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# Editorial

## A CALL TO DO OUR THEOLOGICAL HOMEWORK

The watershed between the Christian faith and other religious faiths and secular ideologies is the doctrine of creation. Biblical revelation begins with the unequivocal statement 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. Creation is not a mystical illusion, nor is matter evil; the world neither emanates from God nor is independent of God. God the creator was satisfied that his creation was good and he rested from his work. Further, biblical revelation affirms that mankind, male and female, belongs both to the creation order and to the spirit order, being created in the image and likeness of the creator himself. In relation to God, we are unique of all creation, for we alone have the capacity for direct communication with God and an abiding awareness of right and wrong. Without this distinction the incarnation would be impossible—sheer nonsense.

The creator has given to the human race the responsibility of stewardship over all of creation. He will judge and punish those who wilfully misuse their stewardship and bless those who act with a sense of accountability. In the present ecological crisis there is a growing self-awareness of the abuse of creation and of coming judgment. Our response to this crisis is not to look to creation itself for spiritual and inner power, but to acknowledge that we have failed in our stewardship, to repent of our sins against the creator God and to seek his wisdom in the repairing of the damage done to creation. Only a change of heart can save the human race from self-extinction. The End may be nearer than we think.

The creation spirituality of the new age cults rightly calls for the rights of all sentient beings and restraint on the use of all irreplaceable natural resources, but it is powerless to reverse the downhill slide. Protests and worthy actions for the protection of nature are merely cosmetic. The unscrupulous greed of forest contractors in league with corrupt political bureaucrats vitiates any serious attempt to replace the loss in natural resources. The arms maker, who earns enormous revenue for his government, produces and sells lethal weapons to the poorer nations with little restraint so that the peace movements are kept powerless. The issue today is no longer just one of poverty but one of escalating violence experienced in the whole of life, from the child in the womb to the geriatric, and from riots to the threat of nuclear war. Unless the creator God in his sovereign mercy restrains the evil power-brokers of this world, there is no hope. It is time for God to act; and we praise him that he is doing so.

Through his redeeming Son he is reconciling the world to himself and the influence of the Church as salt and light in the world is increasingly [p.100](#) being manifest. Evangelism, service and justice are the components of God's mission in the world. The Psalmist declares that the nations may rage, and the kings of the earth and rulers gather against the anointed one, but the Lord laughs at them and rebukes them in his anger. He has promised his Son the nations for his inheritance and the ends of the earth for his possession.

We cry, 'O Holy Spirit, renew your new creation, the Church, and through it redeem all of creation!' The order is not from creation spirituality to the spirituality of the new creation; but from *new* creation spirituality to the renewal of all creation. The beauty, order and goodness of God's creation can be fully understood only through the eyes of those who have experienced recreation in the image of Christ. Natural theology has value to those who have been given the spectacles of God's special revelation as revealed in Scripture, as Calvin and Edwards so clearly saw. This new creation spirituality is both individual and social in its experience of the grace of God, a new community exhibiting

peace and righteousness. But alas, the Church has so often failed to be the guardian of creation, and the world has rejected it and turned to the priestesses and gurus of the age of Aquarius.

The key to this actualization of the new creation is the Holy Spirit. Creation spirituality reduces the Holy Spirit to being the spirit of creation itself, to a cosmic mystical inner force whose secrets have been well-learned by its spiritual leaders. Against this background the doctrine of the Holy Spirit once again becomes the centre stage in theological debate. Leadership in missiological praxis is not enough. We must do our theological homework on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, or as in the parable of the sower we will be rootless and choked by the weeds of other gospels. The call to study is not a call to privatized study in the library alone, but a call to utilize the manifold gifts the Holy Spirit gives to the body, so that in unity we may become spiritually mature and attain the fulness of Christ. We need teams of scholars, churchmen, educationalists and missionaries who will share their resources to do theology in the everchanging world for Christ's sake. [p.101](#)

# The Holy Spirit, Creation and New Creation

Ken R. Gnanakan

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*The author of this article sets the perspectives for this issue of ERT. He welcomes the new emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in ecumenical thinking, but warns against a spirituality drawn from fallen creation. The author explores the work of the new creation spirituality of the Spirit in the renewal of creation, community and in the wider society. The victory of the Resurrection is suggested as the link between creation and new creation and the only hope of mankind.*

Editor

Ever since Roland Allen's powerful reminder about the centrality of the role of the Holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup> theology has struggled to give to the third person of the Godhead the place he deserves within the work of God in the world today. Barth's Christocentrism, for example, dominated the scene for decades. But now with so much within the Church to remind us of the Spirit's working it is time for us to take a fresh look.

The theme for the WCC Canberra assembly is timely—'Come, Holy Spirit,—Renew the whole Creation'. This is the first time the assembly has focused on the Holy Spirit, and with the wide range of representation within its membership one can be certain that the impact will be significant. As stated in their *Resources for Sections*, 'Our choice of a Spirit-centred theme may well reflect the mood of the times in which we live. Rapid changes are taking place in our social and political life. The ongoing search for spiritual values and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected writings of Roland Allen*, edited by David M. Paton (World Dominion Press, 1960). I have developed his thoughts in 'The Role of the Holy Spirit' in my *Kingdom Concerns* (TBT, 1989), pp. 165–186.

human community, the longing for justice, and the expectations around the dawn of a new millennium—all these must have played a part in the choice of our theme. We are convinced that when we gather as churches we must seek to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Churches ([Rev. 2:11](#)) in our day.’<sup>2</sup> p. 102

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Rather than attempting to evaluate the WCC theme and its related documents, this paper sets out to make some comments on the significance of the Holy Spirit to creation and new creation. The linking of creation and new creation is important, as whatever we need to remind ourselves about creation today ought to be from our own eschatological perspective. God proclaimed, ‘Behold, I make all things new’ ([Rev. 21:5](#)), and we live today in the anticipation of the new creation that will fully be available in the coming kingdom.

Right at the outset, we face the question whether there is continuity between the present creation and whatever God wants to accomplish in the *eschaton*. Needless to say, to live in anticipation is to experience already some of the New Creation reality. The Holy Spirit is this foretaste—‘a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance’ ([Eph. 1:4](#)). The Holy Spirit who has central place in the making of this final creation also has a part in the making known of this reality within the present creation.

We must take seriously the possibility that with all the discussions on the nature and ministry of the Holy Spirit there could be a shift in our theological emphasis from Jesus Christ to the Holy Spirit. But this is not to displace Christ, but to place the Holy Spirit where Christ himself showed he would be. Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, ‘He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you’ ([Jn. 16:14](#)). A proper pneumatological emphasis will ensure the right Christological focus. One cannot easily negate the centrality of Christ which is so forthrightly portrayed—‘For by him all things were created ... and in him all things hold together’ ([Col. 1:16f.](#)).

A brief look at the Bible will reveal an interlinking between the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of Jesus Christ. For instance, when the birth of Jesus Christ was announced Joseph found Mary to be ‘with child of the Holy Spirit’ ([Luke 1:3, 5](#); [Matt. 1:18](#)). The same Spirit who acts in creation, the life giving Spirit, was active in bringing about God’s becoming flesh. Then in the baptism of Jesus Christ, the temptation, and the public ministry that follows there is explicit reference to the Spirit’s activity. The emphatic references to the Holy Spirit’s anointing at the commencement of Jesus’ ministry must serve to underline the integral link between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ.

Moreover, the interlinking comes out forcefully in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who is credited for raising Jesus from the dead ([Rom. 8:11](#)). And it is the resurrection that brings the decisive p. 103 blow for fallen creation. Paul exclaims, ‘Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ He is ecstatic about the resurrected life in Jesus. The new creation of which we are part has been made available in an anticipatory way in the life we live in Christ. Jesus Christ, the first fruits of this new creation, the Lord of the Church ‘who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body’ ([Phil. 3:21](#)).

The Holy Spirit—‘the giver of life’—raising Jesus from the dead, giving new life to the believer and pouring out himself to initiate the Church into its life-giving mission—is seen in his broadest possible scope. He is seen to be not only embracing all of the created order at present but all that is to come in the Kingdom. The work of the totality of the triune God

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<sup>2</sup> *Resources for Sections: The Theme, Subthemes and Issues*. WCC Seventh Assembly, WCC 1990, p. 1.

is being disclosed to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit, making known the things of God in Jesus Christ to his people today.

What this means to us today is important. If the Holy Spirit has now filled us with the hope of ultimate victory, we need to be demonstrating this reality *even now*. The resurrection of Jesus Christ spelled his victory over sin. We need to be seeing this victory right here in this world controlled by Satan, 'for [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his son' ([Col. 1:11](#)). We draw out some of the implications below.

## **NEW CREATION SPIRITUALITY IN A FALLEN WORLD**

Paul writes to the Corinthian church, a church struggling with various spiritual issues, 'If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation' ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)). The immediate reference to the new creation is the bringing of the individual believer into fellowship in Christ and into the community of the new creation. Paul elaborates when he writes to the Ephesians: 'We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus ...' ([Eph. 2:10](#)). Linking the Spirit with creation and new creation immediately draws our attention to our personal relationship to God, our spirituality—our personal attitudes towards God, to people and all that is around us. We have tended to take a rather negative view of spirituality, in terms of a retreat from the world. 'Worldiness' has been shunned and what has been advocated is 'other-worldiness'.

In the light of our 'creation-new creation' link, what we need to develop is a worldly spirituality. Part of the problem stems from our attitude to creation itself. We have been unfortunately conditioned by Hindu and Greek negative attitudes to the world, and hence our salvation and our sanctification is looked upon in terms of a separation [p. 104](#) from the created order. The Hindu attitude to the impermanence of this world equated it to meaninglessness. All of creation, including the body and flesh, is therefore seen as that from which we need to escape. This attitude however, needs to be eliminated: creation was seen by God himself as 'good'. 'Goodness' here is not merely something right and proper but that which is meaningful, beautiful and purposeful.

We need to be clear that our new creation spirituality is not merely a personal or individual spirituality. Recent explorations of 'creation spirituality' have been helpful in restoring a balance. While the intention of such thinkers is good, what they are really advocating is 'fallen-creation' spirituality. However, they serve to remind us that, since creation links us with all that God has made, our spirituality must be worked out within that scope. Sin is definitely personal; but man is not an individual in isolation. This is why the sin of Adam has had universal effects. And now, as a new creation in Christ, we can transcend the effects of that sin. It is 'new creation spirituality' we now speak about.

We have no doubt that spirituality must continue to find its expressions in inner depths, continuing in traditional forms of spirituality, even learning from our Asian spiritual manifestations. However, we need to see what is meant by the 'new emphasis upon the dimensions within spirituality of openness and submission rather than struggle, of one's place within God's world rather than one's separation from it'.<sup>3</sup>

## **THE CARING MINISTRY OF THE REDEEMED COMMUNITY**

What we have considered above needs to be elaborated in terms of the shift now being effected from the individual to the community. Unfortunately, our Christianity, and

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

therefore our spirituality as we have just seen, has been influenced by a false idea of individualism. There is no doubt that God has created us as individuals, and that individuality is key to our identity within humanity. However, a negative spirit of individualism has eroded even our understanding of Christian community.

'The Spirit who sets us free reconciles us to God in Christ and gathers us into a community of God's people. Estranged from God, humanity seeks its own destiny, its sinful arrogance that results in brokenness of life, alienation from one another and from the rest of [p. 105](#) creation.'<sup>4</sup> This sums up very well the effects of sin in terms of the alienation that is characteristic of individualism. The Church, then, the community of the new creation, brought into being through the activity of the Holy Spirit, must demonstrate a breaking away from the alienation that resulted from sin and show signs of the Kingdom community brought together by Jesus Christ. The divisions within the Church are a major hindrance to our witness in the world today.

When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples who were gathered together at Pentecost, there was a bringing together for the first time of this new community in Christ. The first thing they realized was that they 'began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' ([Ac. 2:4](#)). Peter was to realize the significance of this phenomenon much later. The gospel was to be sounded out to every creature; salvation was now available for all in Jesus Christ. Every one present heard in his own language and was able to witness this miracle in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of unity. That is why even the Trinity is unity. The alienation that sin brings about—even the alienation of Jew and Gentile—is directly in conflict with the unity that the Spirit creates. The alienation that come from man's rebellion against God brought about a separation not only from God but from the rest of humanity. The Holy Spirit recreates this true community when he sets into motion the Church, the new creation, a community of all who believe in Jesus from every corner of this world.

What are the distinctives of this community? First, the new community that God creates is a community that cares. The blindness of sin has closed the doors of caring for others. Selfishness and greed are the distinctives. But men and women in Christ are those whose eyes are opened to the needs of others in a world with people who are hurting inside, lonely and lost, deprived and forsaken. The community of the new creation begins to experience this concern within its own confines, but then goes on to demonstrate this to fallen creation.

God's concern for the poor is demonstrated through the heart of the new creation community. What must be demonstrated by this community is not just an attitude of pity that will give only from its material possessions, but one which will care enough to get to the sinful roots of imposed poverty. There are perversions and injustices that need to be attacked.

People hunger to be near to God. The Spirit moves within situations both of material poverty and material affluence, challenging and [p. 106](#) enabling persons and communities to proclamation and service. The power of spirituality can be seen in a special way in the lives of some of the poor. Imposed poverty is an expression of sinful forces in society which create and perpetuate social inequality, and is contrary to the will of God, yet some have found in materially desperate circumstances a deeper awareness of their dependence upon God, and a sharper sense of the reality of God's presence. They have found a spirituality which gives them the power to survive degradation and despair, and empowers them to work for God's justice.' God's 'fighting' for the rights of the poor is

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

positively a rebuke to the affluent: 'materially satisfied, they are less likely to recognize their need for God'.<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit deals with the rich who in their callousness refuses to care for the poor.

Further, the community of the new creation, the body of Christ, begins to experience the joy of createdness once again. What was lost soon after creation and therefore impossible to experience in fallen creation is now made possible. Man made in the image of God was created with individuality within community. This individuality was characterized by freedom and dignity: a freedom to be all that God had made him to be, and a dignity to do all that God intended him to do. The world today is crippled under the bondage of sin, manifested before our eyes in all kinds of seen and unseen shackles. The dehumanization of men and women by exploiters and oppressors, the alienation of man from man by racist discriminations, and the degradation of human beings itself, is far too obvious. It is the new creation community of the Holy Spirit that will demonstrate to the world the freedom and dignity which there is in Christ.

## **ACTUALIZING NEW COMMUNITY SPIRITUALITY**

A look at sin from the perspective of the new creation will help us to widen our understanding of this biblical concept. *Resources for Sections*, drawing together from previous challenges, urges us to struggle to liberate every person, community, and the whole of creation to be involved in 'concrete struggles to transform history in the perspective of the Kingdom of God'.<sup>6</sup> Dealing with sin inescapably implies dealing with its manifestations all over God's created world. If sin is universal, it is manifest in the totality of this world's systems. However, to deal with structures is a very abstract expression of a **P. 107** concrete concern. It is people who make structures of evil, who make society evil and therefore make the world's systems what they are today. However, dealing with personal sin is not merely dealing with personal piety. New creation spirituality must be tangibly demonstrated as the community of God's new creation gives itself to a sinful world, just as Jesus Christ gave himself for the sins of this world. Wilberforce, Pandita Ramabai, even William Carey gave themselves to a total expression of the gospel in their attempts to see spirituality influence the sinful systems of this world.

However, the greater need is for the new creation community to demonstrate this spirituality first in itself. The prophetic voices of the Old Testament challenged God's people who were callously immersed in their perversions and injustices. The very structure of God's community was being attacked. The prophets were pointing towards what was to be demonstrated within the community of the new creation in Christ. Our prayer should first be: 'Holy Spirit, renew thy New Creation, the community submitted to Jesus Christ'.

Coming into God's kingdom implies accepting his kingship. There is no claim on the benefits of his rule unless we accept the demands of his kingship. There is little justification for claims that we are cleaning up the evil structures of this world unless people first acknowledge the Lordship of the resurrected Jesus Christ. The Church, the community of the new creation, will need to actualize this victory and stand as a witness to a world that is blinded by the dominion of darkness.

## **SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT RENEWING CREATION**

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78f.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



The Spirit transforming creation calls us to have a new relationship to creation itself. 'As we await the final realization of God's will for all things, the Spirit calls us to work for a right relationship with creation.'<sup>7</sup> The same Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is the Spirit that will raise fallen creation in its decay to be a renewed creation. Is this a breaking in of something new, or a continuity in the economy of God? Whatever the sense of the new order to be consummated with the coming of the Kingdom, we may be sure that there must be signs of this new creation even in our *present* creation.

The Holy Spirit who brooded over the face of the water at the time of creation now broods over this present creation. It is his brooding that brings about a global ecological concern, not only within the community of the new creation, but ironically even outside. Christians p. 108 have been scathingly attacked for an arrogance towards creation which has resulted in the exploitation of the material world. The ecological crisis viewed as a theological problem will help us recognize our sad failure. Our stewardship has been misinterpreted, resulting in a mismanagement. A respect for creation will serve as a corrective to the years of environmental exploitation. On the other hand, one must also guard against the kind of respect that will lead to a total worship of mankind. However, a healthy respect for the handiwork of the Creator must point to the Creator himself as responsible for all the beauty and wonder, a Creator who desiring the best for man planned for him a meaningful existence within a purposeful world he had created for his glory.

We must note that the broadening out of the scope of new creation is linked directly to our appreciation of the scope of God's rule. For instance, there should be no argument against the fact that God is ultimately Lord of all that he has created. But the acceptance of the fact that God has created both man and this environment must lead us to accept his concern for all that he has created. If the new creation community, brought about by the activity of the Holy Spirit, must develop in greater sensitivity to God's total concern, it must accept the ecological challenge. The correlation of man and his environment will highlight the intensity of Paul's imagery of even creation waiting in 'eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed' ([Rom. 8:19](#)). Rather than merely emphasizing human redemption, it is the *interdependence* that we must also stress, and in doing so seek to restore a more positive attitude to our God-given environment and God's concern for it.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The pneumatological emphasis brings us face to face with a totally new attitude to God's work outside the new creation community, to all people within creation. 'The conviction that the whole creation is the sphere of the Spirit's activity has again and again raised questions regarding the discernment of the Spirit outside the boundaries of the Church. In a world that is becoming more and more pluralistic, the issue has become more and more pressing than ever before. Whether Christians should seek to discern the Spirit also in places where the name of Jesus is not acknowledged has become an important question.'<sup>8</sup> P. 109

Our answer to this question should unquestionably be in the affirmative. The Holy Spirit is at work in all of God's creation, and hence he is at work even amongst people where Christ is not acknowledged. However, this does not mean that it is in the same way that he works in the new creation community, the kingdom community. Whereas his

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

activity within the community relates to his sanctifying purposes, his activity outside is salvific, in the sense of bringing men and women face to face with the decisive claims of Jesus Christ.

But we need to take a look at the other side. The Holy Spirit's acting in all of creation inevitably gives us a new attitude to all peoples. Our mission has been stifled because of a negative view of people of other religions, and our confrontation with them. Our arrogant, boastful claims have severed our relationship with our neighbours right from the start. If the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, is responsible for the creation of all the people of this earth, then we need to discover this fundamental commonality before we begin to build false barriers.

'Christians live side by side with communities of other faiths and convictions. Together they share a common humanity and face common challenges and tasks.'<sup>9</sup> This understanding of commonality needs to be explored to greater depth. While our Christian commitment clearly demands a stand for Jesus Christ as the only way for salvation, it does not deny us the right to stand alongside other human beings in common endeavours. In this sense, fighting against injustices and social evils does not imply the bringing in of the Kingdom of God, but the demonstration of Kingdom values, the values of the new creation community. It is here that a greater clarification is needed.

Moreover, we need to develop a more positive view of religion itself. If man is created in the image of God, there is a natural tendency in man towards worshipping God. Satan is active and he diverts man into false forms of worship. But the false essence of worship is what God himself has invested in man. Religions then are an expression of man's desire to get back to God despite his sinfulness. Such a view will help us to have a positive approach to our neighbours instead of the destructive attitude that has hitherto led us to condemnatory and judgmental confrontations. The devout Hindu, the sincere Muslim, truly longs for God and we need to appreciate that fact. The continuity from creation to new creation in this sense implies a continuity from religion to the Kingdom.

However, one will find it hard to justify the claim of God's *salvific* p. 110 activity in and through other religions. *Resources* suggests, 'This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or group of peoples.'<sup>10</sup> This is certainly true if it is meant to combat the idea that the biblical God works only through the Western people or through their culture. But that is not what is implied by the Spirit's working through the new creation. To affirm unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of other faiths *with salvific effect* is totally contrary to biblical teaching. However, the Holy Spirit is definitely at work making men and women aware of the inadequacy of their traditions and pointing them to the ultimate truth that Jesus Christ has brought to light through his death and resurrection.

Today's renewed emphasis on the Holy Spirit provides a welcome challenge, if it truly means a return to the divine initiative for our mission as portrayed in the Book of Acts. The life and dynamism of the early Church was directly related to the life-giving activity of the Holy Spirit, empowering ordinary human beings in their utter humanness to be part of God's mission to the world. In a world torn apart by various forces today, it is the motivating force of the Holy Spirit that will truly lead us in the right direction. Accordingly, my version of the prayer will be: 'Come Holy Spirit, renew thy *new* creation'. It is then that

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

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we will recognize our responsibility to be involved in God's concern for the whole creation.

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# God's Visible Glory: The Beauty of Nature in the Thought of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards

Diana Butler

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*Today there is a growing tendency to fuse nature with grace. Creation is God, as in the Hindu view that nature emanates from God and returns to God in cyclic regularity, that matter is spiritual energy. The visible is but the maya (illusion) or lila (play) of the invisible. There is no essential gap between the creator and the creation. Matthew Fox, the influential American Catholic theologian, expounds creation spirituality as the mystical absorption into Mother Earth, the return to the original innocence of the child and the firm rejection of the fall/redemption theology. The contemporary ecological debate is being moved in this direction by the exponents of New Age philosophies. There is an urgent need for solid biblical foundations if evangelicals are going to enter the ecological debate effectively. This article on Calvin's and Edwards' understanding of creation as God's glory, of the fall as blinding mankind to God's revelation in creation, and of Scripture as providing the necessary glasses (to use Calvin's image) to understand God's revelation through nature is a useful study. The author discusses a number of key issues in Calvin's and Edwards' understanding of biblical orthodoxy offering a theological foundation for ecological understanding. The missing dimension in this article is the role of the Holy Spirit, without which no true understanding of nature is impossible.*

Editor

One of Calvin's earliest statements of Protestant ideas,<sup>1</sup> the 1534 preface to Pierre Olivétan's translation of the NT, begins with his joy in creation:

God the Creator, the most perfect and excellent Maker of things, who had [p. 112](#) already shown himself more than admirable in their creation, made man as his masterpiece ... formed in his own image and likeness, in which we see a bright refulgence of God's glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Haroutunian called this preface Calvin's 'first statement of faith as a Protestant'. See John Calvin, *Calvin: Commentaries* (transl. and ed. Joseph Haroutunian; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 58n.

Calvin's praise continued as he considered all of nature:

For he has raised everywhere, in all places and in all things, his ensigns and emblems, under blazons so clear and intelligible that no one can pretend ignorance in not knowing such a sovereign Lord.... It is evident that all creatures, from those in the firmament to those which are in the centre of the earth, are able to act as witnesses and messengers of his glory to all men.... For the little birds that sing, sing of God; the beasts clamour for him; the elements dread him, the mountains echo him, the fountains and flowing waters cast their glances at him, and the grass and flowers laugh before him.<sup>2</sup>

Two hundred years later, in the small town of Northampton, Massachusetts, one of John Calvin's heirs, Jonathan Edwards, echoed the reformer's words while preaching on [Psalm 89](#):

The beauty of trees, plants, and flowers, with which God has bespangled the face of the earth is delightful, the beautiful frame of the body of men, especially in its perfection is astonishing, the beauty of the moon and stars, is wonderful, the beauty of highest heavens, is transcendent, [and] the excellency of angels and the saints in light is very glorious.<sup>3</sup>

In 1748, Edwards' poetic observations on nature were published as *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*. Since that time, scholars, beginning with Perry Miller, have sought to make sense of Edwards' use of the images of nature.<sup>4</sup> In his introductory essay to Edwards' *Images*, Miller argued that Edwards used nature typologically to fuse p. 113 nature and revelation: 'In this way of thinking, the image was no longer a detachable adornment on the surface of truth; it *was* truth.'<sup>5</sup> Edwards appropriated Locke and Newton, extended typology to include nature and history, and accomplished a 'radical break with the past: an exaltation of nature to a level of authority co-equal with revelation'.<sup>6</sup> According to Miller, Edwards' use of nature is radically different from Calvin's pessimism about the natural order. He quoted the *Institutes* to support his conclusion: 'though [nature] is a mirror in which [men] are given clear representations of God, they can get no real advantage because of their stupidity'.<sup>7</sup>

While Perry Miller is not entirely wrong about Locke's and Newton's influence on Edwards' theology, his conclusions about Edwards' views on nature are incorrect. Miller misunderstood Edwards because he misunderstood Calvin's theology of creation.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–60.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ralph Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards, the Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Discussing Edwards on the natural order is not an easy task. The natural order, according to Edwards, is in the realm of 'secondary beauty' as opposed to 'primary beauty' (see the *Nature of True Virtue*). Secondary beauty is 'inferior'—not in the sense of lesser value, but because it is derivative. Natural beauty is a shadow of primary beauty: God's beauty. To make matters more difficult, Edwards also differentiates between simple and complex beauty. This paper is concerned with nature, a single aspect of secondary beauty—in this instance, nature's beauty—which may be either single or complex. Secondary beauty also includes 'philosophy of being, concept of God and the beauty of Christ' along with moral and ethical concerns. I am thankful to my friend Louis Mitchell, Th.D. candidate at Harvard, for explaining these distinctions in Edward's thoughts. His unpublished paper, 'Beauty and the Experience of Beauty in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards' (seminar paper, Harvard Divinity School, 1982), was invaluable as I prepared for this study.

<sup>5</sup> Perry Miller, 'Introduction', in Jonathan Edwards, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* (ed. Perry Miller; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Following Miller, various philosophical and literary interpretations have isolated Edwards from his Calvinism. Against such interpretations, Clyde Holbrook said of Edwards, 'From first to last he was a theologian in the broadest sense. His early scientific and metaphysical notes were linked to the deeper problem of the nature and destiny of man in God's world.... [H]e was caught by the vision of a universe whose every aspect bespoke the handiwork of a holy and beautiful God.'<sup>8</sup> A full interpretation of nature in Edwards' work must take his Calvinism seriously.

Taking Edwards' Calvinism seriously in connection with creation presents a problem: besides debating the issue of natural theology, scholars have done little work on Calvin's view of nature. Susan Schreiner, in her doctoral dissertation, argued that a proper understanding of 'Calvin's doctrine of creation is necessary to restore that balance originally characteristic of his thought. Calvin emphasized both the sinfulness of the human race and the belief that the creation still reflects His glory.'<sup>9</sup>

This balanced view is characteristic of Calvin and the Reformed tradition which followed him. Comparing Calvin to Jonathan Edwards, a later representative of that tradition, illustrates the similarities between their views and the continuity of the role of nature in Reformed theology. When Calvin's views are properly understood, it is [p. 114](#) clear that Edwards substantially borrowed from Calvin's theological thought on nature. In citing the similarities between the two, Perry Miller's conclusions about Edwards' 'natural theology' are corrected.

This comparison consists of three questions. First, what are the theological purposes of nature for Calvin and Edwards? Second, how does Edwards use Calvin? Third, is there a natural theology in Calvin and Edwards?

## THE METAPHORS FOR NATURE

Neither Calvin nor Edwards is a utilitarian: nature is beautiful because it is beautiful. Although there are important theological purposes for nature, the excellency of creation can be enjoyed because it is delightful. According to Calvin,

In grasses, trees and fruits, apart from their various uses, there is beauty of appearance and pleasantness of odour.... Has the Lord clothed the flowers with the great beauty that greets our eyes, the sweetness of smell that is wafted upon our nostrils, and yet will it be unlawful for our eyes to be affected by that beauty, or our sense of smell by the sweetness of that odour? ... Did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?<sup>10</sup>

In a short essay, 'The Beauty of the World', Edwards extols the pleasantness of the colour of flowers, grass, and the sky. The essay ends with the sadness of death: 'Hence the reason why almost all men, and those that seem to be very miserable, love life, because they cannot bear to lose sight of such a beautiful and lovely world.' Men and women would 'rather live in much pain and misery than lose' the pleasure of natural beauty.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Clyde Holbrook, 'Jonathan Edwards and His Detractors', *T Today* 10 (1953), 392.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Schreiner, 'The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin' (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1983), xvi.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. T. McNeill, transl. F. Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.10.2.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, 'The Beauty of the World', in *Images*, 137.

## CALVIN'S AND EDWARDS' USE OF METAPHOR

Even though Calvin and Edwards both enjoy natural beauty, nature has important theological purposes. To describe these purposes, both use metaphorical language. In their theological works, Calvin and Edwards use rich, poetic terms to describe nature: creation is a shadow, image, school, mirror, fabric, or theatre. These words fall into four general groups reflecting four different theological uses of [P. 115](#) nature: the pedagogical metaphors, the metaphors of sight, artistic metaphors, and types.

(1) *The pedagogical metaphors.* The first purpose of nature is *to teach*. According to Calvin 'the contemplation of heaven and earth ... is the very school of God's children'<sup>12</sup> where even 'irrational creatures give instruction'.<sup>13</sup> All of nature is a school; even the stars are 'preaching the glory of God like a teacher in a seminary of learning'.<sup>14</sup> Creation teaches God's character and glory; it is a school for the Christian life. Edwards never used the word 'school', but he used similar language. For example, 'The works of God are but a kind of voice or language of God to instruct intelligent beings.... And why should we not think that he would teach and instruct in this way?'<sup>15</sup> For Edwards, the created order teaches 'spiritual and divine things to show of what excellent advantage it will be'.<sup>16</sup> The pedagogical metaphors depict nature as a teacher. It instructs humanity in God's glory through his works and providential care; its lessons teach that there is a God.

(2) *The metaphors of sight.* The second purpose of nature is *to show forth God's character*. The most striking metaphors for nature in Calvin's and Edwards' theologies are visual metaphors. In Calvin's thought, 'this skilful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror'<sup>17</sup> which clearly reflects God. Nature is a 'living likeness' of God.<sup>18</sup> The word *image* functions for Edwards in nearly the same way *mirror* functions in Calvin's works. Although image and type are closely linked in Edwards' thinking, *image* conveys actually likeness or reflection—a concept much like Calvin's mirror. For example, 'As the SUN is an image of Christ upon account of its pleasant light and benefits, refreshing life-giving influences, so it is on account of its extraordinary fierce heat, it being a fire of vastly greater fierceness than any other in the visible world whereby is represented the wrath of the Lamb'.<sup>19</sup> The sun, in this example, is more than a pedagogical illustration, it is a mirror image of Christ's mercy and judgment.

Not all the visual metaphors are positive. Nature, besides being an image or mirror of the divine, can also be a shadow. Calvin stated that [p. 116](#) when nature is elevated to the status of creator, it becomes 'a shadow deity to drive away the true God'.<sup>20</sup> He referred to nature as the 'shadows of the world' when contemplated in relationship to God's glory.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.6.4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.15.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* [Ps. 19:4](#). Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 53n.

<sup>15</sup> Edwards, *Images*, no. 57.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.6.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards, *Images*, no. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.6.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Sermons from Job* (transl. Leroy Nixon; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 300.

Edwards conceived of nature in the same way: nature is an image, a direct reflection of God, but it become a shadow when confronted with the reality of the thing itself. He continued the sun example from above, 'for doubtless the substance will be vastly beyond the shadow, as God's brightness and glory is so much beyond the brightness of the sun, His image. Thus the sun is but a shade and darkness in comparison of it'.<sup>22</sup>

Theologically, the visual metaphors of mirror, likeness, shadow, and image suggest that Calvin and Edwards 'see in a mirror dimly' ([1 Cor. 13:12](#)) through the created order. Nature is a glorious, beautiful, and excellent reflection of God, but in comparison to God himself, it is still a limited reflection.

(3) *The artistic metaphors*. The third purpose of nature is *to illustrate God's creative activity*. The artistic metaphors depict nature as a theatre, painting, or exhibition. Calvin called the world a 'glorious theatre' of God's works. Men and women were placed there as spectators.<sup>23</sup> The universe 'was founded as a spectacle of God's glory'.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere he wrote, 'God's powers are actually represented as in a painting'.<sup>25</sup> Words like workmanship and handiwork reappear throughout the *Institutes*. To Edwards, God is an architect who created the 'astonishing fabric of the world we behold'.<sup>26</sup> Divine glory is exhibited, expressed, and communicated through God's artistic creation.<sup>27</sup>

Although they beautifully illustrate God's activity, the artistic metaphors present a theological problem. Is God like an earthly artist who creates for the sake of an audience? No, answered both Edwards and Calvin: God creates because it gives him joy. Edwards said, 'The p. 117 notion of God creating the world, in order to receive any thing properly from the creature, is not only contrary to the nature of God, but inconsistent with the notion of creation.'<sup>28</sup> The creature can recognize the Creator through his works, but that recognition adds nothing to the creation. The creation is perfect and complete without human appreciation. According to Calvin, the creation, even without human comprehension, is God's perfect handiwork: '[T]he Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest testimonies, and they flow away without profiting us.'<sup>29</sup> God is an Artist who needs no audience; he delights in his own creation. Nature remains, even with no spectators, a perfect theatre.

(4) *Typology*. The fourth purpose of nature is to be a type of God's truth. Concerning Edwards' and Calvin's use of typology, Conrad Cherry said:

Typology, an exegetical method of the ancient church, was especially important to Calvin and the Puritans as an alternative to both an unimaginative literalism and a fanciful allegorizing. Typology aimed to take a text first of all for what is said, and then, without

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<sup>22</sup> Edwards, *Images*, no. 128.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.6.2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.12.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (2 vols.; Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1.97.

<sup>27</sup> For more on Edwards and artistic language, as well as his influence on the arts, see Terrence Erdt's helpful *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, *Dissertation*, 97.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.11.

abandoning its plain meaning, move to its prefiguring of a later, historical meaning (the antitype).<sup>30</sup>

Miller, and others following him, have argued that Calvin employed type exclusively from Scripture. According to this view, Edwards led a ‘Puritan revolt against Puritanism’ in his extension of typology from the Bible ‘into nature and history’.<sup>31</sup> Is Edwards’ use of typology a radical break with the Reformed tradition, as Miller suggested? How did Calvin use typology?

In the *Institutes*, Calvin demonstrated the continuities between the Testaments by employing various types of the Messiah from the OT. *Institutes* 2.11 is Calvin’s most explicit use of typological method. The OT foreshadowed—specially with its representative types of Christ—the revelation of Jesus as Messiah in the NT. However, this chapter is not Calvin’s only use of typology. In other sections of the *Institutes*, lightning, thunder, and floods typologically represent God’s power, p. 118 and the sun is a type of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Types are plentiful in the commentaries: winds are a type for angels, farmers are a type of God as provider,<sup>33</sup> and a threshing floor is a type of the church.<sup>34</sup> Most of Calvin’s nature typology came directly from Scripture.

Again, Edwards did not deviate substantially from Calvin’s example. His natural images are drawn, primarily, from the Bible: marriage is a type for the church, Christ is represented by a lamb, a rose is a type for Christ, and the wind is a type for the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> Following Calvin, the sun, stars, and light provided Edwards with many of his types. Quotations from Scripture fill the pages of his *Images*. Occasionally, Edwards turned to familiar New England images: silkworms and milled corn are types of Christ. He also borrowed freely from scientific treatises: he was particularly fond of Newton’s *Optics*. Although Edwards employed typology with literary beauty and originality, and used scientific images which were not available to Calvin, most of his images are drawn from the Bible.

Both men believed that nature was a book of types, but both also adhere closely to the nature typology of Scripture. In his ‘Types of the Messiah’, Edwards wrote, ‘Not only the things of the Old Testament are typical; for this is but one part of the typical world. The system of created beings may be divided into two parts, the typical world and the antitypical world.’<sup>36</sup> Calvin implied the same thing when he said that God had ‘raised everywhere, in all places and in all things, his ensigns and emblems’.<sup>37</sup> Nature, as a type, is not limited to Edwards. Conrad Cherry argued that Edwards inherited his ‘symbolic consciousness’ from the Bible, Calvin, and the Puritans.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Conrad Cherry, *Nature and the Religious Imagination from Edwards to Bushnell* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 18.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, ‘Introduction’, in Edwards, *Images*, 22–30.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.6; 2.10.20; 3.25.1. The sun image is also used in his commentary on [Mal. 4:2](#).

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* [Ps. 104:3, 14](#) and [27](#).

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* [Matt. 3:12](#).

<sup>35</sup> All the examples are from *Images*.

<sup>36</sup> Edwards, ‘Types of the Messiah’, in *Works* 2.674.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, ‘Preface to Olivétan’s New Testament’, in *Calvin: Commentaries* 59.

<sup>38</sup> Cherry, *Nature*, chaps. 1 and 2.



Edwards and Calvin used similar metaphors to describe nature, and those metaphors (especially the metaphors of sight) imply the primary theological purpose for creation: the visible display of God's glory. Calvin said, 'Our salvation was a matter of concern to God in such a way that, not forgetful of Himself, He kept His glory primarily in view and, therefore, created the whole world for this end, that it may be a p. 119 theatre of His glory.'<sup>39</sup> In the *Institutes*, this time using the mirror analogy, Calvin made the same point: '[T]his skillful ordering of the universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible.'<sup>40</sup>

The visibility of God is an important concept in Edwards' work. He said,

By God's declaring and teaching that He is infinitely powerful and wise, the creature believes that He is powerful and wise, but in seeing His mighty and wise works, the effects of His power and wisdom, the creature not only hears and believes, but sees His power, and wisdom, and so of His other perfections.<sup>41</sup>

In his later work, *The End for Which God Created the World*, Edwards stated that God's purpose in creation was the manifestation of his glory: 'Thus we see that the great end of God's works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is but ONE; and this *one* is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD.'<sup>42</sup>

For Calvin and Edwards, God's glory is visible, beautiful, excellent, and overwhelming. 'Even the common folk and the most untutored, who have been taught only by the aid of the eyes,' wrote Calvin, 'cannot be unaware of the excellence of divine art.'<sup>43</sup> God's visibility has two theological purposes: first, it makes men and women accountable for their refusal to worship him; and, second, God shows forth his own character through his delight in visible communication in nature.

## EDWARDS' USE OF CALVIN

That Edwards used nature in a similar way to Calvin should not be surprising. According to Edwards' early biographer, Samuel Hopkins, 'he read all the books, especially books of divinity, that he could come at, from which he could hope to get any help in his pursuit of knowledge'.<sup>44</sup> No one knows the exact contents of Edwards' library; it p. 120 disappeared after it passed to his son. Edwards' reading can be discerned from two sources: footnote references in his works and an unpublished catalogue of books in Yale's library. From footnotes, we know that Edwards read the *Institutes*, but it is difficult to discern if he read any other works by Calvin.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *On the Eternal Predestination of God*. Quoted in Schreiner, 'Theater', xviii.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.1.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, 'Miscellanies', no. 777. Quoted in Miller, 'Introduction', in Edwards, *Images*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Edwards, *Dissertation*, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Inst.* 1.5.2.

<sup>44</sup> Samuel Hopkins, *Life and Character of Jonathan Edwards*, 43–44. Quoted in Thomas Johnson, 'Jonathan Edwards' Background of Reading', *The Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 28 (1930–33) 211.

<sup>45</sup> Various editions of Calvin's commentaries were available in Massachusetts in the early eighteenth century. See Charles Robinson and Robin Robinson, 'Three Early Massachusetts Libraries', *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts* 28 (1930–33) 107–75. I suspect that Edwards read some of them, but

There appears to be at least one case of direct dependence on the *Institutes* in Edwards' discussion of nature. In 1.14.21, Calvin asked, 'How should we view God's works?' His answer: believers should use nature as a mirror for the contemplation of God's attributes. The creation reflects 'those immense riches of his wisdom, justice, goodness and power'. According to Calvin, words cannot describe these things; they are attributes which can only be known by contemplation of creation.

Edwards picked up these themes in section 2 of *The End for Which God Created the World*. He was concerned with 'what thing or things are actually the effect or consequence of the creation of the world'. He concluded that 'if the world had not been created, [certain] attributes never would have had any exercise'. Edwards described these attributes, using Calvin's words, as God's power, wisdom, justice, and goodness (he added 'truth' to his list). Nature exhibits them to a 'glorious society of created beings' because it gives God glory to be known. Without the natural realm, these expressions of God would have remained hidden in himself. God is known through the communication of divine goodness as seen in the natural order.

## CALVIN'S AND EDWARDS' USE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY

If God's glory is visible in nature, did Calvin or Edwards set nature next to Scripture as a separate form of revelation? The answer in both cases is no. If natural theology is an ability to arrive at a saving knowledge of God derived from creation, then neither Calvin nor Edwards promoted natural theology. However, in the theological context of both the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, most theologians believed that **P. 121** nature testified to God's existence as Creator.<sup>46</sup> Following Paul in Romans, both Calvin and Edwards assented to this limited use of natural revelation. Humanity is given enough knowledge of God through nature to make them responsible for their refusal to acknowledge and worship God. The deepest lessons of nature, however, are reserved for the regenerate. By exploring the effect of the Fall on nature and the relationship between nature and Scripture, it is clear that God's greatest glory is visible only to those who have eyes to see.

### The Effect of the Fall on Nature

For Calvin, the Fall did not ruin nature.<sup>47</sup> In spite of the effects of sin, the constant threat of natural disorder, the beauty of nature was providentially protected by God: 'Notwithstanding, I say that it is the same earth which was created in the beginning.'<sup>48</sup> So

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I do not know if they are listed in his catalogue. Surprisingly, Calvin was not often read by colonial Americans.

<sup>46</sup> For Edwards' ideas on natural theology, see his 'Observations on the Scripture' and 'The Insufficiency of Reason as a Substitute for Revelation'. He allows for the possibility that nature could reveal God, but because of human sin, right knowledge of the 'one, true God' is not possible with revelation. Calvin referred to natural revelation of God as a 'seed of knowledge' in the *Instl* 1.5.15.

<sup>47</sup> However, nature does take on a threatening aspect which it did not have before the fall. Schreiner says, 'But nature has not been just weakened; it has actively rebelled against man. The elements are now in disorder and threaten human existence' ('Theater'), 35). God's active restraint protects humanity from the threat of disordered nature. 'Although the beauties of nature were preserved by providence, they were marred by the entrance of disorder and surrounded by the threat of chaos'; however, 'nature continued to reveal the glorious nature of God' (*ibid.*, 39).

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries upon the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* 1.113f., 174f. Quoted in George Williams, 'Christian Attitudes Toward Nature', *Christian Scholars Review* 2 (1971) 13.

nature, originally meant to be a school or theatre of God's glory, continued in its purpose after the Fall.

The Fall blinded the spectators in God's theatre. Although men and women can watch the play, they cannot correctly interpret its meaning. The natural order became an idol: 'it is sufficiently clear from so many corruptions how horrible is the blindness of the human mind.'<sup>49</sup> Edward Dowey summarized Calvin's thought: 'God did not stop revealing himself in nature at the Fall.... Calvin never forgets for a moment that sin had blinded man to the revelation in creation, but since *sin* does it, the revelation itself is not harmed. Man's receiving apparatus functions wrongly.'<sup>50</sup> p. 122

In Edwards' theology, the Fall destroyed the ability to 'sense' divine things.<sup>51</sup> According to him, natural loves, 'secondary' or 'inferior' beauty, can be perceived, but men and women can in no way discern the primary purposes of God's revelation in nature. Echoing Calvin's *Institutes*, Edwards pondered humanity's inability to see God's glory:

The invisible things of God are very plainly and clearly to be seen by the things that are made; and the perfections of the Divine Being, his eternal power and Godhead, are very manifest in the works of His hands. And yet grossly absurd notions concerning the Godhead have prevailed in the world.<sup>52</sup>

He concluded that 'there is an extreme and brutish blindness in things of religion, which naturally possesses the hearts of mankind' as a result of the Fall.<sup>53</sup> The secondary beauty of humanity and nature remain intact, but, as with Calvin, they have limited use. The ability to sense superior, or primary, beauty, which could be 'comprehended in divine love', was destroyed at the Fall.<sup>54</sup> To be able to study the spiritual lessons of nature, the effects of the Fall on humanity—not the creation itself—must be reversed.

### **The Relationship between Nature and Scripture**

In spite of the beauty of the world, 'it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe', wrote Calvin.<sup>55</sup> Depending upon the example of blinded humanity, he clearly stated the relationship of Scripture and nature:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture ... clearly shows us the true God.<sup>56</sup>

Fallen humanity cannot be taught in the school of creation; men and women can only read nature's lessons with the aid of the spectacles of Scripture. Further to explain this idea,

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<sup>49</sup> *Inst.* 1.5.12.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1852), 73.

<sup>51</sup> The Fall also causes disorder in nature for Edwards, but it is primarily a disorder of perceptions. See Conrad Cherry, *Nature and Religious Imagination*, 57ff.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, 'Man's Natural Blindness in the Things of Religion', in *Works* 2.247.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 59.

<sup>55</sup> *Inst.* 1.6.1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Calvin used another analogy: p. 123 nature is like a labyrinth. Only the 'thread of the Word' can guide humanity through the maze.<sup>57</sup>

Although Perry Miller argued that Edwards set up natural theology as a second form of revelation next to Scripture, Edwards' own works undermine Miller's assertion. Writing on 'Christian Knowledge' Edwards said:

Indeed there is what is called *natural religion*. There are many truths concerning God, and our duty to him, which are evident by the light of nature. But *christian divinity*, properly so called, is not evident by the light of nature; it depends on revelation. Such are our circumstances now in our fallen state, that nothing which it is needful for us to know concerning God, is manifest by the light of nature, in the manner in which it is necessary to know it ... it cannot be said, that we come to the knowledge of any part of christian truth by the light of nature. It is only the work of God, contained in the Old and New Testament, which teaches us christian divinity.<sup>58</sup>

In *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, nature is always subservient to Scripture. The revealed word explains the images of nature. Arguing against Miller's interpretation of Edwards' *Images*, Conrad Cherry said, '[P]erception of the divine revelation in nature is fulfilled only in a confrontation with the revelation of God held forth in the scriptural testimonies to Christ: nature in itself, apart from Scripture and the divine Word which shines through it, has only led the world into "the grossest theological errors".'<sup>59</sup>

Although Edwards did not use Calvin's poetic imagery (as the eyeglass example above) to describe the relationship between nature and Scripture, his commitment to the supremacy of Scriptural revelation is clear. Without the aid of Scripture, 'none would differ from the most ignorant and barbarous heathens. The heathens remain in gross darkness, because they are not instructed, and have not obtained the knowledge of divine truths'.<sup>60</sup> Edwards closely followed his Calvinistic heritage on this point. p. 124

### **Nature: Revelation for the Regenerate**

Nature reveals God's glory, but only the regenerate can learn its ultimate lessons. Calvin urged his readers to take 'pious delight in the works of God ... to ponder with pious meditation to what end God created them'.<sup>61</sup> It is a sign of true faith 'not to pass over in ungrateful thoughtfulness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures'.<sup>62</sup> In Calvin's theology of nature only the redeemed can acknowledge and praise God through creation. '[S]ince we have fallen from life into death, the whole knowledge of God the Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless faith also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ. The natural order was

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 1.6.3.

<sup>58</sup> Edwards, 'Christian Knowledge: Or, the Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth', in *Works* 2.158. Spelling, capitalization, and italics are original.

<sup>59</sup> Cherry, *Theology*, 46. He quotes from Edwards' 'Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects'.

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, 'Christian Knowledge', in *Works* 2.158–59. See also 'Observations on the Scriptures'.

<sup>61</sup> *Inst.* 1.14.20.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 1.14.21.

that the frame of the universe should be the school in which we were to learn piety, and from it pass over to eternal life and perfect felicity.’<sup>63</sup>

For those who are saved, creation is, as it should have been, a school. According to Susan Schreiner, ‘the regained ability to study nature profitably is a part of [the] restored image’.<sup>64</sup> With his vision corrected by the lens of Scripture, Calvin profitably used nature’s images in the *Institutes*, his sermons,<sup>65</sup> and commentaries. For example, in his commentary on [Psalm 104](#), Calvin used natural beauty to explain spiritual truth. In his explication, Calvin wrote of light, water, wind, earthquakes, wild beasts, floods, valleys, bread, wine, oil, husbandry, mountains, birds, seasons, night and day, trees, and fish.<sup>66</sup>

Drawing from Calvin’s theology, Edwards believed that God imparted an ability to perceive divine beauty.<sup>67</sup> Edwards called this ability to see ‘a sense of the heart’. For Calvin and Edwards, a corrected sense, a correction accomplished by grace, gives the saint insight into God’s revelation through nature. In this passage, which [p. 125](#) illustrates this new perception, Edwards related his own conversion experience:

The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, I Tim. i.17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of glory of the Divine Being... Not long after I first began to experience these things ... I walked abroad alone ... and as I was walking there, and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious *majesty* and *grace* of God, as I know not how to express... [M]y sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of every thing was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm sweet cast or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity, and love, seemed to appear in every thing; in the sun, moon and stars, in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water and all nature.<sup>68</sup>

‘The appearance of everything was altered’ after God imparted a sense of beauty to Edwards’ soul.<sup>69</sup> His new-found delight was ‘exceedingly different’ from anything he had known as a boy. He has always been fascinated with nature, but after his conversion he could ‘see the visible symbols of [God’s] presence’.<sup>70</sup>

Seeing, tasting, and sensing are words that both Calvin and Edwards used to describe the ability to perceive nature’s beauty. Grace, given by God and explained in Scripture, enables the saint to view the play in God’s theatre, to see the reflection in the mirror, to taste divine sweetness, and to read lessons in the school of nature. Natural knowledge of

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 2.6.1.

<sup>64</sup> Schreiner, ‘Theater’, 168ff.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion on the themes of book 1 of the *Inst.* compared to Calvin’s sermons, see Richard Stauffer, *Dieu, la création et la providence dans la prédication de Calvin* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1978).

<sup>66</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (5 vols.; transl. J. Anderson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 143–71.

<sup>67</sup> Erdt (*Jonathan Edwards*, 1–20) has a fine extended discussion comparing Calvin’s and Edwards’ theology on ‘sensing’ God. He highlights many passages from the *Inst.* which Edwards seems to echo in his works.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, ‘Personal Narrative’, in *Works* 1.13.

<sup>69</sup> For more on this, see Edwards’ beautiful sermon, ‘A Divine and Supernatural Light’.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, ‘Introduction’, in Edwards, *Images*, 33.

God, after the Fall, is a kind of revelation reserved for the regenerate. Only a believer can know God's original intention in nature: knowledge of himself as Creator, Provider, and Redeemer.

## CONCLUSION

Perry Miller argued that once Edwards 'grasped that all we know or can know is the idea garnered from the objects of experience', he 'was dedicated to the proposition that the relation of mind to object, of truth P. 126 to embodiment, is intimate, vital and indissoluble'.<sup>71</sup> This philosophical dedication led Edwards to the conclusion that the images of nature were not separate from truth; they were truth. To Miller, Edwards was a Lockean typologist who fused nature with grace.

Nature was not truth for Jonathan Edwards. He followed Calvin too closely to make such a theological mistake. He carefully maintained the distinction between the visible and invisible worlds: 'creation is *of* God, and *in* God, and *to* God',<sup>72</sup> but creation never *is* God. The natural order is always a foreshadowing of the greatest Beauty: Christ's excellency.

Although Calvin and Edwards closely linked nature and revelation, Miller's interpretation missed Calvin's passion for natural beauty and therefore missed Edwards' dependence on the reformer. For both, natural revelation condemns fallen humanity. However, for redeemed men and women, nature is a revelation of God's glory which brings the believer in closer union with him. With corrected sight, the regenerate person can use nature to teach Christian truth, see God visibly manifested, acknowledge and praise the Creator, and read the world as a book of types of the world to come. After grace, humanity can respond to God's creation using Calvin's words:

What else can we then do  
But stir ourselves to trust,  
Invoke, praise, love Him?  
For all God's handiwork  
Is made for man.<sup>73</sup>

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# New Age Promise: Age Old Problem?

Evangelical Alliance U.K.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Edwards, *Dissertation*, 120.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer of Geneva* (transl. and ed. F. Battles; Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1969), 190.

## *Reprinted with permission*

*This popular article sharply focuses our attention on the magnitude of the New Age movement, alerting Christians to the radical nature of the change in world view and lifestyle advocated by the movement. New Age religions and philosophies are attracting large numbers of 'tired souls' and those concerned about the impending ecological disaster threatening the life of the inhabited world. The simplicity of the article leaves many questions unanswered, for not all in alternative medicine, or in the green political movement, or the movement for human potential, are false; but it challenges us to re-examine our basic Christian assumptions. If the roots of the rainbow are deep in the past—folk religion, casteism, mysticism and the occult—how much more do Christians need to discover the Shalom with its roots in the Old Testament, and its hope in the eschaton.*

Editor

## **THE NEW AGE MOVEMENT**

From faith healing on the NHS to psychic festivals in your town hall—a new age of spirituality is upon us.

It is now more than respectable to turn to inner resources or outside powers for enrichment and survival. Indeed, unless yoga, ginseng tea, a belief in reincarnation and a close check on your astrological chart are part of your lifestyle, you could soon be seen as belonging to the Dark Ages.

This flood of disconnected mind-over-matter pursuits gained momentum more than 20 years ago, though they have roots in pagan rites, occult practices and eastern spirituality that are centuries old.

In the 1960s, The Beatles embraced the eastern mysticism of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; an assortment of astrologers and psychics came to the surface, and a startling variety of alternative healing methods began to capture attention. Today there is a massive industry in what has been dubbed the New Age movement. People dissatisfied with the West's materialistic culture are turning to the East and back to pre-Christian beliefs and practices. Including spirit guides, pyramidology, tarot readings, crystal energy, homeopathy and yoga. It is all here—and more. [p. 128](#)

One mail order catalogue now offers page after page of books on New Age issues—covering a variety of types of fortune telling, psychic discovery and healing methods. Small ads in countless publications provide endless columns of similar products—plus the services of psychics and practitioners in alternative healing. And *The Guardian* ran a regular series of approving articles under the heading of New Age.

Particularly attracted to the New Age way of thinking are young people. They are reaching out to the other-worldly music provided by the likes of Brian Eno, Tangerine Dream and Claire Hamill. And to the loose carefree clothing embossed with mystic Yin/Yang and eastern symbols.

## **ALTERNATIVE WORLD VIEWS**

All this activity is bound to affect the attitudes and actions of 'ordinary' people. It has. An authoritative survey by Mintel shows that 8 out of 10 people would be prepared to use 'natural' rather than conventional 'scientific' medical treatment. The Daily telegraph has described 'a staggering change in attitude' to alternative medicines.

Opinion polls show that 27 out of 100 adults in the UK now believe in reincarnation—the highest rate in Europe As one commentator observed, 'New Age influence is

penetrating our society everywhere—in cinema, psychology, education, politics, business and medicine.’

The underlying beliefs of the New Age movement are steadily capturing the minds of millions and touching almost every corner of our society.

In effect, New Age is ushering in an alternative way to see the world. It is re-establishing an age-old set of assumptions concerning the most vital areas of life—Who are we? What is God like? How do we solve the problems of the world? This strikes at the very heart of both scientific knowledge and the Christian and Jewish tradition that is the foundation of our culture.

These are things in life that we take for granted. Gravity, the four seasons and so on. For Christians, the same is true on issues of personal belief.

God made us—‘*In the beginning God created ...*’ God is personal and listens to our prayers—‘*When you pray say Our Father ...*’ Jesus shows us what God is like—‘*He who has seen me has seen the Father ...*’ We can do things that are wrong and need to be forgiven—‘*Forgive us our sins ...*’

The New Age message tells a different story. Binding this ‘movement’ together are some basic beliefs. [p. 129](#)

These beliefs include—

All is one (monism). A god-like force runs through all creation—trees, animals, rocks, people.

Because everything is the same then ‘all that is is God’ (pantheism). The Earth becomes divine. Things—like crystals—have power and influence.

If all is God, then so are we. To quote New Age guru Shirley MacLaine—or, at least, the ‘Higher Self’ she claimed was talking through her at the time—‘Everyone is God. Everyone’.

Each person is responsible only to themselves—not to a creator God.

‘Right’ and ‘Wrong’, good and evil are merely illusions and different aspects of ‘the One’. Each person decides their own morality.

Humankind has fallen from a past golden age. Previous civilizations—from Atlantis to King Arthur—had a wisdom which we have lost. We have to regain our metaphysical memory—hence the New Age emphasis on consciousness changing techniques—mantras, meditation, yoga and so on.

The universe is in a state of evolution of becoming. And humanity—as part of this process—is becoming more conscious of itself and will eventually fuse with the One.

This way of viewing the world is increasingly influencing almost every area of society. It becomes ever easier to trace its input and influence among scientists, educators, politicians, business executives, sociologists, entertainers and—at times—even some in the Church.

The New Age sounds so very attractive to tired souls. Who would not like to reach their full potential, be in good health and learn how to love a little bit more? But there are those who have serious doubts.

External observers argue that at the end of the the New Age rainbow lies something far less rewarding than is being claimed. That this is actually a world view built on false premises and empty promises.

At the same time some who were once New Age followers speak of never really finding the promise fulfilled or of finding peace within themselves.



This is hardly surprising when you look closer at what New Age really stands for and the age old deceptions on which it is built.

## DISCOVERING THE ROOTS OF THE RAINBOW

The New Age is neither 'new' nor an organized 'movement'.

A major strand of New Age thinking is grounded in the occult. Indeed, the name 'New Age' was coined at the beginning of this century by Annie Besant who later took over from Russian medium and occult writer Helena Blavatsky as leader of the Theosophical Society. Besant also adopted a Brahmin boy, in India, who she believed to be the next Messiah. [p. 130](#)

Helen Blavatsky had founded her movement on revelations she had received regarding world affairs from 'ascended masters'—a group from former civilizations who had evolved to a higher plane.

The phrase 'New Age' refers to the dawning of the new age of Aquarius—based on the astrological theory that each 'star-age' lasts for 2000 years. We are, so New Agers claim, on the way out of the sign of Pisces, the fish, a sign identified with Christianity. The new Aquarian age replaces that with one of humanism, brotherhood and occult activity.

New Age can also not be accurately described as a 'movement'. It has no headquarters or co-ordinating structure. It is simply an unorganized network of those committed to making the Earth 'a better place to live in'.

It is hard to grasp exactly what is and what isn't New Age. This is because under its banner gather a seemingly limitless array of disconnected beliefs and lifestyles.

The New Age roots are in a board range of concepts, from evolutionary optimism and spiritism, to karma and reincarnation. From eastern pantheistic mysticism and science fiction to the Human Potential movement. Astrology and occult practices rub shoulders with the Green movement and alternative medicine.

However, New Age spiritual activities fall within three distinct strands.

*Eastern mysticism.* A string of gurus have blended eastern concepts with the West's thirst for fulfilment, expression and enlightenment. The storm troops of Transcendental Meditation, Divine Light, Hindu and Buddhist meditation techniques have marched in.

*Nature religions* from around the world, featuring Druids, the folk beliefs of American Indians, superstition and Wicca witchcraft, for example, are another New Age strand.

*The occult* is also in the mix—from fortune telling to spirit guides, astral projection to witchcraft.

It is hardly surprising that this strange cocktail of religious concerns should be having such influence today. In the 1960s the spiritual poverty of materialism drew a generation of Flower Children towards this world of New Age promise. They are now the business leaders and intellectuals of our day. [p. 131](#)

## PRIESTS AND GURUS OF THE NEW AGE

As a result, this unstructured movement now has a range of powerful protagonists to express its message. Each use their words and actions to expand the boundaries of New Age. To them it is a way of saving the world.

Actress and entertainer Shirely MacLaine—dubbed the 'high priestess of New Age'—gives lectures, interviews and travels the TV chat shows to present her philosophy—and

promote her books. Her message is clear, 'Know that you are God; know that you are the universe.'

Of herself she has said, 'I am that I am', to her the 'grand truth'. But for those who recognize the phrase as coming from the Old Testament and having been spoken by God to Moses in front of the burning bush, it is a disturbing blasphemy.

Yet Shirley MacLaine's mission is to help us all realize that our problems stem from being unaware of our divinity. If only we could wake up to the truth, all could be well.

She has written that there is 'one basic spiritual law which would make the world a happier, healthier place', and it is that 'Everyone is God—everyone'. She is out to make sure we hear that message and believe it.

Singer John Denver reportedly sleeps under a pyramid structure to enhance his energy level and openly advocates self-awareness techniques and New Age beliefs.

Werner Erhard founded 'est' (Erhard Seminar Training—now known as The Forum) His self-awareness and management training course—modelled by many others—offer the principle to reach one's full potential and be master of your own destiny.

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi placed at least £32,000 worth of advertising space in The Times to present a way 'designed to bring perfection to every form of national life'.

While there may be no New Age HQ, central budget and an agreed masterplan, there is a definite 'working-together' in operation. Leading New Ager Marilyn Ferguson describes this as the 'Aquarian Conspiracy' in her influential book of the same name. She is highlighting the way many are working toward changing our way of thinking.

By 'conspirators' Marilyn Ferguson really means co-workers. She says, 'The Aquarian Conspirators range across all levels of income and education ... There are legions of conspirators ... in corporation, universities, on city councils and the White House staff, in state legislators ... in virtually all arenas of policy-making in the country ... The conspirators linked ... by their inner discoveries ... an [p. 132](#) unlikely kind of conspiracy ... They have coalesced into small groups in every town and institution ... There are tens of thousands of entry points into the conspiracy.'

It is these 'entry points' that are the most visible aspect of New Age. And these innocent encounters grow in both number and depth of involvement. But before long the conspired-against unknowingly becomes part of the conspiracy.

## **A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE**

Few people discover New Age concepts in a blinding flash. The first encounter may be totally innocent—even trivial. But it can lead to an eventual total absorption.

There are four stages in the journey.

1. Turning On—It begins with an initial New Age encounter. Anything from alternative medicine to management training to some occult contact.
2. Exploration—The next step is a desire to 'explore'. For example, Fiona Cartledge, of the 'Sign of the Times' New Age fashion store in London's Kensington Market, says, 'Young people don't just wear this fashion. They want to read and learn about what is behind the symbols too.'

There is no shortage of books, seminars and encounter groups to fuel anyone's desire to know more.

3. Integration—Contacts made through exploration create a network of friends with a common outlook. While the outworking of New Age principles fits easily into a person's lifestyle.
4. Conspiracy—This is the joining up with others in a sense of belonging and shared objectives. A fully committed New Ager says, 'I am into this'.

The true story of Susi perfectly illustrates the route from ‘turning on’ through to total absorption. It began with an invitation to two weekends of self-awareness training—a welcome opportunity to learn more about herself.

Susi recalls, ‘During the first weekend they broke us down. Everyone was told, in very vicious and obscene terms, that their lives were in a complete mess. There was a lot of fear from the moment the course started.

‘If anybody objected,’ she continues, ‘they were humiliated; told how that was the way somebody like them would react.’

The following weekend, the course changed track completely. ‘They built us up,’ Susi recalls. ‘They told us about the other person each of us could be. I left the training renewed and full of power.’

Susi was later to discover that she had undergone initiation into New Ager Werner Erhard’s ‘est’. [p. 133](#)

Susi soon noticed a change in the way she approached life; she began to live it solely for herself. ‘Morality didn’t bother me very much anymore. And I was able to direct my thoughts and actions towards making things work instead of being limited by old beliefs about myself or others.’

She found that she could no longer relate to her old friends, dropping them one by one. ‘At the time I was having problems with my boyfriend. We loved each other very much, but we were going through a difficult phase. I was amazed at how easily I was able to dismiss six years of close friendship by simply deciding that “it doesn’t work” and leaving it behind.’ Her attitude also changed to the world around her. ‘I believed that everything needed to be transformed. The “power of being” within me launched me into doing good works—humanism—because I felt I had the power to make things happen. But at the end of the day, all the credit went to myself. Without knowing it, I got closer to becoming my own god.

‘At one point, I actually began to feel that “I Am” and to say it. It was only later I learnt that Jesus had said those words. I’d just thought it was part of the altered state of being enlightened. I thought all the power came from within me,’ she admits.

‘But now I know it was obviously a spiritual power. At the time, I didn’t know I could make myself available to powers governing my mind and spirit. But when you open yourself up to any spirit, you open yourself up to the powers of darkness. It is the ultimate deception; that the self is God.’

## **A MORE EXCELLENT WAY**

The only honest way to evaluate any aspect of the New Age movement is to put Jesus into the picture. Jesus describes God as a loving father with whom we can have a friendship. Not as an impersonal force who can be experienced but never known.

Jesus speaks of those who follow him as needing to sacrifice their lives for each other. Not as putting their own needs and self-attainment first.

Jesus speaks of God as someone we can depend on in times of trouble. Not of us needing to rely on our own strength to get on terms with him or to help save the planet.

It was in order to show us the real way to live and to worship that God sent his son, Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross he was taking on himself all the blame and punishment for the wrong things we have done. He was paying the price to make it possible for us to be forgiven and for friendship with God to be ours. [p. 134](#)

Jesus came alive from the dead and now lives in the lives of those who turn to follow him. Through prayer and reading the Bible we can be close to God today.

Jesus is relevant to all aspects of our lives and the world around us. God has always cared about injustice, pain and oppression, and works against it through his people until Jesus returns at the end of time and puts all things right.

It is the age old answer to the emptiness and futility that people experience when they do not know God as a friend and a father for themselves.

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***New Age Promise: Age Old Problem?* in attractive format is available from Evangelical Alliance, London. See Journal Information. Here is it slightly edited and without illustrations. p. 135**

## **The Reincarnation of the Soul**

**Vishal Mangalwadi**

*Reprinted with permission from The Seer, April and October 1990, this part of a chapter in the author's forthcoming book In Search of Self: A Journey Beyond the New Age*

*If the claim of opinion polls is true, that 27 British adults in every hundred now believe in reincarnation, then the Christian Church must re-centre its evangelistic message if it is going to meet effectively this apologetic challenge. This forceful article by a credible Indian Christian apologist unmasks much of the sentimentality and wishful thinking about reincarnation. The biblical doctrine of the final resurrection of all human beings is good news to those who trust in the resurrected Christ for their salvation but bad news for those whose hope is only in reincarnation. Neither a crass materialistic resurrection, as in Islam, nor a spiritualized reincarnation as in Hinduism can satisfy the human longing for peace and justice now and eternally. The resurrection of Jesus Christ holds the key to our understanding of the solution to the present political, economic and ecological crises, and the meaning of death and life beyond death.*

Editor

Millions of people all over the world are getting excited about the doctrine of transmigration or reincarnation of the soul. This doctrine, technically called *metempsychosis*, teaches that human souls do not die at physical death but are reborn into different bodies many more times.

It is true that scientists never did disprove the existence of the soul, and that their efforts to reduce mind and self-consciousness to the biological brain never did succeed. As neurologist Wilder Penfield said in his paper for the Conference of Brain Researchers held at the Vatican in 1966: 'If we are good scientists, we cannot claim that science has already explained the mind.' In other words, man has a solid core to his personality from which his decisions emanate; a core which, Penfield says, 'controls his thinking and directs the search-light of his attention'.

Yet it is equally true that the scientists who assumed that the material world was the only reality did succeed in persuading several generations to accept their belief that the soul and the supernatural were all that there was to reality.

Dr. Raymond A. Moody, whose book *Life After Life* sold over 3 p. 136 million copies, studies 300 cases of people who either had close encounters with death or who were actually pronounced clinically dead by doctors, but revived. These people claimed, in remarkably similar ways, that during their experience of death, they left their bodies, they saw and heard the doctors who were trying to revive them and they met dead relatives, other spirits and a Being of light.

Dr. Moody admits, 'Not one of the cases I have looked into is in any way indicative to me that reincarnation occurs.' But he adds, 'However, it is important to bear in mind that not one of them rules out reincarnation either' (*Life After Life*, Bantam Books, 1988, page 141).

Hollywood actress and entertainer Shirley MacLaine, for example, describes experiences in Peru when her soul left her body lying by the Mantaro riverside, and flew around for a while. (*Out on a Limb*, Bantam Books, 1984, pages 327–329).

We can discuss the empirical strengths and weaknesses of research in parapsychology, as well as the scientific integrity of the researchers, to assess whether or not their conclusions about the existence of the mind or soul as distinct from the brain are valid. But this is not the relevant point here. The simple fact is that millions of people have attested to direct experiences of the spirit world—faith, healing, mediums (channels), spirits, possession, and exorcism. Their faith in the reality of the soul is strengthened by the research in parapsychology, but it does not rest upon it. They know the soul and the supernatural reality from their own first-hand experience. And they are simply not willing to accept a view that reduces them to the level of monkeys or machines.

## THE CASE FOR REINCARNATION

We need to realize that for those who believe in reincarnation, the weakness of empirical evidence is compensated for by the pragmatic advantages of their belief. It is worthwhile summarizing some of these.

1. *The doctrine of reincarnation gives a plausible explanation to inexplicable suffering and inequalities.*

Why is a child born lame, poor, blind, 'unwanted female' or an 'untouchable'? When the disciples of Jesus saw a beggar who was born blind they asked, 'Master, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' ([John 9:2](#)).

The belief that the good or bad actions (*karma*) of one life determine the future incarnations gives a plausible explanation of undeserved suffering in a previous life. In 1860 the Unitarian clergyman Rev. W. R. Alger wrote in his monumental work *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* that the 'theory of the transmigration of souls p. 137 is marvellously adapted to explain the seeming chaos of moral inequality, injustice, and manifold evil presented in the world of human life'.

2. *The doctrine of reincarnation gives basis for hope to imperfect, ignorant humans.*

One short life of 60–80 years is simply not enough for anyone to become perfect, to realize one's ambitions and achieve one's goals including the desire to know the truth. If man has to find the truth and become perfect, he just has to have many lives. If this one life is all that one has, in which to find truth, then there is no hope. But faith in reincarnation gives hope that through experiences and information received in millions of lives one can get to know the truth and become perfect.

3. *The belief in reincarnation seems to give respect for all life.*

If animals and plants also have souls, and if there is a possibility that I may be reborn as an animal or a plant one day, then I ought to treat all life with respect and develop ecologically responsible behaviour.

#### 4. *The belief in reincarnation puts one in the company of great sages.*

In *Kathopanishad*, which is considered to be the backbone of philosophical Hinduism, Yama, the lord of death, himself teaches what happens to the soul after death:

Well then, O Gautama, I will explain the mysterious and ancient *Brahman*, and also what happens to the soul after death. Some souls enter the womb to have a body, others to the plants according to their work and according to their knowledge (*section V, 6 & 7*).

Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, built his entire religious system on the cornerstone of the doctrine of reincarnation, even though he does not seem to have believed in an unchanging, substantial soul itself. According to Buddhism the individual, as such, ceases to exist at death, but his *karma* survives and passes on in the form of "germ of consciousness" (*vijñana*) to the womb of another, there to grow into a new individual.

Even though the belief in reincarnation as central doctrine has been confirmed mainly to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism for the past three millennia, it is indeed a very ancient idea that existed in many creeds throughout the world. The ancient Egyptians practised embalming the dead to prevent or delay reincarnation. The Greek Philosopher Plato accepted the Orphico-Pythagorean views that the soul is immortal, the number of souls is fixed and that reincarnation occurs regularly. The Tibetan Book of the Dead (edited by W. Y. Evans Wentz p. 138 and published by the Oxford University Press in New York in 1957) has exerted much influence in our day to inspire belief in reincarnation.

#### 5. **The belief in reincarnation helps those who are dying.**

Psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, at least in the early part of her career, effectively promoted the use of belief in reincarnation to comfort terminally ill patients. In a recent book, *Death—the Final Stage of Growth* (Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster Inc., New York, 1975) she does not seem to be promoting that any more. Perhaps this is due to a recognition that the doctrine is at best a double edged sword. If it comforts some dying patients, it can add to the guilt of others, about their unknown *karma* of the previous lives which produced the present illness. It can also create anxiety about what the *karma* of this life will produce in the next life. In those who pursue the logic of reincarnation more rigorously it can breed a hatred of life itself, as it has in the Indian sub-continent.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Lord Krishna used the belief in reincarnation to inspire Arjuna to kill his cousins. Thus, if the doctrine helps some to accept death by trivializing it, it can inspire others to kill, on the same grounds that death is after all unreal.

### **THE CASE AGAINST REINCARNATION**

#### **1. Reincarnation does not Guarantee a Memory of a Previous Life.**

The believers in reincarnation often argue that an eight-year-old child can display great mathematical, linguistic or musical genius because of the skills acquired in previous lives. But Tertullian, an early church father, asked, 'Why is it that an adult soul is always reborn as an infant?' For every child who claims to remember his previous life, there are several million who do not remember. Therefore, the basic question that the reincarnationists need to answer is not 'What makes a soul a child prodigy?' or 'What accounts for love-at-first-sight?' but 'Why don't all souls reincarnate with experiences or memories of previous lives?' If they did, they would know why they have the sufferings and joys of their present lives. Such memories will also help them 'evolve' faster.

If 'love-at-first-sight' is a result of a relationship in a previous life, then why does it happen only after puberty? If child prodigies are to be explained by a faith in

reincarnation, then does it mean that we are not to study their brain structure or learning environment?

## 2. Reincarnation Precludes Responsibility and Repentance.

The fact that most people have no memory of previous existence implies that the explanation of evil and suffering offered by the [p. 139](#) doctrine of reincarnation is very weak. If I am unfortunate enough to be born an 'untouchable', black, a woman, or blind as a punishment for a deed that I did in a previous life which I do not remember, then how can I repent for it or reform and perfect myself? How can I take responsibility for what I don't remember? If I am a bonded labourer or a slave today because of my previous *karma* (deeds), then how can my owner be considered immoral or unjust? Punishment is just and meaningful only when I know the evil for which I am being punished.

## 3. Reincarnation hinders the Motive to Relieve Suffering.

Not only is the explanation for suffering and evil in the doctrine of reincarnation very weak; it actually hinders our commitment to alleviate suffering. If a man is starving in this life because of his evil in a previous life, why should we interfere? If a person is suffering because of his *karma* in a previous life, then any effort to alleviate his suffering amounts to interfering with the cosmic justice of the law of *karma*. It is like breaking into a jail to free a criminal, who has been judicially awarded life-imprisonment for a gruesome murder.

When Christ's disciples wondered out loud if the congenial blindness of the beggar was due to his sins committed prior to the present birth, the Lord Jesus rejected their speculative theory ([John 9:1-7](#)) because Jesus considered it to be his disciples' and his own duty and privilege to care for the blind beggar. He therefore healed the blind man. When this beggar became a victim of social ostracism ([John 9:34](#)), Jesus must have welcomed him into his community as he did the other blind beggars whose eyes he opened and who stopped begging ([Mark 10:46-52](#)).

In contrast, a professor of Hindu at Delhi University said that acts of compassion on behalf of those suffering were foolish: if we did succeed in cutting short someone's suffering, he would still have to be reborn to complete his due term of suffering; so what is the use of interfering with the law of *karma*? It is because of this doctrine of *karma* and reincarnation that, in spite of the Buddha's teaching on compassion (*karuna*), India never developed a tradition of compassionate social service.

In contrast to Hinduism, which exalted the violence of animal and human sacrifice and one's *dharma* to kill, Buddha put great emphasis on *karuna* (compassion) and *metteya* (the sentiment of friendliness). 'The righteous monk is sympathetic and merciful, and strives with friendly feeling for the good of all living things.' But, as Richard Lannoy concludes in his classic work, *The Speaking Tree*, 'by this compassion and friendliness Buddha does not imply active love, for active love feeds attachment to earthly cares; and though Buddhism is [p. 140](#) an ethic of inner perfection like the teachings of Christ, it does not promote *active* compassion. The Christian idea that evil in the world can be transformed into good is not to be found in the teaching of Buddha, who is silent on the question of redemption of the world' (Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 330).

Buddha sees life as suffering: birth is suffering, old age is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with what one loves not is suffering, to be separated from what one loves is suffering, not to attain one's desires is suffering! Desires lead us from birth to rebirth. Therefore desires have to be eliminated.

'The perfect man' for Buddha is one 'who cares not for others, who has no relations'. To a father who has lost his only son Buddha says, 'What one loves brings woe and

lamentation.’ In order to attain liberation from the cycles of births and deaths, Buddha abandoned his own wife and child; how then can he teach commitment to others who need our love and care? His is an ethic of compassion without enduring commitment. This is the best that belief in reincarnation can give.

#### **4. Reincarnation leads to a Selfish Asceticism.**

In *Katha Upanishad*, the god of death, Lord Yama, says that attachment to the material world is the cause of repeated (births and) deaths: ‘Fools, swelling in the very midst of ignorance, by fancying themselves as wise and learned, go round and round staggering to and fro, like the blind led by the blind. The truth of the Hereafter does not shine before that child (childish person) who is ineffective and can be fooled by the delusion of wealth. “This world (seen by the senses) is, and there is no other”; thinking thus, he falls into my [death’s] clutches again and again.’

The history of the Indian sub-continent shows that besides undercutting our commitment to other human beings, the belief in reincarnation also leads to asceticism that is a negation of life itself—at least in our attitudes. Rebirth is considered necessary for us to take the good and bad consequences of our karma. If we want salvation or deliverance from the cycle of repeated births and deaths, we have to come to a state of mind where we act or do our duty without desire for rewards. All desires have to be killed, and it has to be duty for duty’s sake. Krishna calls this attitude *Nishkama Karma* in the *Bhagvad Gita*. Asceticism implies detachment from body, life, relationships, and the world. In Jainism, religious austerities necessary to prevent reincarnation go as far as to renounce clothes and eventually food itself. To starve oneself to death becomes the ultimate spirituality. Buddha taught that those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain. [p. 141](#) Therefore, far from making us ecologically responsible citizens, the doctrine of reincarnation has all but turned India into a desert by making us detached from the world, utterly self centred, concerned more for our own soul’s progress than for the people and the world around us.

#### **5. Reincarnation Justifies Racism and Sexism.**

It is true that a person like Shirley MacLaine finds it a comfort to know that a soul is born sometimes as a male and other times as a female. Reincarnation to her, therefore, implies the equality of sexes. Ironically, however, it is the doctrine of transmigration which has traditionally sustained racism and sexism in Indian society. As Romila Thapar says in *A History of India* (Penguin Books, 1975, p. 46), ‘The doctrine of *karma* also provided a philosophical justification for caste. One’s birth into a lower or higher caste was also dependent on one’s actions in a previous life.’ The logic of reincarnation has been, ‘You are born an untouchable or a woman to serve me because of your past karma’. The doctrine was formulated to justify inequalities and suffering, not the equality of all people. Giving religious justification to untouchability (racism) and oppression of women (sexism) is one of the most inhuman consequences of this belief.

#### **6. Both early Hinduism and Christianity Repudiate Reincarnation.**

Before we consider the most important aspects of the case against reincarnation it should perhaps be pointed out that by no means all or most saints and seers have espoused this doctrine. Within India, for example, the teaching of the most ancient and authoritative scriptures, the *Vedas*, states that departed spirits lived in a shadowy world called *Pitri Loka* (a world of ancestors), which is comparable to the abode of Hades for the Greeks. As Nirad Chaudhuri points out in his authoritative book, *Hinduism*, Hindu mortuary rites,



which continue to this day, are meant to secure the entry of departed souls 'into the world and after that to provide for their sustenance there ...' (B.I. Publications, New Delhi 1979), page 152.) This original Vedic understanding ruled out reincarnation. The Encyclopedia Britannica says, 'The first formulation of the doctrine of transmigration is found in the early Upanishads (c. 600 BC)', i.e. at least half a millennium after the *Vedas* were composed.

Many later Hindu scriptures have elaborate teaching on heavens and hells where the departed souls live, instead of reincarnating. Traditionally Islamic and Judeo-Christian prophets have also rejected the doctrine of reincarnation. The Old Testament saint, Job, who experienced much 'inexplicable' suffering, did not see it as a result of *karma* in a past life. He understood death as going 'to the place of no p. 142 return' ([Job 10:21](#)). As we have already seen, Jesus firmly repudiated the view of his disciples that the man may have been born blind because of his sin prior to this birth ([John 9:3](#)). The Lord Jesus taught that after death there is judgement and then the wicked 'will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life' ([Matthew 25:46](#), see also John:[5:28-29](#)). The claim of many New Age writers is that Jesus taught reincarnation, which was later removed from doctrinal statements. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, 'Within the Christian Church it [the belief in reincarnation] was held by isolated gnostic sects during the first centuries and by the Manichaeans in the 4th and 5th centuries, but was invariably repudiated by the orthodox theologians.' (See article on *Metempsychosis*). The belief was rejected by the church as heresy first of all because after his death Jesus was not reincarnated in another body, but resurrected in the same. His tomb was empty and his disciples saw his nail-pierced hands. But reincarnation was also rejected because it goes against the basic teachings of the Bible, such as these:

a. *This world*, even though under a curse, is essentially good and not a place of punishment, where souls are sent to be in bondage of the body to take the consequences of their *karma* ([Genesis 1:31](#)).

b. *The human body*, though subject to decay and death due to original sin, is essentially good and to be enjoyed. It is redeemable and will be saved by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ ([1 Cor. 15](#)).

c. *Our individuality*, though finite, is good and eternal. We are meant to live forever as God's children, not lose our individuality by merging into an impersonal universal consciousness ([John 3:16](#)).

d. Even though we must deny ourselves to follow Christ and to serve others, we are not to espouse asceticism or practice austerities for earning merit. The New Testament says that asceticism is a diabolical teaching:

The (Holy) Spirit dearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons ... they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving ... For everything God created is good ([1 Timothy 4:1-5](#)).

e. *The judgement of our sin* is essentially a future event at the end of this age. We are accountable before a personal and holy God, not an impersonal law of karma. When our accounts are open we will know the sins we are being punished for ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

f. *Salvation* is not by the human effort in millions of lives but by God's grace shown in Christ. Therefore through repentance for sin and p. 143 faith in Christ's death on the cross for our forgiveness, we can be saved in this life itself ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

## 7. Reincarnation Undercuts Philosophical Foundations of Morality.

In her book *Out On A Limb* Shirley MacLaine uses reincarnation to justify:

(i) Homosexuality—A soul which was female in its previous life and is male now is working out the residual *karma* in this life with the soul which was its husband than (p. 199).

(ii) Adultery—MacLaine's politician boyfriend Gerry and she are working out the *karmas* of a previous life; therefore his wife should not look upon it as unfaithfulness to her (p. 201). At one point MacLaine even suggests, albeit guardedly, that even the 60 million Jews killed in Hitler's Germany were simply working out their collective *karma* from previous lives. Such blatant justification of immorality becomes possible because the Law of Karma is ultimately viewed as an amoral, unknowable law—'a cosmic joke' (p. 363).

The theory of *karma* which lies behind the belief in reincarnation undercuts the foundations of morality, because it views morality as a mechanical cause and effect system.

A friend of mine, a believer in *karma* and reincarnation, was raging and fuming because a cook had cheated him of Rs. 150. He wanted my sympathy and support. But I said, 'Don't you think that he did it because you had taken Rs. 150 from him in a previous life?' My friend became quiet and said 'Maybe not in a past life, but I cheated someone of Rs. 150 in this life.'

He grasped in an instant that a belief in karma and reincarnation does not permit us to say that *anything* is morally wrong.

This is so because the Law of Karma is viewed as a mechanical law of cause and effect. 'If you cheat someone of Rs. 150 you will get the identical result'. But in reality the logical connection between an ethical choice and its consequence is a personal one. When a mother says to her child, 'If you are mean to your sister, then you will not go with us to the picnic', there is no mechanical cause and effect relationship between meanness and picnic. Their logical connection is a personal one—the decision of a person in authority, in this case the mother. The term 'personal' here does not mean 'private'. It implies that the sense of morals is a characteristic of personality but not of machines; moral laws are laws of persons. Moral laws of human persons are temporary. Moral laws of the divine 'person' (God) are eternal. There are consequences of breaking moral laws, but they are not cause and effect consequences; they are decisions of the person in authority whose law we have broken. p. 144

This perspective makes forgiveness of sin possible, in contrast to the mechanical perspective which rules out the possibility of forgiveness. If the child says, 'I am sorry Mummy' and 'I am sorry, sister, I will not do it again; please forgive me', he can go on the picnic.

Likewise, when we break God's law, we can find forgiveness if we come to him with repentance and brokenness of heart. But this possibility is ruled out when the moral law is conceived of as mechanical—if you put your hand in the fire, it must burn.

## **8. Reincarnation Negates Our Individual Identity and Significance.**

One of the most tragic and ironic consequences of belief in reincarnation is that it implies the opposite of what its modern adherents seek. That is, instead of affirming our value as individuals it negates it. Instead of offering immortality it offers eternal death, the extinction of our individuality, as our salvation. If Shobha Ram becomes Jasbir, then Nirmala and then a lizard in my garden, then do any of these individual personalities have any uniqueness or significance? Within India, where the logic of reincarnation has been better understood than in the West, individuality has been acknowledged as illusory. The corollary of the idea of reincarnation is that 'an unchanging reality subsists beneath all apparent change'. There is nothing comparable in India, though, to the western idea of

unrepeatable events, unique historical *avtaras*, or messiahs, an exclusive God, and exclusive true religion or a standard of constant value. And since empirical reality is subject to the law of *karma* and rebirth, there is no eternal individual soul' (Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*, p. 284). In simple words, according to the doctrine of reincarnation, your belief that you exist as an individual is your bondage. Liberation means to be freed from this illusory experience of individuality.

The doctrine of reincarnation not only negates the significance and uniqueness of your individuality; it opens the door to murder by trivializing death.

### **9. Reincarnation Trivializes Death.**

Sri Krishna teaches in the *Bhagvad Gita* that death is like changing clothes; just as you discard worn-out clothes, so does a soul discard one body to adopt a new one. The soul is never really born and never dies. Krishna says to Arjuna, 'Thou dost feel pity where pity has no place, wise men feel no pity either for what dies or what lives. There never was a time when I and thou were not in existence, and all these princes too, nor will the day ever, hereafter, when all of us shall cease to be ...' This is why Shirley MacLaine says that 'our belief in death was the gravest unreality of all' (*Out on a Limb*, p. 437). In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna propounded this view of death to motivate Arjuna to kill his p.145 cousins, whom he was hesitating to kill. One can accept the moral justification of a righteous war and see it as one's sad duty. But this trivialization of death had disastrous consequences. In India it has justified the widespread practice of widow and leper burning, infant drowning and human sacrifice.

The lepers, for example, were not loved and cared for but buried and burnt alive, on the grounds that a violent end purifies the body and ensures transmigration in a healthy new existence, while natural death by disease results in four successive births and the fifth as a leper. This belief was resisted and care for lepers began only when William Carey, the first English missionary in India, began to challenge it, and opened an asylum for lepers. Carey also opposed the drowning of infants in the holy river Ganges and had infanticide declared illegal. This was followed by an anti-*sati* campaign which lasted a quarter of a century.

The whole widespread tradition of human sacrifice in India was sanctified by belief in reincarnation. Out of all the better developed religious systems in the world, only Hinduism put man as the prime sacrificial animal. Men and animals have the same souls; but as Nirad Chaudhuri says, 'In Hindu rituals he was the first among animals' (*Hinduism*, p. 75). A neighbour of ours who killed his unwanted infant daughter rationalized it on the grounds that 'death is unreal; she can come back next year as a boy. What is the use of her suffering now and making the life of the rest of the family miserable?'

Many believers in reincarnation in the West justify abortion on exactly the same grounds.

### **10. Reincarnation mocks our aspiration for immortality.**

In India the doctrine of reincarnation has bred a fear of life itself, and an ambivalence towards a concern for its welfare. Even in Egypt where the doctrine is assumed to have originated, the embalming of the dead was done to prevent or delay reincarnation.

Swami Ranganathananda, an outstanding Hindu scholar and preacher, confesses in his book *The Message of the Upanishads* (Bombay, Bharitya Vidhaya Bhawan, 1971):

Two sentiments that are more often associated with the idea of salvation in India are disgust for the world and fear of rebirth ... [our] religious books are heavy with these two sentiments. And our people in general have sought in religion only one blessing, a

cessation from rebirth. This fear of life, this hope of salvation, this intense desire to escape from rebirth, have gone so far as to throw into the shade the problems and prospects of the brief spell of human life on earth. This helped to develop a negative attitude which, in its extreme forms, illustrated the sentiments in the lines of a p. 146 German poet:

Sweet is sleep; death is better  
But it is best never to have been born.

This negative attitude has been digging deep into the Indian mind during the last thousand years.

Shirley MacLaine's silence on the question 'Are souls reborn as animals and plants?' suggests that beneath all the excitement about the doctrine of reincarnation in the New Age movement, may be a lurking fear that after all it is not a very pleasant doctrine. Because Hinduism assumes that the whole universe is Divine the Hindu scriptures, such as *Manusmriti*, go into great detail specifying which deeds will lead to what kind of animal birth. It is all very well to assume that evolution is a pre-determined fact, therefore through endless cycles of births and death a soul will finally and inevitably attain liberation. But on what grounds do you base optimism? Within the Hindu scriptures it has been understood that very few and rare souls in fact do attain salvation. As Lannoy summarizes, 'There is no kingdom of heaven on earth in Hinduism; unity is either atemporal, mystical, private or temporal, cyclical and collective. Overarching the entire system is the Cycle of Brahma. The inexorable law of eternal renewal, within which the cosmos and man are successively born, degenerate and die; at the most a few rare souls dissolve into the inexhaustible plenitude of the divine substratum, while the collective fitfully attains partial enlightenment on the wheel of rebirth until another year of Brahma ends. A cosmic holocaust ensures that the whole process begins again' (*The Speaking Tree*, p. 212).

Logically, belief in evolution and *karma* just cannot be held together. If *karma* determines the state of the next life then bad *karma* necessarily means devolution in the next birth. According to the Hindu seers, the majority of souls never attain enlightenment; that is why the cycle continues. But what about those rare souls who do attain it? What do they get? Not immortality, but cessation of existence as an individual soul, eternal death. Life is bondage; death is salvation.

## RESURRECTION—AN ALTERNATIVE

The biblical concept of the resurrection offers genuine immortality to the individual. The Bible teaches that the human being is not eternal and infinite. He is a creature who had a beginning and he will always remain a creature. Yet God breathed his own immortal life into man at creation ([Genesis 1:7](#)). Death came as a result of man's sin of rebellion against good in trying to be God ([Genesis 3](#)). P. 147

Death, therefore, is abnormal in the sense that it is not part of the original intention of God in creation. Death is an enemy, something to be resisted. The basic problem is not ignorance—that man is infinite God, but has forgotten it. Man's problem is sin. Man has rebelled against God, and therefore lost God's Spirit and become subject to decay and death.

Because man's problem is his disobedience to God, he does not need millions of lives to earn his salvation and the knowledge of his infinity. He can repent of his sin and find forgiveness and reconciliation with his Father in a moment. Salvation does not depend on man's efforts but on God's grace. Therefore one life is more than sufficient to find truth

and salvation—a salvation which includes the gift of the immortal spirit of God and eternal life in fellowship with God.

Resurrection affirms that man is more than a material body, but it does not minimize the body. The material universe, being God's creation, is good ([Genesis 1](#)). Man who was made with the dust of the earth was declared to be 'very good' by his Creator ([Genesis 1:31](#)). Resurrection does not mean my becoming something or someone else in the next life, but the same me, in the same body, being raised to life and being glorified just as the crucified body of Christ was raised to life. Resurrection offers hope and meaning, not simply for my life and for my body, but for my world as well. Because man was meant to be the Governor of the earth, his sin has subjected his planet also to decay and death. But as he finds forgiveness and salvation, the earth itself will be delivered from its bondage and renewed to become the dwelling place of God ([Romans 8:18-22](#)). Therefore my efforts to care for this world and make it beautiful have meaning and significance.

Belief in resurrection means that I do not have to fight against my individuality or be ashamed of my finiteness. I do not have to become detached from this world, my life and history. Eternal life is not a negation of what I am, but my fulfilment as a child of God.

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# Genetic Engineering: Catastrophe or Utopia?

Darryl Macer

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*For those with limited scientific background this article demands careful reading and re-reading. The ethical issues that are raised by genetic engineering may prove as critical in the 1990s as those raised by nuclear fission since the 1940s. The theological issues of the distinction between human and animal life is already high on the agenda. Our Christian stewardship of the earth's resources calls for clear biblical thinking and a courageous stand for ethical responses to those who are exploiting this new scientific knowledge for selfish ends and the illegal preparation of biological weapons for germ warfare. We cannot ignore the challenge of 'genetic engineering, catastrophe or utopia?' The author calls for a balance between our creativity and caution.*

Editor

Genetics strikes a deep chord as it involves changing ourselves and controlling the future generation of life. We have gained the ability to adapt our environment to our genes, and are now learning how to adapt our genes to the environment.

We are called to be stewards of the earth ([Gen. 1:26, 28, 2:19; Ps. 8:6-8, 24:1](#)). Stewardship is the proper use of human resources to change ourselves and the world and

involves active participation in a responsible way, which should be a partnership with God. We must be humble, admitting the limitation of our finite minds and the perversion of motives caused by sin. Stewardship, however, involves creativity, with the obvious consequence that things will change.

There needs to be a balance between our creativity and caution. There is manipulation that improves, and manipulation which can harm.<sup>1</sup>

Mastery over nature should not be explored in a spirit of exploitation, but with reverence for all creation, as a gift entrusted to our care. God will judge those who bring ruin to nature and the earth ([Is. 24:5-6](#), [45:18](#); [Rev. 11:18](#)). There is an amazing mixture of life. p. 149 All is intertwined, in a delicate ecosystem which should not be needlessly disrupted. We could use the image of participation in the community of nature rather than domination of nature.<sup>2</sup>

Animals were part of the covenant relationship with man ([Gen. 9:10, 5](#); [Is. 50:2](#); [Jer. 7:20](#)). The Bible has often been criticized by non-Christian animal welfarists because of its assertion that man is uniquely made in the image of God, and has dominion over the rest of creation including the permission to kill and to eat animals. However, the belief that man is unique does not mean that animals have no rights, or better that we do not owe them duties. If we read our Bibles it is clear that we do have such duties (See e.g. [Ex. 23:4, 5, 10](#); [Deut. 25:4, 22:6-7](#)). In fact the Bible does teach a respect for all of creation. It was made for its own sake, not simply for man's needs and interests ([Job 38:2-4](#); [Ps. 8:3, 4, 19:1-6, 65:9-13, 104, 136:4-9, 148](#); [Jer. 8:7](#)). Being made in the image of God means that we should behave in a loving way as God does, who made animals not only for us, but for their own sake as part of creation. It is an issue of human responsibility which we cannot ignore. Animals cannot be viewed simply as expendable raw materials for our designs.

## POTENTIAL OF GENETIC ENGINEERING

Modern genetics and molecular biology have led to techniques by which it is possible to find the exact chemical sequence of any gene. A gene is made of a specific sequence of bases of DNA. The genotype of a multicelled organism is the complete set of genes they possess, and this is determined at the time of conception. It is normally the same in all cells of one individual organism. The exception is in chimeras, which are organisms made from at least two genetically different cells.

Enzymes called restriction endonucleases were found that cut DNA at short specific base sequences. DNA that has been cut into smaller pieces can be joined to other pieces of DNA. It can be incorporated into carriers called vectors, that normally multiply in the cell, and will also do so with any inserted foreign DNA. Recombinant DNA technology allows the earth's entire genetic resources to be exploited by providing a means of overcoming natural barriers of gene transfer. The technology has developed so that there are a very large number of different vectors. Many organisms can be 'engineered', and the range of possibilities has also increased with the large number of different genes which have been identified, sequenced and isolated.<sup>3</sup> p. 150

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<sup>1</sup> B. Haring, *Manipulation*, St. Paul Press, Slough (1975).

<sup>2</sup> J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, SCM Press, London (1985).

<sup>3</sup> J. Marx, editor, *Biotechnology*, Cambridge University Press (1989).

## APPLICATION OF GENETICS TO INDUSTRY

In the last decade genetically engineered bacteria and yeast have become common extensions of the long history of human use of microorganisms. Many human proteins can now be manufactured commercially by the use of these techniques, including the blood clotting factors, interferons, interleukins, growth hormone, erythropoietin, insulin and various growth factors, which have medical uses. Recombinant DNA techniques are also being used to produce vaccines against human or animal diseases. It would not be an overstatement to say that the new genetics is revolutionizing the treatment of disease. More recently mammalian tissue culture cells have also been used to produce proteins. Bacteria have been made to produce enzymes for industrial use, such as lipase (enzymes that break down fat), which is now used to add to washing powders. There is also much work in the area of biopolymer engineering, involving the use of cells to produce polymers such as plastics. This involves transferring the genes that make natural polymers. It may save us using petroleum-based polymers, and allows much more precise control of polymer properties because it uses the precise enzymic design.<sup>4</sup>

Larger organisms are also being used to produce products. Transgenic plants are being used to produce industrial products, for example melanin, the natural pigment that darkens skin and has been made to be used in new sunscreen lotions.<sup>5</sup> There have been pharmaceutical peptides produced in oilseed rape plants, and even antibodies made in transgenic plants.<sup>6</sup> There are experiments underway to use animals to produce desired proteins in their milk, as protein factories or 'bioreactors'. Currently there has only been reasonable success using sheep which make human blood-clotting factor IX or human alpha-1 antitrypsin, though there is work on pigs, and cows. The advantage over bacteria is for proteins that require processing by mammalian enzymes after protein synthesis. The mammary gland is very useful here; for sheep about 400 litres can easily be collected per lactation cycle (in cattle the figure is 8000 litres), work is progressing.<sup>7</sup>

Commercial biotechnology is advancing into areas that depend on [p. 151](#) the introduction of genetically modified organisms into the environment. Bacteria and fungi can be made to degrade environmental pollutants. For instance the ability to degrade toluene has been transferred into bacteria that can live at zero degrees celsius.<sup>8</sup> There are other bacteria that can be used to extract and concentrate heavy metal contaminants from places such as land fills, mine tailings, or low grade mineral ores. Bacteria are already used to extract 10–20% of the world's copper supply.

## PATENTING OF LIVING ORGANISMS

Patents for individual molecules are held by different genetic engineering companies, similar to patents obtained for pharmacological drugs. The first patent obtained for a

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<sup>4</sup> R. Pool, 'In search of the plastic potato', *Science* (1989) 245: 1187–1189.

<sup>5</sup> K. Buck, 'Brave new botany', *New Scientist* (3rd June 1989), 50–55.

<sup>6</sup> A. Hiatt, R. Cafferkey & K Bowdish, 'Production of antibodies in transgenic plants', *Nature* (1989) 342: 76–78.

<sup>7</sup> J. Van Brunt, 'Molecular farming: Transgenic animals as bioreactors', *Biotechnology* (1988) 6, 1149–1154; A. J. Clark, *et al.*, 'Expression of human anti-hemophilic factor IX in the milk of transgenic sheep', *Biotechnology* (1989) 7, 487–492.

<sup>8</sup> S. E. Lindow, J. H. Panopoulos & B. L. McFarland, 'Genetic engineering of bacteria from managed and natural habitats', *Science* (1989) 244, 1300–1307.

living organism was obtained after the court case *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* in 1980. Since then, many patents have been granted in many countries. The industrial competitiveness does lead to secrecy, but on the positive side the financial interest has created more funding, and faster overall progress in research.

The first patent to be issued for animals in the USA applies to all non-human animals made containing an activated oncogene inserted by genetic engineering techniques, and was based upon one such mouse made.<sup>9</sup> These animals, 'Oncomice', are being sold as research 'materials' for testing sensitivity to carcinogens, at US\$50 an animal. The question of the patenting of animals is very contentious, and there have been some major studies on it.<sup>10</sup> Existing regulations can be adapted for most of the practical considerations of animal patenting, such as whether farmers should pay royalty fees for breeding patented livestock, but the ethical question is still unresolved. There are objections because animals have a higher status than nonliving matter, fears that it could lead to disrespect for nature, and that it will adversely affect small farmers who might not have access to the new varieties. Property rights have a long history of recognition in breeding animals, such as prize bulls and racehorses. However, the European patent office in Munich has turned down the application for a European patent for 'Oncomouse'. The legal situation varies between countries. In Europe microorganisms are patentable, but 'plant or animal p. 152 varieties or essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals' are expressly barred.<sup>11</sup> This is still being contested.

It is important that patenting protection does not prevent the widespread application of important new strains for scientific research and agriculture. Many companies are involved in the work solely for the fortune that they will make from using what are essentially natural genetic resources, which are merely moved around. There has to be some limit to how the patents are enforced, especially in areas such as agriculture where companies could be seen to be making a profit from the world food shortage. There must also be concern that large companies do not exploit third world natural resources, that they are gathering in the form of seed banks, at the expense of the people in those countries.<sup>12</sup>

## GENETIC MODIFICATION IN PLANT BREEDING

The welfare of humanity is inextricably bound up with efficient agriculture. There are dozens of examples of agriculturally important genes and traits transferred to crop plants by interspecific or intergenetic hybridisation using selective breeding,<sup>13</sup> but recombinant DNA technology allows the transcendence of inter-species barriers and makes very novel genetic combinations possible. There are several methods of gene transfer. The bacterium *Agrobacterium* is naturally found in associations with certain types of plants, and it can be used to transfer genes to those plants. Purified DNA can be used directly for plant transformation either by direct DNA uptake, such as by electroporation, by microinjection

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<sup>9</sup> Editorial, 'Towards the patenting of animals', *Nature* (1989) 336, 293 & 300.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment, *New Developments in Biotechnology-Patenting Life*, Washington: U.S.G.P.O. (March 1989).

<sup>11</sup> European Patent Convention, Article 53(b).

<sup>12</sup> C. Juma, *The Gene Hunters. Biotechnology and the Scramble for Seeds*, Princeton University Press (1989).

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Gasser & R. T. Fraley, 'Genetically engineering plants for crop improvement', *Science* (1989) 244, 1293-1299; R. M. Goodman *et al.*, 'Gene transfer in crop improvement', *Science* (1987) 236, 48-56.



or by particle gun technology. The advantage with direct gene transfer methods is that they are not limited by the host range restrictions of biological vectors such as *Agrobacterium*. Transformation frequencies of 1% are currently obtainable, and potentially any crop is now accessible.

The agriculturally important genes transferred include genes for insect and disease resistance. Herbicide-resistance genes from bacteria for the herbicide glyphosate (Roundup), Basta and other herbicides have been expressed in higher plants. Tobacco, tomato and potato plants have been bred which are tolerant enough to grow with p. 153 concentrations of the herbicide that would kill all weeds growing alongside. Field trials have been underway since 1986 on these plants, and they will soon be commercially available. Tobacco plants resistant to tobacco mosaic virus infection have been bred. There are also plants that contain a bacterial toxin gene to make them pest resistant; the insect pests will die if they eat the plants. Monsanto and Plant Genetic Systems, two U.S. companies, have used toxins from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*. They put the toxin gene into tobacco and tomato plants and this protected the plants from the larvae of tobacco budworm.<sup>14</sup> Only those insects which eat the plants are affected, which is an advantage over chemical pesticides.

Plants will be able to be more resistant to drought, salinity or sensitivity to heavy metals, or less dependent on nitrogen fertilisers, so that they can be grown in areas of the earth currently unable to be used for agriculture. The food content of seeds, and plant products can be altered to improve the nutritional qualities. Tomatoes have been made whose fruits soften more slowly than usual, so that they last longer in shops.<sup>15</sup> There is the potential to make more nutritious plants, such as by increasing the level of the amino acid methionine in Soyabeans.

There are already many types of agriculturally important plants that have been grown with genetic modifications. The list in early 1989 included alfalfa, apple, *Arabidopsis*, asparagus, bananas, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, celery, corn, cotton, cucumber, Douglas fir, flax, horseradish, lettuce, lotus, *Medicago varia*, Morning Glory, Orchard grass, peas, pears, petunias, pinetrees, poplar, potato, rape, rice, rye, soyabean, sugarbeet, sunflower, tobacco, tomato, trefoil, *Vigna aconitifolia*, walnut, and white clover, with many to join.<sup>16</sup> We need to be able to feed a growing population and these additions to agricultural productivity will aid this. Environmental pollution is becoming a key area, and if we can avoid excessive fertiliser and pesticide use we will also aid agricultural production. It is not so much the quantity of food that we can grow, but the way that we grow it, that is important.<sup>17</sup> p. 154

## GENETIC MODIFICATION IN ANIMAL BREEDING

In the past, animal breeders have had to rely on the opportune use of stud animals which show the desired qualities, using selected mating, by natural or artificial insemination or *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and embryo transfer. Genetic techniques are being increasingly

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment, *New Developments in Biotechnology-Field Testing Engineered Organism, Genetic and Ecological Issues*, Washington: U.S.G.P.O., OTA-BA-350 (May 1988).

<sup>15</sup> M. Kramer, R. E. Sheehy & W. R. Hiatt, 'Progress towards the genetic engineering of tomato fruit softening', *Trends in Biotechnology* (1989) 7, 191-194.

<sup>16</sup> M. Ratner, 'Corp Biotech '89', *Biotechnology* (1989) 7, 337-341.

<sup>17</sup> P. R. Crosson & N. J. Rosenberg, 'Strategies for Agriculture', *Scientific American* (Sept. 1989), 78-85.

used to alter animals in both medical and agricultural research, and are being extended into many applications.

Genetically engineered animals are becoming the preferred source of experimental animals, seen in the growing number of transgenic animals made. Part of the reason for this is that scientists prefer to use standardised animal strains for experiments, and in the pursuit of knowledge they want to study the affects of genes not just on cells but whole animals. The effects of altering the genes will only be known inside the transgenic animals, and may be complex. New strains have been made already that are diseased, and feel more pain, and the question has to be asked whether it is right to breed them.

The first method used was to inject large quantities of DNA containing the chosen gene into fertilised eggs. The first publicized examples of this were mice that had multiple copies of rat growth hormone genes, some of which grew up to double normal size, later called 'supermice'.<sup>18</sup> This technique has been improved by the use of more targetable vectors such as retroviruses to give better control of integration. Another technique used is to use heat shock to induce triploid salmon which do not spawn, but continue to grow.<sup>19</sup> In mid 1989 it was found that it is possible for sperm to uptake DNA, thus opening the way for making transgenic animals by the sperm instead of by the eggs.<sup>20</sup> This would avoid the need for specialized micromanipulation that is needed for microinjection of eggs, but has been difficult to confirm.

The technique which people still associate most with the subject of cloning is that of nuclear transplantation. This is the technique that was used to make clonal frogs thirty years ago, and involves the transplantation of nuclei from a multicelled individual (which may be embryonic or more mature) into the enucleated egg cells. One way of removing the influence of the recipient cell's DNA is to irradiate them. [p. 155](#) This method was used in making clones of salmon.<sup>21</sup> The sperm were irradiated before fertilization, so that the sperm's genes are destroyed, but the sperm still stimulate the eggs to complete division so allow fertilization to occur. The fertilized eggs were treated by pressure and temperature resulting in 90% clones. The purpose is to increase the number of females in the farm. Males can be produced by treating the hatched fry with a male hormone, and so despite being chromosomally female about 80% of those treated could function as males. This technique has proved very difficult to apply to mammals. It appears that for proper development of mammalian embryos, genes from both parents are needed, as genes are differentially used from paternal or maternal chromosomes. More success has been achieved with fusions of whole embryonic cells, after embryo splitting.

The cloning that has been reported for mammals involves the splitting of preembryos into two or more preembryos which can then develop into several clones. Cattle, horses, pigs, sheep and mice have been developed from as little as a quarter of an embryo. Development and the ease of manipulation may be species dependent. There are related alternatives that can produce up to ten clones.<sup>22</sup> There are commercially available kits for

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<sup>18</sup> R. D. Palmiter, *et al.* 'Dramatic growth of mice that develop from eggs microinjected with metallothionein-growth hormone fusion genes', *Nature* (1982) 300, 611-615.

<sup>19</sup> OTA (note 14), p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> M. Lavitrano, *et al.* 'Sperm cells as vectors for introducing foreign DNA into eggs: genetic transformation of mice,' *Cell* (1989) 57, 717-723.

<sup>21</sup> B. Johnstone, 'Japanese Solve Riddle of Salmon-Cloning', *New Scientist* (Nov. 3rd 1983), 328.

<sup>22</sup> S. M. Willadsen, 'Nuclear Transplantation in Sheep Embryos', *Nature* (1986) 320, 63-65.

'do-it-yourself' embryo sexing and splitting (taking about three hours to use).<sup>23</sup> This type of technique is useful for agricultural breeders to rapidly increase the number of a breeding stock. The use of embryo transplantation is growing to be more common than artificial insemination for agriculture, and is becoming similar in price and success rate. It is possible to buy pairs of frozen beef cattle embryos for US\$70 (including implantation). Dairy farmers are able to implant the embryos into their dairy cattle so that they can give birth to beef calves, which are worth more money, yet maintain the requirement for dairy cows to have a calf each year to maintain the high milk production.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most publicized outcomes of embryo splitting was the creation of the sheep and goat hybrid, the so-called 'geeps'.<sup>25</sup> The p. 156 hybrid chimeric embryo obtained from mixing sheep and goat embryonic cells developed into 'healthy' hybrid adults, displaying a mixed physiology and behaviour. A chimeric animal can occur naturally. Some chimeras will not develop as they are rejected by the mother's womb. This may be overcome by only substituting foreign cell into the inner cells mass, leaving the trophectodermic shell around the outside of the embryo, which develops into the placenta, to protect the new embryo. This has led to sheep being able to give birth to goats, and vice versa. This type of embryo transfer technology may also be very important to preserve rare species, by using domestic animals as surrogate mothers. These chimeras are used for the study of cell differentiation and interaction in the developing and mature organisms.

One major development in embryonic manipulation and genetic engineering is the use of embryonic stem (ES) cell lines.<sup>26</sup> These ES cell lines are established in culture from preimplantation blastocysts and can colonise both the somatic and germcell lineages of chimeric animals following their injection into host blastocysts. ES cell lines have made genetic manipulation much easier. These cells can be grown in cell tissue culture *in vitro*, genetically manipulated, the desired transformed somatically growing ES cells selected, and only these cells used to make chimeric embryos which when born give rise to new strains of mice. Many mutations have been made in different genes, resulting in the generation of new strains of animals. Animals can be made as experimental models of human disease, for example the first mice strains that are deficient in an enzyme HPRT were made as potential animal models for the human disease Lesch-Nyhan syndrome.<sup>27</sup>

## ETHICAL ISSUES IN BIOTECHNOLOGY

Of obvious commercial value is the *ability to control the sex ratio* of offspring in breeding populations of livestock. It is possible to alter the sex balance of food animals, as described for salmon. There are several methods that claim to separate semen into X- and Y-bearing sperm (there are two sex chromosomes in mammals, X and Y, the female genotype is XX, male is XY, and the sex is determined solely by the sperm). There is still much research, and it appears that there are p. 157 male-specific antigens expressed in 8-cell embryos of mice, cattle, pigs and sheep that can be identified. When it is known that these methods

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<sup>23</sup> L. Glasgow, 'Kit for sexing embryos sets to work down on the farm', *New Scientist* (9th Dec. 1989), 19.

<sup>24</sup> P. Newmark, 'From the dairy case to the butcher block', *Biotechnology* (1988) 6, 1281.

<sup>25</sup> C. B. Fehily, *et al.* 'Interspecific chimaerism between sheep and goats', *Nature* (1984) 307, 634–636.

<sup>26</sup> M. R. Cappechi, 'Altering the genome by homologous recombination', *Science* (1989) 244, 1289–1292.

<sup>27</sup> M. R. Kuehn, *et al.*, 'A Potential Animal Model for Lesch-Nyhan Syndrome through Introduction of HPRT Mutations into Mice', *Nature* (1987) 326, 295–298.

do not damage the progeny, they will be used for human sperm selection which currently can only alter the natural sex ratio by a factor of two. It is also possible to use embryo sexing, by analysing the DNA of a single cell out of an eight cell embryo, and only implanting embryos of the right sex or other genetic characteristics. Embryo sexing at any time after the eight cell stage is already being performed for humans as well, though it is aimed at avoidance of sex-linked genetic disease.

The type of genetic alteration that could be used includes *improving the weight gain, disease resistance and fertility*. There has been success making vaccines using gene technology, for example a vaccine made by workers at the C.S.I.R.O. in Australia against the external cattle parasite tick, *Boophilus microphilus*. Genetic engineering is being applied to farm animals, such as sheep, cows, chickens, pigs and fish, with the goal of increasing their growth rates by introducing extra growth hormone genes.<sup>28</sup> The enhanced growth of mice after transfer of the human growth hormone gene is an effect that is being repeated in other animals, though only effectively in fish. Pigs that are being tested, were found to grow more rapidly but have a high morbidity.<sup>29</sup> There needs to be a deeper understanding of the genetic regulation. The way that animals respond to new genes will only be known after experiments on them. The aim is not to make larger animals, but faster growing ones. The way the over-expression of an exogenous gene such as that for growth hormone affects the complex processes regulating growth rate, body composition and reproductive characters can only be discovered by experiment. There is consumer opposition in some countries to meat produced in animals made to grow faster by injections of the protein, growth hormone, and Europe has refused some American beef imports because of this. Public attitudes may change, but are another factor. Any food products must be shown to be safe for their intended use.

One unethical use of these techniques that is of grave concern is their major use in the military sphere, although *biological weapons* are outlawed by a Geneva convention. This research is claimed to be defensive, but there is really no distinction from offensive, as in order safely to commence germ warfare one should be immune to what one [p. 158](#) is releasing. It is very easy to engineer toxic bacteria; for example, the genes controlling toxins such as those of cholera or botulinus can be put into the normal human intestine bacteria *E. coli*. Numerous more lethal combinations have been constructed.<sup>30</sup>

Our Christian view of creation means that it exists for God's glory. It has a meaning and worth beyond human utility. It has intrinsic value. Preservation of each species is important ([Gen. 9](#)), so we should not lose each species' identity, but the question of *changing the genetic identity* is harder to answer. There is a law in the Old Testament ([Lev. 19:19](#)), which says not to crossbreed animals or plant two plants in the same field. This verse is not considered relevant to the field of modern genetics or agriculture. As we discover how information has interchanged freely it becomes even less 'unnatural'.

The argument against genetic manipulation that we should not cross species barriers is weak. Nature has set barriers to horizontal gene transfer in eucaryotes, but trans-species gene exchange by a process called conjugation is common among procaryotes. There has been little investigation of DNA transfer between procaryotes, bacteria and eucaryotes, but, it was recently found that *dna* can be transferred between bacteria and

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<sup>28</sup> R. Jaenish, 'Transgenic animals', *Science* (1988) 240, 1468-1474.

<sup>29</sup> V. G. Pursel, *et al.*, 'Genetic engineering of livestock', *Science* (1989) 244, 1282-1288.

<sup>30</sup> D. Kamely, 'Military applications of biotechnology', *Biotechnology* (1989) 7, 447-451.

yeast which is a eucaryote.<sup>31</sup> There are several plant species which can be traced to the natural cross-species pollination of other plants.<sup>32</sup> So it follows that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are not significantly different from the organisms that could arise by normal genetic exchange, it just increases the rate of genetic reorganisation.

## ETHICS OF GENETICALLY INDUCED PAIN

People are more concerned about the alteration of animals, because they are sentient beings. There are major changes possible in animal characteristics and even category. We have seen the animals that we have made by conventional animal breeding, illustrated dramatically with the variety of dogs we now have. Nature itself is full of variety, and the selection of different characteristics in domestic animals has relied on this variety. But there is a point beyond which it is unethical to use animals as a means to our ends. There are similar problems to those existing for vivisection. There is room for government legislation [P. 159](#) to supplement the regulations based on avoidance of pain and endangered species, as there are other factors which are important. Public attitudes are becoming important as seen in the protest groups that have influenced decisions already. The boundary to the genetic manipulations we use on animals is going to be difficult to decide.

The Bible often mentions animals, as Israel was an agricultural community. God owns everything of creation, including all our cattle ([Ps. 50:10](#)) and he cares for them all ([Gen. 8:17, 9:4, 10; Ex. 23:5; Deut. 12:23, 25:4; Num. 22:32; Prov. 12:10; Ps. 36:7, 104:10–11, 145:9, 15–16, 147:9; Job 38:26–27, 41; Jonah 4:11](#)). God is not even careless of birds ([Matt. 6:25, 10:29](#)). God's mercies are over all his works ([Ps. 145:9](#)), and animals should also rest on the sabbath ([Ex. 23:12; Deut. 5:14](#)), and should be fed first, before the farmer ([Deut. 11:15; Num. 20:8](#)). Animals, however, can be eaten and farmed ([Gen. 9:3; Deut. 12:20](#)).

That is the issue on a broad scope, but what about the individual animals that are being made for such testing or use in general? In the case of clones, they are the same as normal animals. In the case of deliberately diseased animals, such as those that develop cancer very easily, or have physical abnormalities bred into them, the question is whether the means justifies the ends—not only in the actual use of animals, but in their creation that way at all, bringing them into life. There are those that develop cancer, such as the so-called 'Oncomouse' that was patented, and numerous other types of genetically modified animal strains, many in mice. Some of these animals are made so as to study the genes involved in development, including what are unique models for cancer research, as well as other worthy medical goals.<sup>33</sup> Embryonic stem cells are used to make some of these genetic modifications and new strains, and there is much research into the genes that control the developmental process. The ES cell lines make it easier to control specific genes, and also to generate many novel mutants.

What is surely an evil is the production of unnecessary pain in other beings. However, if we reduce our argument against using animals to that of the evils of causing pain, it

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<sup>31</sup> J. A. Heinemann & G. F. Sprague, 'Bacterial conjugative plasmids mobilise DNA transfer between bacteria and yeast', *Nature* (1989) 340, 205–209.

<sup>32</sup> S. Young, 'Wayward genes play the field', *New Scientist* (9th Sept. 1989), 49–53.

<sup>33</sup> C. Cohen, 'The case for the use of animals in biomedical research', *New England Journal of Medicine* 315, 865–870; Council on Scientific Affairs, American Medical Association, 'Animals in Research', *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1989) 261, 3602–3606.

would not restrict the use of nonsentient or painless animals.<sup>34</sup> It is possible to engineer them p. 160 genetically to be painless, though I do not know of any examples of this having been done yet. While actively producing pain is seen as an evil, the sensation of pain is necessary as pain is important in the proper functioning of nervous systems, so feeling pain should not be seen as evil. We could imagine beings that could be made with limited sentience, only having the perception needed for basic survival, such as for limited self interest for eating, grooming or avoiding injury. In the extreme case we could consider animals made that enjoy being kept in factory style farms, or that want to be eaten, or are even masochistic. If we object to these experiments, we would probably be forced away from arguments based on pain, or preference utilitarianism, in which sentience, the capacity of a subject for sensation, is the preeminent quality on which attitudes towards the treatment of that being by others is based. To a Christian the answer would be that it is because it is against the responsibility that God gave to man in looking after animals. It is not respecting other creatures in God's creation and is a misuse of power.

Transgenic studies after incorporating growth hormone genes into pigs and sheep have not shown any relation between gene number and expression of genes and growth rate. In fact many of the pigs died within 90 days of birth in the preliminary experiments, with significant problems of lethargy, muscle weakness, uncoordination, and susceptibility to stress. Most of the transgenic animals did have improved weight gain (about 10%), but also had gastric ulcers, dermatitis, nephritis and other major problems.<sup>35</sup> This does illustrate the problems, and until these factors can be removed, even if it was economic to use these animals, it would not be ethical if they are going to suffer to that degree.

There will be major problems in agricultural and industrial use of new animals. These problems are not new in themselves, but the rapidity of change and the types of changes that are possible make it essential to look at the possibilities. It will never be sufficient to justify animal use on the sole grounds of the ultimate benefit to man.

The humane treatment of animals requires at least that we seek to use the procedure involving least suffering. Alternatives involve reducing the number and refinement of procedures so there is less suffering, or replacement of animals by such methods as *in vitro* experiments, using cell lines, or embryos of lower status or larvae, or isolated organs, and computer simulation.<sup>36</sup> Government regulations p. 161 that require animal testing of new drugs and compounds need to move with the development of alternatives, as they began to with the European Commission's decision in late 1989 to avoid the need for the LD50 test which killed many animals. Genetic techniques and embryo manipulation will reduce the number of animals used in vivisection because cloned animals can be used.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL DANGERS OF GENETICALLY-MODIFIED ORGANISMS**

The question of environmental release of GMOs is applicable to the release of bacteria, plants, animals and humans. The possibility of a novel and harmful virus being released and damage or disruption of the ecosystem are the main fears. In view of the potentially dramatic consequences, this is very serious. To be of a major practical use to worldwide agriculture, any GMO must be released into the environment. Only small scale agriculture

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<sup>34</sup> D. Macer, 'Uncertainties about "painless" animals', *Bioethics* (1989) 3, 226-235.

<sup>35</sup> Pursel *et al.* (note 29).

<sup>36</sup> A. M. Goldberg & J. M. Frazier, 'Alternatives to animals in toxicity testing', *Scientific American* (August 1989) 261, 16-22.

can be conducted in closed environmental systems, though some important products used today are produced in that way, such as eggs from battery farming of chickens.

There have been many protests to prevent research, and they were delayed for several years.<sup>37</sup> It is generally difficult to make predictions about the potential of a given organism to become established and to maintain high populations in a given environment. The data obtained so far suggest that there is an extremely small likelihood of any survival of genetically-modified bacterial strains outside the area of use.<sup>38</sup> In these experiments, previous laboratory studies of bacterial behaviour predicted the observed environmental behaviour. Many pathogenic bacteria are continuously released into the environment in sewage, and millions of hectares of land are inoculated with *Rhizobium* each year to improve the growth of leguminous crops.<sup>39</sup>

A procedure for estimating the risks of each organism has been developed by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.<sup>40</sup> They argue that because of ignorance we should not immediately categorize any type of release as sufficiently free of risk not to require individual scrutiny by the Committee. Each stage of the experiment p. 162 should be subject to approval and licensing. It points out that the biggest brake on the acceleration of the number of releases would be any case of serious damage caused by slack regulations. This justifies close examination of each case. In Europe the regulations between countries differ, experiments are underway without any control in some countries, like Italy, but had been banned completely in West Germany. There have been several German biotechnology companies that have decided to build new laboratories outside of Germany to avoid prohibitive local regulations, such as BASF and Bayer.<sup>41</sup> Public opposition in Germany has even prevented the construction of factories which would use contained GMOs to produce medical proteins. In mid 1989 Denmark announced that they had authorised the first field trial of transgenic plants. The plants will be sugarbeet with either resistance to the herbicide Roundup, or resistance to a viral disease, rhizomania.<sup>42</sup> In the USA the Environmental Protection Agency has drafted new regulations in mid 1989 which do not distinguish whether the new organism is genetically modified but focus on the properties of any organism. In Japan there are experiments underway, and they seem to be adopting U.S. policies.

Most planned introductions are likely to be agricultural, so the negative consequences probably would involve an agricultural problem. Experiences with past introductions of organisms into new environments provides some clues as to the nature of the possible disruptions, though a better analogy for planned introductions of genetically engineered organisms is that with new crops or cultivars that have been introduced in agriculture in the past. There are some examples in nature where the acquisition of a single gene can cause ecological problems, such as antibiotic resistance genes that have been acquired by

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<sup>37</sup> P. R. Wheale & R. M. McNally, *Genetic Engineering: Catastrophe or Utopia*, Harvester, London (1988); OTA (note 14).

<sup>38</sup> T. Suslow, 'Ice nucleation and the deliberate release of genetically engineered microorganisms', *Trends in Biochemical Sciences* (1989), 14, 180.

<sup>39</sup> M. Sussman, *et al.*, eds., *The Release of Genetically-engineered Microorganisms*, Academic Press, London (1988).

<sup>40</sup> Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, thirteenth report, *The Release of Genetically Engineered Organisms to the Environment*, London: H.M.S.O. (July 1989).

<sup>41</sup> D. Dickson, 'German biotech companies flee regulatory climate', *Science* (1989) 244, 1251-1252.

<sup>42</sup> P. Newark, 'Danish law to be less rigid', *Nature* (1989) 339, 653.

many bacteria. In the case of bacteria designed to degrade environmental pollutants, even if the degradatory gene(s) are transferred to other bacteria the effect would be beneficial. There have been some studies of bacterial colonies in polluted sludge/mud which have followed the fate of the novel genes, and have suggested only beneficial affects.

## TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW

Overall these new genetic technologies promise much to aid world [P. 163](#) agricultural techniques. They are cheaper and should help to solve the pollution problems caused by the current fertilisers, herbicides and insecticides. If plants were made to use fertiliser more efficiently it would mean less fertiliser would run off into rivers causing pollution, and if they were made disease resistant then less problems would arise from the poisoning of the environment by chemicals. When preliminary trials in contained, controlled environmental situations have been completed for genetically modified organisms, and they are considered safe in the open environment by the controlling committees, those organisms should be able to be used in open environments.

One test case was the application by Monsanto Agricultural Products Company to field-test a soil bacterium (*Pseudomonas fluorescans*) which has been engineered to produce a naturally occurring pesticide (the toxin of *Bacillus thuringiensis*) for the protection of the roots of crop plants.<sup>43</sup> Traditional chemicals are toxic to many life forms, but this pesticide is only toxic to a specific soil larva. This pesticide provides a better targeted and safer way to control insect pests.

One alternative to the release of live genetically engineered bacteria is to use dead bacteria. The U.S. company Mycogen received U.S. patents in 1987 for the invention of a process that kills bacteria while preserving their cell wall as a gelatin-like capsule which remains intact until the insect pests eat them, only then releasing the contents such as a pesticide. These are alternatives to chemical pesticides, which are very damaging to the environment. The dead bacteria began field tests in 1987. The first large scale field tests of this pesticide (called 'Mycogen Vegetable Product') have recently been approved.<sup>44</sup> Live bacteria will be more useful on fast growing plants such as lettuce, as bacteria will grow with the plant avoiding the need for reapplication. The capsules are better for transporting, and have a higher concentration of toxin than bacteria, compared to bacteria which have to grow in the open environment.

The World's first commercial pesticide based on a live genetically engineered organism went on sale in Australia in March 1989. It is called 'NoGall', and it protects stone fruits, nuts and roses from a disease called Crown Gall disease, which causes worldwide annual losses of at least US\$150 million.<sup>45</sup> The 'pesticide' consists of a [p. 164](#) harmless strain of the disease causing bacteria, that will live on the same leaves, and produce an antibiotic which kills the disease-causing strain.

ES cell lines make the creation of transgenic animals easier, and give much more control over the exact genetic change transferred to the animals. If we are concerned about the targetting of gene changes then they may have definite advantages. The genes can be manipulated in their natural chromosomal environments, whereas the use of conventional methods for introducing DNA sequences into the germ line allows little control over the chromosomal site of integration and the number of integrated copies.

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<sup>43</sup> OTA (note 14).

<sup>44</sup> S. Watts, 'Dead microbes sidestep rules on genetic release,' *New Scientist* (Oct. 1989), 21.

<sup>45</sup> B. Wright, 'Gene-spliced pesticide uncorked in Australia,' *New Scientist* (4 March 1989), 23.



At recent conferences on GMOs the concern has been switching somewhat from the environmental issues to the issue of safety of the end product for human consumption. There are worries about the genetically engineered crops, and many will soon be under scrutiny in the USA for Food and Drug Administration safety. There are concerns that there could be harm from high levels of some toxins, which are probably of low risk. There was, however, the case in the 1960s of a new strain of potato called 'lenape' which had high levels of a usually trace level toxin, and caused illness after eating. There are also unknown affects on allergies of people. The concerns also cover grains or food that can be given to animals as feed.<sup>46</sup> It has been found that some plant defences against pesticides involve the synthesis of carcinogens.

## TOWARDS CHRISTIAN VALUES AND STEWARDSHIP

In this study some ethical issues raised by the application of newly developed genetic techniques have been considered. We do not need to move to very novel ethical theories to consider the implications of new genetic technologies as some propose.<sup>47</sup> Rather, these new problems reflect similar issues to those of existing and older problems. The problems of GMOs come down to two major issues; Stewardship (including cruelty) and the free environmental release of GMOs with the possible ecological dangers.

The insertion of new genes into animals should continue where necessary for the study of biology when there is no clear detrimental p. 165 affect upon the mutant animals. There is a balance in each case between the importance and effect of an experiment and the status of the animal. Where there is likely agricultural benefit without major suffering or change then new genes should be able to be inserted. In agriculture there are definite advantages in the use of some artificial reproduction, embryo transfer, and clonal reproduction, that do not raise unsolvable ethical dilemmas. Some genes may be found which it would seem wrong to insert into animals, such as genes which control basic animal behaviour, or pain sensitivity, or introduce disease or excessive suffering to them. In medical research using clonal animals, there are problems similar to those existing for vivisection, with the need perhaps to develop criteria for judgement less based on pain as argued above. We may need to consider the protection of species integrity or bodily form, which have been neglected in recent ethics. We may also need to work towards promotion of a higher view of nature, which would condemn the misuse or abuse of nature not only because it is wrong but because of the bad effect on human values.

Some of these techniques do raise different and much more complex problems when applied to human beings. We may not object to altering the sex-ratio of agricultural animals, or even of endangered animals in the wild to improve their chances of species survival, but we may oppose sex selection in humans. We can not argue that because a technique is unethical for human use it should be banned in animals, as shown by currently accepted practices. We can draw the line between animals and humans.

There will be novel situations that will make us think more about our use of nature, and particularly animals. This is good if it makes us rethink our attitudes, and perhaps question some accepted practices. We will have many new possibilities in the decade ahead. Within ten to fifteen years we will have the sequences of all human genes, raising the question of future animal research which may transfer specifically human

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<sup>46</sup> I. Wickelgren, 'Please pass the genes', *Science News* (19th Aug. 1989), 136, 120-124.

<sup>47</sup> D. Suzuki & P. Knudtson, *Genethics: The Clash Between the New Genetics and Human Values*, Harvard University Press, Boston (1989).

characteristics to animals. There are potential advantages for both medicine and animal welfare, but we do need to reexamine where the ethical limits are. It is important for Christians to be involved in deciding the future scope of the use of these techniques. We need to examine what type of society we are making for ourselves, and we as Christians should be moulders, not the moulded. It must be clear to all of us that science will not solve our social problems, but it is an important part of our management of the earth.

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Darryl Macer, Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Cambridge University U.K., has returned to New Zealand. [p. 166](#)

# **The Role of Political Change in the Advancement of the Kingdom**

Gail Law

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*In this article the author surveys the effect of unwelcomed political change on the advance of the kingdom of God among both Jews and Gentiles in the biblical records of the Exodus, in the Exile and in the early Church in Jerusalem, and in its implications for Hong Kong after 1997. In identifying common principles in each movement, Dr. Law calls on the churches of Hong Kong to prepare themselves for radical change. Most nations and churches are not given such a time-bound warning to prepare themselves. If the 1990s prove to be an era of radical change worldwide, as many predict, God's people need a clearer understanding on the Lordship of Christ and his kingdom over creation and human history. We need to prepare for the unbelievable missiological opportunities that God the Creator/Redeemer has in his plan for the redemption of mankind.*

Editor

On July 1, 1997, China will claim sovereignty over Hong Kong from the British government. This impending political change has given rise to a major emigration movement from Hong Kong. Thousands of Hong Kong residents have left or are leaving this British colony for other countries. Among them are many key Chinese Christian leaders. The Church of Jesus Christ is confronted with the need to interpret this current socio-political phenomenon from the Christian viewpoint. This article attempts to examine missiologically some major biblical events of unwelcome political change<sup>1</sup> which led to significant migration movements, with the view to explore how God's salvation activities were carried out in and through them.

## **THE GOD OF THE KINGDOM IN HUMAN HISTORY**

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<sup>1</sup> The reason for choosing unwelcomed political changes is to limit the paper to only those events which share similar features with the Hong Kong situation.

The conviction that God intends to offer his Kingdom to all humanity and that he is actively working towards that purpose gives impetus and enthusiasm to world mission today. Missiological interpretation of [P. 167](#) secular events sees God's hand behind political and social phenomena, leading to the redemption of His people.

### **Man's Need for the Kingdom**

The Bible begins with the proclamation of a Creator God who has absolute rule over the created universe ([Gen. 1](#)), being the object of worship for all creatures. At the Fall, man chose to surrender to Satan's temptation. Consequently, Satan, sin and death bind man in the Kingdom of Darkness, excluding him from the gracious rule of his Creator God ([Gen. 3](#) to [11](#)). Man cannot save himself nor is he aware of the need to be saved. Deliverance from the power of darkness, and return to the gracious rule of the Creator, has to come from God.

The call of Abraham reveals God's gracious initiative in offering his Kingdom to fallen humanity, extending to them the invitation to return to him and to honour him as King. The dominant theme which most aptly describes the drama that runs through Scripture from Abraham to Revelation is the Kingdom of God. God identifies himself as a King who always calls people into his Kingdom, promising the restoration of all things at the end-time.

### **God Reigns in the Kingdom**

The nature of God's reign in the Kingdom is to be distinguished from his absolute reign over the universe at Creation. The Kingdom of God always implicates the redemptive dimension for fallen humanity.<sup>2</sup> After the resurrection it is God who reigns in the person of Jesus Christ among his redeemed people.

Although the concept of the Kingdom of God is most explicitly expressed in Jesus' teaching and ministry in the Gospels, the idea of God's reign is not unfamiliar in the Old Testament. God called Abraham who was to forsake all and obey his instruction, and receive his blessings and promises ([Gen. 12:1-4](#)). The first commandment of the Decalogue given by God through Moses forbids Israel to have other gods ([Ex. 19:5-6, 20:2-3](#)). God claims sole kingship over his people. In the period of the kingdom, the kings of Israel and Judah recognized that their kingship was not absolute—the true King was Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> [p. 168](#)

Some scholars, including Otto Michel and Joachim Jeremias, regard the Great Commission in Mathew [28:18-20](#) as the coronation formula of Christ, the King.<sup>4</sup>

God reigns in his Kingdom, yet the Kingdom needs to be sought. Although the Kingdom was inaugurated by Jesus' ministry ([Lk. 4:16-21](#)), its consummation awaits his Second Coming. Living in this already-but-not-yet tension of the Kingdom, its citizens need to make conscious effort to seek it ([Matt. 6:33](#)), giving first priority to their King.

### **God Extends his Kingdom to All Peoples**

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson Chow, 'An Analysis of the Progress of the Kingdom of God', *Chinese Churches Today* (Aug. 1988), 39-41.

<sup>3</sup> The story of Ahab's frustration at failing to acquire Nabob's vineyard is a good illustration of this point. See [1 Kings 21:1-4](#).

<sup>4</sup> Richard R. De Ridder, *Disciplining the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), pp. 170-172.

God does not only reign in his Kingdom, but also extends its boundary to those outside the faith. His concern is never one family, one race or one nation, but all peoples and all nations in the whole world. He progressively offers his Kingdom to peoples of increasingly diverse cultural and ethnic origins. This action stems from the missionary nature of the Godhead.

When God elected Abraham he had his eye on the nations. Not only would Abraham be blessed, but 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' ([Gen. 12:3](#)). Through the election of Israel, God was paving a way toward achieving his world-embracing goals. Israel was to lead a lifestyle reflecting God's character, pointing the nations to the true God. Where she gravitated towards gross social injustice and idolatry, replacing true religion with former cultic observances, prophets, like Amos, lashed out their indictment against her subversion of God's gracious intentions for the nations.

God's election of Abraham and Israel concerns the whole world. He deals so intensely with Israel precisely because he is maintaining his claim to the whole world.<sup>5</sup>

The last command before Jesus' ascension is consistent with God's missionary intention revealed in the New Testament. The explicit instruction to make disciples of all nations leaves no room for doubts and ambiguity about this in the mind of his followers ([Matt. 28:18-20](#)).

### **God Acts In and Through History to Advance his Kingdom**

God is actively working towards his redemptive purpose for humanity. He involves himself in a project of joint partnership with his people. **p. 169** Since man's response to God's calling is realized in the concrete arena of history with its social, economic and political options, God's invisible hand always leaves its imprint in many secular events. Therefore missiology sees God's work both in and through human history, moving the world forward towards his redemptive purpose.

This is the appropriate point to turn to the examination of the three major migration movements resulting from political changes.

### **POLITICAL CHANGE AND KINGDOM ADVANCE**

If the consistent will of God is to extend his Kingdom to peoples and nations of this world, and if he actively engages himself towards his redemptive purpose, will he use political change and migration this way? If so, how will he do it? The missiological questions to ask are: What strategy, method and leadership will he use? How will he use them? This section attempts to seek answers for these questions from the Bible. The focus is on biblical patterns involving political change and migration for the extension of God's Kingdom. It will take a 'broad stroke' approach examining only the more dominant features and will not dwell on the finer details, deviations and differences.

All of the three events studied (namely the exodus from Egypt, exile of the Jews leading to dispersion and the persecution of early Christians in Jerusalem) did contribute positively to the advancement of God's Kingdom. A pattern of three particular features is discerned. First, each event led to a major breakthrough in the authentication of the migrants' faith in God and in its expression. The people of God finding faith real and authentic grew in conviction. Second, the development in each case gave rise to a new approach of witnessing for God with fresh vigour and enthusiasm in the new land which

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<sup>5</sup> J. Verkuyl, Dale Cooper tr. and ed., *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 92.

the migrants adopted as 'home'. Third, in the process, a new kind of leadership emerged, which was instrumental in shaping and sustaining the new movement. The following sections elaborate on the observed pattern and the way the Kingdom was advanced.

## The Exodus

The Exodus was the foundational event of Israel as a people. She traced her peoplehood to this event. A nation was born through this trauma.

### 1. Authenticating in Faith

The Exodus from Egypt and the Covenant at Sinai made Israel a people *p. 170* whose faith was based not on abstract theological ideas or moral principles, but on the memory of a crisis event in which God's intervention put her trouble as well as emotional and physical trauma to an end. Before this event, Israel knew her God as 'the God of our fathers'. But after this event, he became intensely real and lively. Their faith in God had been proven real and authentic. God was the mighty Deliverer who delivered her from desperation in slavery and oppression. He was the God of Covenant who chose her for his own possession. Her election was pure grace ([Deut. 7:7-9](#)). The Decalogue given in suzerainty treaty form also bound her in relationship to God as vassal to overlord. God was her king, with whom she maintained a covenant relationship. Her duty was to be faithful and obedient to him.<sup>6</sup>

The memory of her divine encounter with God was translated into visible symbols of worship with an elaborate system of priesthood, sacrifices, festivals and Covenant laws. They guided Israel to lead a lifestyle which reflected Yahweh's grace and mercy, and justice and holiness. Thus, a new witnessing community was established first in the desert and then in Canaan.

### 2. Advancing in Witnessing

Israel witnessed for God mainly through her Covenant lifestyle. Nowhere did Yahweh instruct Israel as a people to launch aggressive witnessing campaigns. Instead, she was to attract Gentiles to her midst.

Sure enough, the peoples of the land would be attracted to Israel's lifestyle, especially its concern for widows and orphans, slaves and the resident aliens. Burnett describes it as 'shalom lifestyle',<sup>7</sup> which was the key element in the 'centripetal' approach to mission, in contrast to the 'centrifugal' or 'go' approach in the New Testament. Alan Richardson defines 'shalom' as follows:

'Shalom' is a comprehensive word, covering the manifold relationships of daily life, and expressing the ideal state of life in Israel. Fundamental meaning is 'totally', 'wholeness', "'ell-being" 'harmony', with stress on material prosperity untouched by violence or misfortune.<sup>8</sup> *p. 171*

The religious practices were familiar and meaningfully enlightening to the peoples, for Israel absorbed them selectively from the local cultures and skillfully infused them with new meanings which were in line with her faith in Yahweh. Festivals of nature religion, e.g. the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Ingathering, became celebrations for Yahweh's

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<sup>6</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 149.

<sup>7</sup> David Burnett, *God's Mission: Healing the Nations* (MARC Europe: 1986), p. 71.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 165.

mighty acts toward Israel. They were now not just cyclical in conception, but commemorating past redemption. Animal sacrifices were never considered as food for God. Though the worship of Yahweh was a brand new religion to the peoples of the land, it posed little barrier for Gentiles to convert to faith in Yahweh.

### *3. Excelling in Leadership*

The prominent leader guiding and shaping Israel in faith and witness was Moses, whose insight, brilliance and capacity far exceeded that of his contemporaries. He was a man of God, appointed by him to lead his people. Apart from God's intervention Moses' personal history also contributed to make him the man he was. Born as a Hebrew to Hebrew parents, brought up in Pharaoh's palace as an Egyptian prince, and forced to mature in the wilderness in Midian as a shepherd, Moses embodied three cultures in one person. This rich heritage gave breadth to Moses' horizon, discernment to his wisdom, and practical skills to his leadership, making him the most brilliant man who not only could appreciate and understand God's revelation, but could also interpret it meaningfully to his people who also had Egyptian and Hebrew tradition in the background, but had to learn surviving as the People of God in the wilderness.

## **Exile and Dispersion**

The Exile was God's judgment on his rebellious people. But the judgement was intentionally restorative. The restoration of Israel's faithfulness to God, through leaving much to be desired, was manifested in the organizing of synagogues and the widespread proselytizing activities in the Diaspora. So the Exile and the Dispersion have to be considered in one package.

### *1. Authenticating in Faith*

Jews in exile went through a conversion experience. The trauma and humiliation of defeat and deportation brought them from rebellion to penitence and yearning for God ([Ps. 137](#)). Painful as the experience *p. 172* was, surprisingly it was actually very liberating. The uprooting from Jerusalem and the Temple emancipated them from their erroneous narrow past. Their faith was transferred from the 'temple-centred cult in Jerusalem to individual-centred faith of universal validity'.<sup>9</sup> King Nebuchadnezzar came to know God as 'God of gods and lord of kings' ([Dan. 2:47](#)). Earthly kings like Cyrus were but God's instruments ([Is. 44:28-45:4](#)). Whereas the Jews knew God as the 'God of Israel' before the Exile, now they knew him as 'God of heaven' ([Neh. 1:4](#)). He was not bound to one place, nor one people.

To maintain their existence and faith as a people against hostile external influences in the Diaspora, the Jews developed Jewish colonies and planted in them synagogues which served many functions. Though synagogues never took the place of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was the centre of their faith, they nonetheless were of tremendous importance to the Diaspora Jews. Religiously, they were centres for worship, prayer, Scripture reading and public instruction. There God's word was heard. Socially, there were many activities, such as the manumission of slaves, hospitality to travellers, conferring honours upon Gentiles and many others. The Jews went into captivity as a nation, but emerged from the Exile as a religious community. Mission takes precedence over nationality.

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<sup>9</sup> De Ridder, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

## 2. Advancing in Witnessing

In this period, probably upon the Return to Jerusalem, proselytization was actively pursued by a segment of the Jews in the Diaspora. The synagogues became centres not only for the Jews, but also for those Gentiles attracted to the Jewish religion. There was much adaptation to the needs of foreigners and the Jews born and raised outside of the homeland. Translators were used in Scripture reading for the benefit of those who did not know Hebrew. The Scriptures were translated into the Greek language. The Babylonian Talmud showed that the 'Holy Books' were also translated into Assyrian, Coptic, Old Hebrew, Median, Iberian, Elamite, Aramaic, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic and Persian languages.<sup>10</sup> Propaganda materials were produced in a variety of forms for proselytization purposes. Gentiles soon found that the God of all men could communicate to them in their own languages. Many Gentiles did become adherents in various forms to faith in God. *p. 173* The success of the proselytization movement explains the presence of proselytes and god-fearers in the synagogues of the New Testament. The intensity of the proselytizing activities is attested by Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in [Matt. 23:15](#):

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much as a son of hell as you are.

Jesus was not accusing the Pharisees because of their proselytizing activities, but because of what they made out of the converts. Proselytizing was not only instrumental in preparing the Gentiles to accept Christ, but was a noble effort in its own right. Proselytism was motivated by a noble purpose: to make known Yahweh's sovereignty over all the world and over the whole life of all men.

## 3. Excelling in Leadership

The proselytizing movement never became a generalized movement of the Jews in Diaspora, though the impact was very widespread. The impetus to proselytism did not come from Jerusalem, but lay within each synagogue community. It was in fact a lay movement of Jews and true proselytes who were brought up and lived in the larger world of the Diaspora. Living in a Hellenistic world, they were not only exposed to the moral decadence of nature religion, but also imbibed the Hebrew religion of the one True God through the synagogues. These were people who had experienced both worlds, and found the world under God to be far superior. Small wonder that the ablest missionary leadership (e.g. Paul and Barnabas) of the early church also originated from the Diaspora.

### Persecution of the Early Church in Jerusalem

The persecution of the Early Church in Jerusalem in [Acts 8](#) opened a way for the development of Gentile Christianity. It emancipated the Hellenistic Christians<sup>11</sup> from the relatively more conservative mould of *p. 174* the Judaistic Christian<sup>12</sup> in Jerusalem. Away

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<sup>10</sup> Jacob Salmon Raisin, *Gentile Reactions to Jewish Ideals* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1915), p. 163. Quoted by De Ridder, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> The term 'Hellenistic Christians' is used to refer to those Greek-speaking Christians in Jerusalem, who most probably had returned to Jerusalem from the Diaspora, and gathered in synagogues more often than in the Temple.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'Judaistic Christians' is used to refer to those Aramaic-speaking Christians in Jerusalem, who still adhered to the Temple for prayer and worship. It is also noted that Hellenization being so widespread

from Jerusalem, their faith matured and liberated a missionary movement which swept swiftly across Asia Minor to Europe.

### *1. Authenticating in Faith*

The Early Church began with active manifestations of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, healing, signs and wonders ([Acts 2:4](#); [3:1-10](#); [5:12, 16](#)). Conversion was not simply a cool, cognitive and objective matter. The first few chapters of Acts show that many Christians in Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit, and engaged in a lifestyle which worshipped Christ as King. Authentication of faith among the Christian in Jerusalem came into being with the descent of the Holy Spirit. However, this new-found faith in the resurrected Christ became the cause of persecution launched against them by the Jewish authorities in the city.

The persecution did not affect the apostles who were able to remain in Jerusalem. It is obvious that the Hellenistic Christians were the primary target of their oppressors. The persecution was precipitated by Stephen's defence before the Sanhedrim. He relativized the importance of the Temple and Mosaic law through a review of Israel's history, and was probably one of the first who could interpret the Old Testament from that perspective, a direction leading toward the development of Gentile Christianity. However, he was rejected by the Jewish leaders and met his death in martyrdom.

The persecution sent the Hellenistic Christians out of Jerusalem, the stronghold of Judaism, to places where Gentile Christianity was given a second chance to emerge. This did happen as more Gentiles and Hellenistic Jews came to Christ outside of Jerusalem, and especially in Antioch. It shared the same faith in the resurrected Christ with Judaistic Christianity, but did not require the believers to be circumcised according to the Mosaic law. At the Council in Jerusalem ([Acts 15:1-35](#)) it won legitimacy. Gentile Christianity began to sink its roots in rich Gentile soil in the Mediterranean world.

Thus in the early church there developed two kinds of Christianity, differing from each other in outward expressions, but united in one p. 175 faith in Jesus Christ. Judaistic Christianity was contextualized to the Hellenistic culture. Christ was the bridge between the two.

### *2. Advancing in Witnessing*

Unlike the Diaspora Jews whose proselytizing movement came long after the Exile (migration), the early Christians experienced almost an immediate release of a tremendous amount of energy for evangelism away from Jerusalem, leading to the establishment of many churches in Judaea, Samaria and Galilee ([Acts 9:31](#)), and in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch ([Acts 11:9](#)). It seemed that the Hellenistic refugees not only shared the same kind of courage and boldness for the Lord as Stephen, also a Hellenist, but they also passed on their enthusiasm to their converts. Through them the strong Church of Antioch was planted, which eventually gave birth to an extraordinary missionary movement which swept across the Mediterranean world.

The approach of their witnessing was characterized by aggressive proclamation, preaching, and sharing of the good news of the resurrected Christ, and by the lively witness of the community life of the new churches. As the Book of Acts closes, the Gospel of Jesus Christ had crossed ethnic lines from Jews to Gentiles, cultural lines from Judaistic culture to Hellenistic culture, and geographic lines from Palestine to Asia Minor and to Europe.

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that even these Judaistic Christians were not barred from their influence. So they are more Judaistic in a relative sense as compared to the Hellenistic Christians.



Political changes and migration in the Bible often led to scattered communities whose members have had their faith authenticated and their lives transformed. In the case of the Exodus and the Exile and Dispersion, political changes and migration were part of the process in faith authentication and life transformation. In the case of the persecution of the Early Church, political change and migration scattered the congregated community whose faith was already authenticated and whose lives were already transformed.

### *3. Excelling in Leadership*

The outstanding leader for the missionary movement was the Apostle Paul. Next to him was Barnabas. For Paul, his miraculous conversion experience drew him close to Christ and provided him with the fuel for his missionary endeavour. The Holy Spirit guided his itinerary. As with Moses and the proselytizers of the Diaspora, the contribution of Paul's personal history towards the man he was cannot be dismissed. He was born in the Diaspora university town of Tarsus, and was educated in Jerusalem, at least for a period of time, under the best teacher, *p. 176* Gamaliel. He had imbibed deeply in both Judaistic and Hellenistic cultures. This biblical perspective developed early in the life of Paul and gave him the freedom and the breadth to be all things to all men. Not only so, he was sufficiently informed by both cultures to lead in the contextualization of the Christian faith in the Hellenistic culture (e.g. [Acts 15:1-2](#); [Gal. 2:11-21](#)).

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith ([Acts 11:24](#)). He was also a bicultural person. Born in Cyprus as a Diaspora Jew, he assumed a leadership position in the church of Jerusalem which had obviously gravitated towards Judaistic culture. Later, ministering in Antioch with mainly Hellenistic and Gentile Christians, he was also tremendously successful. His leadership demonstrated that he also had the freedom and capacity to minister to groups with diverse cultural and ethnic origins.

## **SUMMARY**

The above study of the three biblical events with political changes resulting in major migration movements shows that there was a definite pattern which facilitated the advancement of the Kingdom—the authenticating in faith of the migrants, advancing in witness in a new land, and excelling in leadership of a multi-cultural kind. So three elements are necessary to sustain the movement of migrants from trauma to victory and from identity to outreach. Is there any conclusion we can draw?

Unwelcome political changes resulting in migration always bring emotional and psychological trauma, among other things. However, such crises often prove to be the best occasions for God to confront men in their weaknesses. Facing God in 'naked faith' and humility leads them to the discovery of God's sufficiency. Then faith becomes real, and strong conviction develops. Crises turn into opportunities for growth and maturation. This seems to be the case for Israel in the Exodus experience. In the Exile, God's judgement on the nation occasioned the authenticating of faith. The humiliated Jews came to know God as the One who could not be slighted, but had to be honoured and glorified. Thus, proselytizing began with the purpose to glorify God. In the Early Church, hope in the resurrected Christ and the active work of the Holy Spirit made the Christian faith authentic, personal, real and lively.

No matter how the authenticating of faith comes about, it always provides God's people with strong conviction and a sense of mission. These eventually lead to practical ways of expressing their faith, both *p. 177* as God's people (identity), and in the style of witnessing (outreach). Identities such as the Covenant People of Yahweh, the Chosen People of the God of Heaven, and the People of the Resurrected Christ are strong and

powerful identities when authenticated through real faith experiences with God. They provide God's people with dignity, meaning and a sense of destiny. Values and priorities will change. External behaviour, largely determined by internal values, will be different. The People of God go through a life-transforming experience. Their heart, soul, mind and might will increasingly be more in tune with God. The final result is the expansion of God's Kingdom. Such Christians can hardly contain Christ within themselves, but have to proclaim him, just like the refugees from Jerusalem and the proselytizing Diaspora Jews.

God can bring about a turning point in his people single-handedly. Yet he always uses leaders. In the case of migrating or migrated people, the leaders he uses are men of God, full of spirit and faith, like Moses, Paul and Barnabas. They also have a wide spectrum of exposure to and experience in diverse cultures, among people of different ethnic origins. Such experiences equip them to give new answers to old questions as the people of God move from one context (region, culture, nation, etc.) to another. They lead God's people in grappling with their identity in a foreign land and in contextualizing their faith in God in a new context. In so doing, the People of God find dignity and meaning in their adopted homeland. The message they bring is understandable and meaningful. The way Christian faith is expressed, in word, in deed and in lifestyle, is acceptable and palatable to the local people.

## **MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HONG KONG**

The finding in this paper raises possibilities for Christian communities in Hong Kong. With the near advent of 1997 and the ongoing migration movement, is God laying the foundation for future expansion of his Kingdom? If so, how will insights gained in this study find application to Hong Kong?

As China claims sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997, Hong Kong Christians are 'migrating' to China socially, culturally, economically and politically, though not having to emigrate physically. One can also say that China is 'migrating' to her. For Hong Kong, it is a kind of involuntary migration into a 'foreign' culture with unfamiliar values, political and ideological systems, and strange practices of many kinds. It will also be a traumatic experience. The finding in this article [p.178](#) indicates that there is the need to equip Hong Kong Christians to face God in 'naked faith' before that time comes. Should they experience God to be real and faithful, and faith become authentic to them, they would emerge as Christians with strong convictions and a sense of mission. Difficulties become challenges. God is always ready for us. Are we ready for him?

There is also the need to find appropriate ways for Christians to express their Christian faith and identity as God's people in a way which is attractive and meaningful to China. In other words, the Christian faith needs to be contextualized in Chinese soil. Special approaches in witnessing should be pursued to attract the millions in China. The meaning of holding a Chinese passport is to be explored. As China's diplomatic relationship with the outside world evolves, there may be open doors leading to the Muslim, Hindu and the atheistic worlds in Asia, where the major blocs of unreached peoples are found.

Chinese Christian leaders with multi-cultural background, and given to theological and missiological reflections like Moses and Paul, will have an important role in shaping and sustaining the movement. They will do well to begin 'rubbing shoulders' with those who have already migrated to Hong Kong from China, and learn from them. The content of the Basic Law and its religious implications need to be heeded. The advent of 1997 should be considered as a missionary challenge where God takes our hand into a country in which resides the largest population in the world yet to be reached for Christ.

## Book Reviews

Lesslie Newbigin

[\*The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society\*](#)

Review by Roger E. Hudlund

Max L. Stackhouse

[\*Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization and Mission in Theological Education\*](#)

Review by Dr. Graham Houghton

Darrel L. Guder

[\*Be My Witness: The Church's Mission, Message and Messengers\*](#)

Review by Donald K. McKim

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[\*Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics\*](#)

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## Book Reviews

### THE GOSPEL IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

by Lesslie Newbigin

WCC Publications, 150 route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 255 Jefferson Ave. S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. 49503 (1989). 244 pp.

Reviewed by Roger E. Hedlund

On the eve of his eightieth birthday, Lesslie Newbigin—the former bishop of Madras and active ecumenical leader—has written a penetrating analysis of the contemporary pluralistic world in which the Christian mission takes place. Newbigin is essential reading for evangelicals who, for the most part, have had little to say to the proponents of a philosophy which appears a front-running heresy for the Church entering its third millenium. The issue is pressing for Church leaders in America and Europe, where plurality of alien cultures and non-Christian faiths is a startling recent phenomenon. Eastern religions have come to the West, and are engaged in vigorous missionary propaganda. It is no longer the 'missionaries' problem' or the 'situation for the Church overseas'. Globalization has brought Hindus and Buddhists next door; temples and mosques punctuate the landscape of American and European towns and cities.

Newbigin does not deal with the Eastern intrusion into the West. He tackles a more serious problem: a loss of faith, the disappearance of God from the modern (Western) worldview which makes us vulnerable to the cooption of a domesticated Jesus into the Hindu worldview. Christians must rediscover the meaning of *truth*. We have become victims of a *philosophy* of pluralism which assumes there are *no absolute truths* Newbigin hits at the core of the problem, the assumption of present-day thinking (the results of TV-theology, serial superficiality, the ‘feeling’ generation) that truth is unknowable. The modern assumption, largely unquestioned, is that beliefs are mainly a matter of preference; that there is no ultimate reality; that therefore all confident statements of belief are to be regarded as arrogant.

But Newbigin raises a ‘critique of doubt’ and calls for an *act of faith*, a commitment—which our society fails to make and for lack of which it is falling apart. If there are no absolutes, Christian propositions may be rejected in favour of spiritual experience (of whatever kind); to p. 181 affirm beliefs as factual truth is labelled ‘fundamentalists’; to seek conversions is considered ‘arrogance’.

Against this dismal outlook, Newbigin prescribes a different set of lenses for seeing the world: the *Christian* story, the story of God’s acting. Christians believe he has acted and is acting in the *secular* (real) world. This is the reality of revelation. It is not mere ‘religious’ truth.

In a world of contradictions, a true understanding of history has been given to a particular community which bears the name of Jesus and in which the Spirit of God is actively at work. This gives a logic to election. Truth can only be communicated which is embodied. The Church, the body of his disciples, is to embody him for all families of earth. The Bible thus is *universal* history though communicated largely through one people, Israel.

The Bible tells a unique story, universal in application. The domestication of Jesus into Hinduism does not fit—yet this is being attempted not only in India but also in the West, not least by influential theologians such as Hick and Knitter, Panikkar, Samartha and Cantwell Smith. The Church must be loyal to the Lord in order to challenge the powers, make his kingdom present, and cause people to ask the question which the gospel answers.

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## **APOLOGIA: CONTEXTUALIZATION, GLOBALIZATION AND MISSION IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

*by* Max L. Stackhouse

(Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988)

Reviewed by Dr. Graham Houghton. Printed with permission.

This book is the publication of the substance of a series of faculty discussion papers, debates and conversations that took place over the past few years at Andover Newton Theological School in the United States. In addition to the ANTS faculty, from time to time a number of visiting theologians and international guests joined the dialogue. These discussions have for the most part been written up by Max Stackhouse, a professor at ANTS.

The purpose of the whole exercise is admirable; to discuss what is referred to as the ‘best current literature on the state of theology and p. 182 the future of the theological education’. The ANTS faculty acknowledges the need to establish its priorities in a context

increasingly aware of a commitment to the world church and to reach out beyond its own enclave.

Arising from their concern for involvement in the world there has emerged a working or 'fraternal' relationship between ANTS and other theological schools in various parts of the world including East Berlin, South India and Nicaragua. This type of thing is to be welcomed, provided the relationship remains uniquely fraternal and is not permitted to degenerate into one that is by nature paternal—which is so often the case when schools in western nations relate to theological institutions in the Third World. In all these discussions the recurring themes were 'contextualization', 'globalization' and 'mission'.

The questions that lay at the back of the deliberations are worthy for a theological faculty anywhere to pick up. They were three; what does it mean to engage in theological education when it appears that every statement we make and every response to it is contextually determined? What does it mean to engage in theological education at a time when the world is becoming more and more a global village and when new voices are entering the dialogue? What is the mission of the church, especially that of seminaries, in a 'post-modern' world? *Apologia* deals firstly with the whole issue of the biblical text on the one hand and our context on the other. Under this head Stackhouse has given paragraphs defining contextualization from the liberal, modern, neo-orthodox, ecumenical, realist and biblical points of view. In this latter section he says (I thought rather uncharitably), that fundamentalist authors (it is not clear that he has included evangelicals here) can be found who are deeply concerned with apologetics and mission 'of a sort'. The interesting thing is that, at least in the Third World, those seminary graduates who are being enabled to provide the greatest impact upon human society for transformation, the glory of God and the expansion of the Church come from those schools that have a high view of Scripture and an urgency to make the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus known to the needs of the whole man wherever he may be found.

*Apologia* is concerned that we understand the context in which theological education must be worked out and the Church that must carry out its mandate. It is not clear, having come to grips with our context, what we should do next. All is not lost, however; we would agree with the late ANTS Dean, Orlando Costas, who (in what became a manifesto) noted that too much of what passes for theological education is academic and professional rather than Spirit-filled and p. 183 practical in application. Costas went on to say that theological institutions need to equip students to assist the church to address the challenge of the world in which the vast majority know nothing of the appeal of the Christian faith, and where billions live beyond the reach of local congregations of believers; that theological institutions should prepare dedicated men and women capable of leading the church in ministries among the 'sinned against', the poor and the oppressed, bringing them in word and deed a promise of liberation, justice and the rule of God's kingdom; and that theological education must prepare the called leadership of tomorrow to promote Christian unity and human solidarity. Recommendations worthy for any seminary faculty to ponder.

This book is important. ANTS has, in a sense, exposed itself to all those of us who are involved in and concerned for the present (not too healthy) status of theological education. We should be thankful then to ANTS for their courage in letting us all have a glimpse of their ongoing pilgrimage and struggle for identity and purpose.

Although the text tends to be rather abstruse at times *Apologia* could be a helpful point of departure for any theological faculty that takes seriously the mission of God in our world.

I cannot resist adding that it would be wonderful if the same foundation that sponsored the ANTS deliberations would likewise underwrite the possibility of Third World Seminaries undergoing such worthwhile analysis and reflection.

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## **BE MY WITNESS: THE CHURCH'S MISSION, MESSAGE AND MESSENGERS**

by Darrel L. Guder

(William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985)

Pp. 237, \$10.95 pb.

Reviewed by Donald K. McKim in *The Reformed Journal* June 1986.

Darrell Guder, vice president and dean of the faculty at Whitworth College, has already put the English-speaking theological world in his debt by his superb translations of Otto Weber's *Foundations of Dogmatics* (2 vols., Eerdmans, 1981, 1983) and Eberhard Jüngel's *God as the Mystery of the World* (Eerdmans, 1983). He now makes another contribution with this study in ecclesiology—a solid, stimulating, and suggestive discussion of the church and its mission. The book is firmly grounded in substantial theological reflection but is also intensely practical. It provides guidance for practice and action which p. 184 the Christian church and Christian ministers within the church (all of us!) can profitably appropriate for our further nurture and growth.

Guder's presuppositions are that God has been revealed in history, that we know this through Scripture, that God is at work in the world to restore a rebellious creation, and that the reconciling activity of God through Jesus Christ is being continually carried out in human history as God works toward a final completion. The Christian church is part of this salvation history. God has called out a people to serve and to carry out the mission of God through the church which is the 'witness' to God's saving actions.

Guder's approach rests on his understanding of the incarnation as the paradigm of God's acting. He stresses that God's way of acting in the world—most decisively seen in God's acting in Jesus Christ—is through people. *What* God has done is intimately related to *how* God has done it. God has

overcome our rebellion by becoming part of our history, finally and conclusively in the incarnation of Christ. And this continuation of that work, which is the witness to what God has done, is to be 'incarnational', is to continue to link the *what* and the *how* of God's action. The witness to the unique salvation events of Christ's incarnation is itself to be incarnational. Justification by grace is communicated through incarnational witness.

Thus, says Guder, God comes to us 'only in the human forms of his self-humiliation'. God 'does not come as propositional truth or logical syllogism, but as a loving and acting God who encounters us, confronts us with his real and mighty presence in our experience, challenges us with his purpose, and enables us to respond'. The message of the incarnation is 'enfleshed' in the church and 'continues to be a contemporary reality for us as we discover that Jesus came to show us how to be obedient, how to translate the message into our relationships and action, and how to be a discipling community constantly being disciplined by its Master'.

This is the rich theological base from which Guder goes on to discuss the church's mandate to be 'witness', to define the church's mission 'incarnationally' and to show how the church becomes this incarnational witness. In all this, Guder is candidly realistic about

the church, never glossing over its failures but never giving up on it either. He writes of the 'disappointment of church history' when at times the church has distorted its calling to serve purposes other than God's. It has so concentrated on the benefits of salvation that these have been divorced from the church's true vocation of being witnesses to *God's* acts and God's servant people. Concerns with 'success' and God's 'blessings' can squeeze out the church's task of ministry. A too narrow p. 185 view of the gospel can so focus attention on the past tense of salvation—'Are you saved?'—that the present and future senses of what God is doing and will do in this world are neglected. This onesided emphasis can lead to a reversal of 'the thrust of the Pentecostal equipping of the church and return to some form of centripetal spirituality, looking for or attempting to fabricate the perfect community, the perfect theology, the perfect place and time for the Christian experience of our own savedness'. Guder speaks of 'the sobering challenge of the institutional church', realizing that while the institutional existence of the church is a 'sociological necessity', the real question is 'how will it be institutional?' In our secure Western societies, Guder writes, we have become too complacent about our church institutionalism which has become a dominant ideology. The task, he argues, is 'to develop a biblical theology of the institution, and then to apply it rigorously to the church's reality, with the intention to change what must be changed based upon such a review'. Guder suggests 'sunset laws' for the church so it will test its institutional forms regularly and ask: 'Do we best carry out our purpose and serve Christ in the form in which we now exist?' or 'Could we be better stewards of our resources in this particular historical situation by making changes in the form—since the form is neither sacrosanct nor inspired?'

To understand the church and its mission in terms of incarnational witness is also to become aware of the fullness of the Christian gospel in its past, present, and future tenses as well as to *be, do, and say* the witness. Guder adds a model to the models of the church developed by Avery Dulles (see *Models of the Church*, Doubleday, 1978) and writes of the church as 'the equipping community'. In this model, the mission of the church is defined as 'Christ's witness in the world, being, doing, and saying that witness as the continuation of his ministry, incarnating the gospel for the sake of a world for which Christ died. And the internal mission the church is to be equipped and to equip itself, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, for this work as witness'. Guder goes on to flesh out what it means to do and to say the witness, arguing they cannot be divided from each other and considering them 'inwardly' within the church and 'outwardly' in the world. The church will witness in its proclamation and 'evangelization' as well as by its actions in the world. This will involve the church in concerns for adequate food, shelter, clothing, health, and life with dignity since 'to be made in the image of God must include these dimensions, if we are to understand the Old Testament Hebraically and not to separate the spiritual from the physical'. Therefore, he argues, 'the outward dimension of the church's witness may well focus p. 186 on precisely these areas of human need, not as diversions from the evangelical purpose of the church, but as its very expression'.

Part of the power of Guder's proposals is his insistence that saying the witness in the world through incarnational evangelization involves 'earning the right to be heard'. The spoken witness develops out of the broader, more comprehensive understanding of the definition of the church's mission. It thus involves the 'Good News about God's action for his entire creation' rather than the narrow focus of 'winning souls' or getting people 'saved'. The benefits and the responsibilities of salvation are inextricably bound up together in Guder's understanding. All of which means that a witness to the gospel earns the right to be heard in a congruence, an integration of 'the person of the witness (*martyrs*) with the actions and words of the witness (*martyria*). The world should see and hear the same gospel in the lives and words of the witnesser'. Thus, 'the message is is not to be

separated from the messengers'. Guder claims that mass media approaches, 'when separated from the witnessing community, are a questionable means of evangelization in our world'. They tend to reduce the gospel to its benefits with a message that can come across 'as one of many "answer-alls" to the challenges of living. The gospel begins to be heard as a solution, even an elixir, offered in the marketplace next to headache pills and new cars'. The media 'can never serve as the total means for evangelization; rather, we must link them with the enfleshing of the gospel in the lives and actions of the Christian community'.

These theological insights reach full expression in the final part of the book where Guder suggests a correction of the church's course. This correction must come in the church's interpretation of its historical nature which, Guder argues, should be more 'tabernacle' than 'temple'; the church is a people on the move yet a people with the presence of God in their midst. The church is more properly a 'witness' to salvation than a 'dispenser' of salvation. Also, the concept of incarnational witness leads the church to be concerned most with 'people' rather than 'hierarchy', the image being an inverted pyramid with the membership seeing itself rather than the church's structure as the primary focus of the church's organization.

Guder's discussion of how the gospel can become a hostage to culture is particularly potent. He concludes that all attempts to recast the gospel as a 'religion' by means of political, social, economic, or psychological ideology ultimately have theological effects. For they change the gospel, domesticating and reducing it to only a 'functional part of the cultural machinery' and thus depriving it of its 'prophetic thrust'. Yet through it all, 'this church in cultural bondage is still the p. 187 church of God's making!' For 'even when our sinful reductions and domestications of the gospel take place, God is not banished from the scene'. God 'surprises us with the ways he works in and through our very ambiguous history!'

The author's long experience with Young Life shows in his discussion of general and specialized ministry where he concludes that there are diversities of ministries but that all have as their main purpose the 'equipping of the saints for ministry'. The church should be ordered *functionally* so all ministries, both general and specialized, can carry out their purposes in obedience to the mission given them by God ([Eph. 4](#)). To see the church's task in terms of 'equipping' has wide-ranging implications, Guder believes, for understanding baptism, confirmation, worship, and the Lord's Supper. Guder sees the church's whole life defined in terms of this equipping mandate with the church upheld in its task by God's Spirit. The authority for ministry comes through the people God uses to do ministry.

Guder appeals finally for theological unity—not necessarily 'uniformity' but rather a quest for the wholeness and breadth of the gospel. He wants us to bring together those elements of the gospel that are often torn apart; put in other terms, he wants us not to separate the inseparable. In salvation, the benefits and responsibilities to mission in God's world must be joined. In the church, the inward and outward dimensions must coalesce so the people of God will be equipped to *do* the ministry to which God calls them.

One senses that if our churches were to wrestle seriously with the issues and understandings Guder presents in this splendid work, things would be different. Ancient dichotomies that breed separation could be overcome. Lethargic bodies that resist the winds of change would be challenged. Facile preaching that is long on the 'language of Canaan' would be replaced by prophetic proclamation that could galvanize a community around a common vision, mission and ministry. Such changes would not be instantaneous nor automatic. They would stem from gradually emerging identities as the people of God study seriously who they are and what they are called to say and do. The change would



take shape slowly. Yet the yeast would rise and the leaven would leaven as the church would continually listen and learn what it means to 'be my witness'. p. 188

## **RESURRECTION AND MORAL ORDER: AN OUTLINE FOR EVANGELICAL ETHICS**

by Oliver O'Donovan  
(Intervarsity Press, Leicester: 1986)  
284 pp. £14.95

*Reviewed by Trevor Hart in Themelios Vol 12, No. 3 April 1987*

The importance of this book lies in the corrective it provides to two equally erroneous Christian approaches to ethics. There have always been those whose interpretation of the gospel as an essentially 'spiritual' phenomenon has obliged them to neglect ethical considerations in favour of personal piety and doctrinal orthodoxy. Others, disappointed by this apparent failure to address the world's problems, have taken the opposite course and have propounded a 'social gospel' as the essence of Christianity at the expense of traditional beliefs concerning the person and work of Christ.

It is in direct opposition to both these tendencies that Professor O'Donovan proceeds with his contention that 'Christian ethics must arise from the Gospel of Jesus Christ' (p. 11). Both moralism and antinomianism rest upon a false dualism more proper to the Gnostic systems than to a Christianity which takes seriously the redeeming act of God in his Son Jesus Christ. Once the nature of this act as a recreation and vindication of the natural order in the resurrection of Christ is perceived, these sub-Christian alternatives must be left behind in the realization that 'certain ethical and moral judgments belong to the gospel itself' (p. 12). Evangelical ethics is thus not to be considered as a subject in its own right, but is properly an aspect of soteriology concerned with the new life in Christ.

Professor O'Donovan speaks of three 'moments' in the salvation of man: the past moment, in which God acted decisively once-for-all, renewing his creation in Christ; the present moment, in which the Holy Spirit enables us to participate in this new creation; and the future moment, in which lies the final consummation of the divine salvific purpose. In accordance with this model, Part One of O'Donovan's book deals with the objectivity of the moral order which God has established in creation and vindicated in redemption. An evangelical ethics cannot condone the objectifying approaches to moral order represented by voluntarism and rationalism. If Christian morality consists properly of man's appropriate response to the divine ordering of creation, then that ordering must be real, and not simply a p. 189 measure of man's ability to *impose* order upon what he experiences. Alongside this affirmation, however, O'Donovan calls us to 'reckon also upon the opacity and obscurity of that order to the human mind which has rejected the knowledge of its Creator' (p. 19). There can be no 'natural law' in the poetic sense. Christian ethics must feel the force of the cross before it can proclaim the resurrection. It is only in Christ that we *truly* know the moral order of creation as it stands before us in judgment as well as grace (here, as elsewhere, we see that the influence of Barth is not limited to the placing of discursive material in small print). The responsibility which this knowledge in Christ imposes upon the church is that of being a prophetic voice in the world, avoiding the erroneous alternatives of moral totalitarianism on the one hand and 'ecclesiastical house rules' on the other.

Part Two, entitled 'The Subjective Reality', approaches the question of moral order from the perspective of man's participation in the new humanity in Christ. Thus whilst O'Donovan is eager to point us first and foremost to the objective reality of redemption,

he is in no way guilty of 'objectivism'. The restoration which God has set forth in his Son does not proceed independently of us, but for our sakes, God is not content to leave us in our sin, but gives us to participate in the renewed order. Our moral agency as Christians is thus enabled by the Spirit of Christ who makes the 'objective' subjective in our lives. He it is who evokes our free response as moral agents to the authority of the New Creation. Thus true human freedom is not overwhelmed or contradicted by the presence of grace, but is upheld and affirmed. This is contrary to the popular presentation of human fulfilment as consisting in increased autonomy and self-sufficiency.

We might expect Part Three to deal with the third 'moment' of redemption, as indeed it does in the final chapter presenting the eschaton as the *telos* of the moral life, but this section as a whole attempts to deal with the *form* of the moral life which has been revealed to us as love. This is considered first from the perspective of the variety of situations to which the moral agent might find him or herself having to respond. O'Donovan reminds us again that we are living in a universe rather than a multiverse, and thus even the most novel occurrence is encompassed within the interpretative matrix of the divine ordering.

After a consideration of the moral subject in terms of the relation of character to actions, there follows a Christological reworking of the twofold command of Jesus to love God and our neighbour. This must direct us to Christ, our love for whom fulfils both aspects of the command. The point is a powerful one, and might perhaps have been [p. 190](#) developed more fully along the lines that our relationship to God is not primarily an immediate *vertical* relation but a *horizontal* relation through the mediating humanity of Christ, a fact which condemns further any 'spiritualizing' of the Christian life. The book continues, however, by raising the question 'who is my neighbour?' in terms of the Christian perception of human personhood. Who is a person? O'Donovan answers this question with the challenging statement that 'the church anticipates restored humanity, and all humanity lies implicitly within the church' (p. 242). Thus there can be no theological justification for the dehumanizing of any group or individual; all are comprehended in our love for Christ the Head.

It is impossible to do justice in so little space to the breadth of scope of this book, incorporating as it does penetrating discussions on issues of philosophy, hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and many other topics in addition to those discussed above. That this is achieved without the cost of superficiality is a fact which ought to command the respect of ethicists and theologians alike. [p. 191](#)

## Coming Issues

*(Subject to change)*

Symbols and Reality: A Theology of Communication - July 1991

Women in Church and Mission - October 1991

Evangelism, Conversion and Community - January 1992

The Editor invites readers to suggest themes, articles and book reviews for these issues.

# Journal and Book Information

## **Westminster Theological Journal**

is published by the Westminster Theological Seminary, Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, PA 19118 four times a year. Subscription rates: \$30 for institutions, \$20 for individuals, \$15 for students.

## **New Age Promise: Age Old Problem?**

is an 8-page magazine-style pamphlet well illustrated, published by the Evangelical Alliance, U.K. Copies are available from the EA, 186 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BT, U.K. for 60 pence; 10 copies £5.50, 50 copies £22.50. Cheques payable to the Evangelical Alliance.

## **The Seer**

published occasionally by Good Books, Ivy Cottage, Landour, Mussoorie - 248 179, U.P., India. Private circulation. Subscription rates: 25.00 or \$5.00.

## **Science and Christian Belief**

incorporates Science and Faith, and Faith and Thought, and is published twice yearly by Paternoster Press, Paternoster House, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter EX2 4JW, U.K. on behalf of the Victoria Institute and Christians in Science (UCCF). Editors: Oliver R. Barclay and A. Brian Robins. Subscriptions rates (post free): one year: U.K. £9.00, U.S. \$27.00. Overseas subscribers who cannot easily transfer funds should correspond with Christians in Science, UCCF, 38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7JP, U.K.

## **C.G.S.T. Journal**

is published in January and July in Chinese with abstracts and selected articles translated into English. It is published by the China Graduate School of Theology, 5 Devon Road, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong. Editor: Wilson W. Chow. Subscription rates: one year: Asia \$8 (U.S.), other areas \$12 (U.S.).