teacher wants to hear.

Some curriculum materials tend to be heavy in presumptive language and this has come to be expected by many teachers. Their style implies that teachers and students hold the same beliefs, which is usually not the case even in church schools. Hence, the language of teachers is often inappropriate when dealing with belief issues.

The RECP *Teachers Notes* have been written without resort to this presumptive language. In them, teachers are invited to talk about their beliefs but the materials do not presume to make faith statements on their behalf. Once they become aware of the reasons for this change, most teachers appreciate the greater freedom that it gives. For example, the *Teachers Notes* themselves do not have to be limited by some 'agreement' to deal only with areas in which no major disagreements arise. Points of difference are acknowledged as well as points of similarity within the religious traditions.

## OWNING AND GROUNDING

The problem of presumption in religious education is overcome by altering the patterns of the sentences used by teachers. It is possible to find a way of speaking which leaves them free to state clearly what they believe, what this or that tradition believes and does, or what the Bible says, without denying to students the freedom to respond from their perspective. As noted, adults have this skill in other areas of life, but they seem to find it hard to apply in teaching religious education.

This process may be described as the 'owning' and 'grounding' of belief statements. These terms sum up the way adults qualify their belief statements in everyday conversation:

- (i) sometimes they own the belief as theirs, by the use of such terms as 'I believe ...', 'It seems to me that ...', 'I feel ...', 'I think ...' and 'In my experience ...'
- (ii) alternatively they ground the belief by attaching it to some group of people who hold it or to some source from which it comes. This is seen in such statements as 'Christians believe ...', 'The ... church teaches ...' or '[Genesis 1:1](#) says ...'

Owning or grounding a belief does not prove that it is true or that it is authoritative for others. At the same time, because it does not presume p. 78 upon their agreement, the students are more likely to be able to hear and to discuss what is being presented.

When beliefs are owned or grounded, they sound less dogmatic, and this may lead some to fear that they will sound less authoritative. When the source of their authority, whether in personal experience or in the tradition, is made clear, however, this provides important data for those who are being asked to consider where they stand in relation to those beliefs. This is in keeping with the custom, in both academic writing and preaching, of acknowledging the authority on which a statement is based.

A quick way to check the authority or source of a belief statement is to ask 'Who says it?' or 'Who believes it?' This assists teachers to either *own* the statement or to *ground* it by indicating who believes it to be true.



## OPEN COMMUNICATION

The debate about what is appropriate in religious education has often centred around such words as 'evangelism', 'indoctrination', 'formation', 'objectivity'. Mostly these words focus on what teachers try to do *to* students. In contrast, the view described here refers to a way of teachers being *with* students. In it, their common humanity is affirmed, their individual contributions are acknowledged, and the tradition is presented and studied.

This is stated with full recognition that in many schools religious education is dependent upon the efforts of volunteer teachers, often motivated by a desire to share their faith. What is being suggested is a way in which teachers can seek to make their beliefs comprehensible to the students, to bear witness to them by their words and actions, and to help the students reflect on what those beliefs could mean for them. In the end, however, it is the students themselves who decide what they will believe and teachers can create problems for themselves and the students if they try to take away that responsibility.

## SUMMARY

The careful use of language in the classroom provides a simple and practical solution to these potential problems. Several benefits can be seen to follow when teachers either *own* or *ground* belief statements.

- a. It gives teachers greater freedom to deal with their own beliefs in class; p. 79
- b. It makes conversation about beliefs more open and easier to develop, in that once teachers and students learn either to own or to ground statements of belief, it is easier for others to respond with their beliefs, whether these are the same or different;
- c. By this approach, speakers do not presume upon the beliefs of their hearers, thereby helping avoid the negative reactions and 'discipline problems' that such presumption can generate;
- d. While most denominations acknowledge the importance of faith decisions as part of the development of religious maturity, when beliefs are referred to as if everyone thinks that way, the role of decision is hidden. In contrast, if beliefs are owned or grounded, the issue is brought into the open for consideration. In this way, students can become aware of the importance of such decisions, without any implication of an attempt to enforce or require commitment to a particular belief;
- e. Some students are placed in a situation of tension, in that they receive contradictory views on belief issues from various significant adults. The language of teachers can heighten this tension or can support and encourage the students in working out their own patterns of belief. If this is done by teachers from the earliest primary school years, students may be better prepared to work through the faith struggles which often characterise the teenage years;
- f. One of the difficulties facing religious education teachers is to make the content as concrete as possible. When beliefs are owned or grounded they are linked to individuals or groups who hold them. This will help to make them more concrete in that the beliefs are seen as having implications for people's lives;
- g. When referring to the Bible, care in owning and grounding can help clarify the way in which it is being used. This will involve distinguishing between (i) quotations from the Bible; (ii) interpretations or summary statements based on someone's reading of the Bible; and (iii) implicit claims concerning the authority of the Bible in people's lives. The statement 'The Bible says ...' is a form of grounding only if it can be followed by the question 'Where does it say it?'



These issues relating to the language of RE teachers may actually be applied to any teaching context in any subject. But it is in the teaching [p. 80](#) of religion that they have special relevance. 'Owning' or 'grounding' their references to beliefs and attitudes can help teachers communicate more easily. It enables them to speak in a way that is inclusive of all students, without making assumptions about prior commitments. It also provides an example which can assist the students, in giving clearer expression to their individual patterns of belief.

## POSTSCRIPT: A COMMENTARY ON THE WORKSHEET

(i) *God planned that people should care.*

This statement presumes belief in God and even a particular understanding of the nature of God. To a believer this may appear as a 'fact' but it would only be a fact-type statement if owned, e.g. 'I believe that ...', or grounded, e.g. 'Christians believe that ...'

(ii) *Some of the basic problems of the early Christian community were learning to love and serve one another and accepting the varying customs among different members.*

This is fact-type statement in that it is open to historical research and is the type of statement that an impartial historian could make without having a particular belief commitment. The statement has problems for some in that the only historical source available is the Bible. Note, however, that a distinction can be made between statements in the Bible which deal with observable events and those which are interpretations or faith affirmations, e.g. compare 'Jesus the carpenter's son from Nazareth, was crucified by the Romans' and 'Jesus, the Christ, died on the cross for the sins of the whole world'. The concern here is with the *type* of statement, rather than with questions of accuracy.

(iii) *Prayer gives me a feeling that someone really understands me.*

While this statement deals with prayer, which involves beliefs, it is a fact-type statement because it is made as a personal affirmation. It is a statement about the experiences of the speaker, and is acknowledged as such or 'owned' by the use of 'me'.

(iv) *Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. From the time he was young he was specially favoured by the Lord.*

The first sentence is a fact-type statement, open to historical [p. 81](#) research. To say, however, that he was 'specially favoured by the Lord' introduces a belief or interpretation. Not everyone would describe Solomon that way. Who makes that kind of claim? It might be owned as a personal view or grounded by reference to some persons or group who hold that belief, e.g. the writers of the Books of Chronicles.

(v) *The Father of all Spirits woke the Sun Mother and sent her to cover the earth with plants and to bring to life birds and animals.*

Most people readily see this as a belief-type statement, perhaps because it is easier to identify the beliefs of others. It could be grounded by referring to it as a dreamtime story or Aboriginal legend.

(vi) *Everyone has sinned.*

This statement depends heavily upon the meaning one gives to the word 'sin'. Something more is usually meant than the breaking of a human code of law, and thus beliefs are involved, e.g. the Christian beliefs about original sin and the sinlessness of Jesus.

(vii) *Knowledge can help to spoil the environment—or it can help us to take care of God’s world.*

This would be typical of statements made by many religious education teachers, with a preference to ‘God’s world’ included in a seemingly factual comment. This hides the belief dimension instead of making it clear that one has to make some degree of faith commitment to affirm that this is ‘God’s world’. It would be more ‘open’ to split the sentence by simply referring to ‘care of the world’ and then indicating beliefs on which care for the world is based, such as the belief that this world is made by or belongs to God.

(viii) *Most Christian churches keep Sunday as a day for meeting together to worship God.*

This is a fact-type statement. It can be investigated by observation and does not depend on the beliefs of the observer. Similar fact-type statements could be made in discussing the beliefs that lead people to worship on that particular day, e.g. The choice of that day is linked to the belief that Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday.

*p. 82*

(ix) *Rama, as a human form of the god Vishnu, performed many heroic feats.*

To say that a man named Rama performed many heroic feats would be open to historical research, but to refer to him as ‘a human form of the god Vishnu’, adds a belief dimension. It could be translated into a fact-type statement by owning it as a personal belief or by grounding it as a belief held within the Hindu tradition.

(x) *The good that you do will not be treated with ingratitude since God knows those who act piously.*

Again, there is no indication as to who holds this belief, which in this case comes from the Koran and is a teaching of the Islamic tradition. It could be ‘grounded’ by saying ‘the Koran teaches ...’ or ‘Islamic people believe ...’

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# Exposition

## IN THE BEGINNING: THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF GENESIS

*by* Henri Blocher

(Leicester: IVP, English translation, 1984)

Pp.240, £5.95

Reviewed by John Wenham in *Themelios*, April 1985

This is a demanding work but a rewarding one, written by a biblical scholar who is also a systematic theologian. It is not for those who want quick and easy answers to their problems concerning the early chapters of Genesis, but for those who wish to dig deeply into these scriptures. Blocher is quite a difficult writer who has a great deal to say in a small compass. The publishers have sensed the reader's problem and have used two different fonts of type to distinguish the main argument from the numerous more peripheral (but often very interesting) matters for discussion. I strongly recommend that the material in smaller type be omitted on first reading, and be returned to on the second time through.

The author's sole aim is to grasp the meaning of the original writer and to relate the teaching to the thought of today. He believes that the carefully constructed first three chapters come from a wisdom-writer, whom he boldly identifies as Moses himself. He rightly stresses that the writer knew nothing of twentieth-century science and that modern scientific ideas must not be read into what he writes. It is only after the exegesis has been conscientiously done that we can try to relate our findings to modern knowledge. (He reserves his own attempt for a rather technical and inconclusive appendix which ends on just the right note: faith has such confidence in the Word of God that it can be quite open about its hesitations (e.g., with regard to palaeolithic man) and wait patiently for the clouds to clear.)

This open hesitation can also be applied of course to his own theory of the authorship of [Genesis 1](#). If we totally reject J, E, D and P, as I believe we must, and attribute Exodus to

Deuteronomy directly to Moses, Genesis has all the appearance of being *pre*-Mosaic. Indeed there is much to be said for [Genesis 1–11](#) being pre-Abrahamic, and for the idea that God’s earliest revelation came through theophanies: the God who walked in the garden in the cool of the day himself instructing Adam concerning the creation. [p. 85](#)

Blocher is entirely committed to verbal inspiration and to the historicity of Genesis, but he is no literalist. He believes that the days of [Genesis 1](#) are neither 24-hour days nor great ages of time, but form a literary framework, leading up to the sabbath rest. Adam’s rib, the upright serpent and the two trees of the garden are not to be taken literally.

His exegesis is thorough and richly satisfying. Having determined the meaning of the text, he illuminates its significance with the help of later writers, biblical and post-biblical. The mind is stretched and the heart moved with the help of thinkers of many schools, providing an awesome insight into the majesty of God, the plight of man and the final victory of grace. The book is a first-class introduction not only to [Genesis 1–11](#) but to the best reformed theology. It is the sort of book which will bear re-reading many times.

## Faith and Church

### THE PERSON OF CHRIST

*by* David Wells  
(Crossway: 1984)  
Pp.205, \$7.95

Abstract of a review by J. I. Packer, professor of historical and systematic theology, Regent College, Vancouver, Canada, in *Eternity*, July/August, 1985

*This book is designed to be a class text and can be used as such for excellent reasons.*

First, the book is learned, clear, tidy, and in my view right-minded. Subtitled ‘A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation’, it begins with the New Testament material, picking its way surefootedly through the thickets of theories with which the evidence is nowadays overlaid. Then it follows Christology through the patristic period, the so-called Dark Ages (actually times of considerable light), the Reformation era, and the Enlightenment and its aftermath—the real Dark Age, which we are not yet out of. The data is mainstream and sometimes second-hand, but it is all well-digested, economically expressed, and masterful in evaluation, particularly of Schleiermacher, [p. 86](#) Barth, Pittenger, and Schillebeeckx, each of whom gets the full treatment in every sense of that phrase. Last comes a crystallizing of parameters for contemporary Christology—a superb 8-page chapter which alone is worth the price of the book.

Then, second, this book fills a gap. Not since Macintosh (1912!) has one book surveyed so much ground, certainly not in textbook style. Of course (to borrow an oracular phrase which Wells rather overworks), this raises the question of how Christology courses should be set up, and whether textbooks are best written in the developmental 19th century way, starting with Scripture, moving to history, and ending with the author’s own views set forth like a detective story’s last-chapter resolution of all the previous puzzlements. I suspect that the ideal Christology textbook would give equally full treatment to Jesus’ person and his work, both past and present, would show how at each stage thoughts of the one bore on thoughts of the other, and would correlate both these

aspects with the spirituality (devotional relationship to Christ) of which each theology was at once the root and the fruit. While indicating historical links, it would be arranged systematically, and the analysis would be topical rather than genetic. Hints dropped by Wells make me think that he agrees with me, but that limitations of space and of the design of the 'Foundations for Faith' series in which this book appears make it impossible for him to go this way.

Funnies from the proof-reading department include the friendly 'Phil' for Philo on p.68. Less funny is the truly awful mangling of Greek and Hebrew, which for a textbook is disgraceful. And readers should be warned that the writing is compressed and fairly technical, and, like some cheese, needs chewing to bring out the flavour.

## Apologetics

### **THE INEXHAUSTIBLE GOD: BIBLICAL FAITHS AND THE CHALLENGE OF PROCESS THEISM**

*by* Royce Gordon Gruenler  
(Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983)  
Pp.210, \$11.95

Reviewed by L. H. Osborn in *Themelios* April 1985

This is a sustained critique of Process Theism from a New Testament [p. 87](#) scholar who has abandoned the Process camp in favour of evangelicalism. His two main aims are to show that Process Theism fails to live up to its claims to offer a rational alternative to classical Christianity and that it fails to do justice to the biblical revelation.

The work is divided into three main sections. Parts 1 and 2 tackle Process Theism in terms of philosophical theology while Part 3 examines the adequacy of Process Theism as a basis for biblical interpretation and theological reconstruction. The philosophical discussion is characterized (and, to my mind, marred) by a reliance on the jargon of the Process school of thought and by a tendency to ramble. Parts 1 and 2 are thus anything but light reading (a glossary of Process terminology would have been a valuable addition to the book).

In Part 1 Gruenler highlights three major difficulties with Process Theism: its difficulties over divine power, the implications of Process metaphysics for personality and the idea of God as a person, and the incompatibility of a temporal view of God with relativity theory. With reference to the problem of divine power Gruenler argues that the Process denial of omnipotence is based on a secular definition of freedom and leads to metaphysical dualism (it is thus incompatible with orthodox Christianity though not necessarily logically inconsistent). He devotes two chapters to the idea of God as a person (the latter chapter characterizing the work of Hartshorne and Cobb as neo-Buddhist in tendency). His discussion of the problems arising out of a Process view of the temporality of God in chapter 4 is very difficult going and this is not helped by the appearance of nonsensical statements like 'Using our relative frame of reference we may speak of time flowing radially in eight directions: past to future, future to past, east to west, west to east, north to south, south to north, top to bottom, bottom to top ...' (p.80). However he does

succeed in showing that Process Theism's claim to be compatible with contemporary science is false. Part 2 focuses more specifically on the philosophical theology of Charles Hartshorne by examining and rejecting twenty points from a summary of Hartshorne's work by Eugene Peters.

Part 3 is much more readable and I would recommend anyone who is not familiar with Process thought to begin there. Its two chapters constitute a brief critique of Neville, Ogden, Cobb and Ford. In particular he deals with Process interpretations of the Bible and its reconstruction of Christology, Trinitarianism and eschatology.

Since I know of no other book-length treatment of this subject from an evangelical viewpoint I have no choice but to recommend it. However, I feel that the unnecessary difficulties presented by its p. 88 language will limit its usefulness for those who want a basic introduction to Process Theism.

## Mission and Evangelism

### MOMENTOUS DECISIONS IN MISSIONS TODAY

by Donald A. McGavran

(Grand Rapids: Baker House 1984)

Pp.231

Reviewed by Roger S. Greenway in *Urban Mission* May 1985

During the era of missions that is now winding down, the main questions facing missionaries were how to get there and how to evangelize. But today in each of the multitudinous groups of unreached people, the main task is to identify the people groups, reach out to them effectively and plant churches. Travel-wise, the groups are not far away, but they've been passed by in the onward march of the Church. Now they must be recognized, effectively disciplined, with the Church firmly established in each group. For all this to happen, momentous decisions have to be taken at every turn. This book pleads for right decisions, and quickly.

Donald A. McGavran is the 'dean' of modern evangelical missiologists. Founder of the 'Church Growth' school of missionary thinking, author, editor, and prime mover behind dozens of important books, he speaks from the vantage point of more than half a century of deep personal involvement in world missions. He is speaking in this book to the mission leaders of today and tomorrow. He sees the skyline ahead with keen and practiced eyes, and he points out the problems, the vexing issues, and the vital decisions that must be made.

The decisions lie in four principal areas: (1) Theological, (2) Strategic (shall we address the ethnic mosaic?), (3) Organizational (continued roles of the churches and missionary societies), and (4) Questions of method and strategy, including the high priority of ministering the saving Word of God. The book's twenty-six chapters are roughly divided into those four areas. There is one chapter by Everett F. Harrison in which he defends in a moving and scholarly way the authenticity of the biblical command to evangelize the world.

Against the never-ending chorus by liberal missiologists that the p. 89 main concern of missions is the relief of poverty and injustice, McGavran reaffirms the primacy of Gospel



proclamation, conversion, and church planting. He sees this as the more biblical approach to missions and the only guarantee that society will ever be leavened by mercy and justice. Says McGavran:

Christians should feed the physically hungry and clothe the physically naked and should look after their own families' earthly welfare, too. But they do this as pilgrims. They do this as servants of the King. The same King who commands them to feed the physically hungry, commands them to distribute the Bread of Heaven and to disciple *panta ta ethne*. There is no surer way permanently to alleviate poverty, injustice, and oppression than to lead non-Christians to Christ and to help them become practicing Christians. Then these populations will have the power to act in just, peaceful, and brotherly ways (p.221).

Two things that strike me about the book are the important recognition given to cities and the new day of worldwide urban evangelization (chapter 21), and the pinpointing of American Jews as an unreached people (chapter 12). McGavran quotes Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews For Jesus, as saying: 'It must seem incredible to you Christians that someone could live in this country for 26 years and never hear the Gospel. Yet most Jews will exit from this life into a Christless eternity never having heard the Good News.' The same can be said of many more groups of unreached people in this and other countries. They live in the midst of Christians and churches but language, cultural and other factors prevent them from ever really hearing the Gospel.

I recommend the book highly to missionaries and their executives, to college and seminary students, and to Third World leaders who are concerned about the future of missions in, to, and from their countries. McGavran, the senior missionary statesman, says strong and compelling things as he helps us look toward the challenges and decisions ahead.

## Pastoral Ministry

### THE REFORMED PASTOR: A PATTERN FOR PERSONAL GROWTH AND MINISTRY

by Richard Baxter *edited by* James M. Houston  
(Multnomah Press, USA 1983, Pickering & Inglis 1983  
Pp. 158, \$4.95 [p. 90](#))

A review by James D. Rushton in *Churchman* Vol. 98 No. 4, 1984

This is a beautifully bound edition of Baxter's classic statement of the pastor's life and ministry. It is one of a series, emanating from the USA, designed to be components of a preacher's library.

The feature of this series is that each work is abridged and edited for twentieth-century readers. The editor claims to seek out the kernel and leave the husk. Since what is contained is less than half Baxter's original, the editing is certainly radical.

Baxter is introduced to the reader by Dr Richard C. Halverson, who is chaplain to the US Senate. He claims to have applied Baxter's principles to his own ministry with success. He certainly sets the background against which this book should be read, and makes some timely observations on present-day trends. *The Reformed Pastor* is set out in three main

sections: (1) 'An Examination of our Personal Lives', (2) 'Looking Out for the Flock', and (3) 'Some Directions for Preservation of the Fellowship'. There are three appendices, the most interesting being the basis of the Worcestershire Agreement, published in 1653, setting out the concerns of the Association of Evangelical Clergy in that county. Scripture and subject indices are included.

The problem with abridged editions is the inevitable subjectivity of the editors. It is they who decide which parts are relevant, and which are not. In this case, where the editing is so severe, what is gained in simplicity and clarity is often lost in losing the original's passion and warmth. Despite the wide margins, and clear chapter and paragraph headings, I found the style turgid.

However, none of this prevents the immense piety and maturity of Richard Baxter from standing out. Any who have only negative attitudes to those once called Puritan will discover here one who possessed a depth of scholarship, maturity of judgement, and compassion for men's standing with God, that will shake their preconceptions. The church today lives in a totally different culture from Baxter's, but his appreciation of NT spirituality will always be relevant. In an age so largely secular, what is needed is clergy who have bowed in the presence of God, and who are able in life, preaching, and personal counsel to present him before men. This is the witness of Baxter, and no amount of modern technology will ever replace this as a source of ministerial fruitfulness.

If this volume of 158 pages serves to promote such quality of ministry, it will be well worthwhile. If it commends the quality of the Puritans as some of God's ablest men in their day, so much the better. One suspects, however, that Baxter is best encountered kernel and [p. 91](#) husk together. For those who find Puritan wordiness too much, this may be your answer. [p. 92](#)

## Journal Information

### *Publications Referred to in this Issue*

#### **Churchman**

Published by Church Society (Anglican), 186 Kennington Park Road, London, SE11 4BT, England. Rates: £8.95 p.a. (4 issues).

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#### **Themelios**

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