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EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 28, NO 2, April 2004

# Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews reflecting  
global evangelical theology for the purpose  
of discerning the obedience of faith*



Volume 28 No. 2 April 2004



PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



0144-8153(200404)28:2;1-K



PATERNOSTER  
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# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 28 · Number 2 · April 2004

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical  
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



**PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS**



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

ISSN: 0144-8153

Volume 28 No. 2 April 2004

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Typeset by Profile, Culmdale, Rewe, Exeter, Devon EX5 4ES  
and Printed in Great Britain for Paternoster Periodicals,  
PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS  
by Polestar Wheatons Ltd., Exeter, Devon.

# Editorial —Discerning the Obedience of Faith

IN THIS ISSUE, WE continue our series to mark the 30th anniversary of the WEA Theological Commission. Throughout the year, our companion publication, *WEA Theological News*, also contains anniversary features.

The first article is the initial installment of a short history of the movement, covering the period up to 1986 when the founding director, Dr Bruce Nicholls, concluded his outstanding service. Though retired, Dr Nicholls continues his keen interest in the organization. As one of our key leaders, we are pleased to present an up to date article by him dealing with the global environmental crisis. One of his early colleagues was Dr Byang Kato, the promising African theologian who was the first chairman of the TC. We have one of his insightful articles as a sample of the contribution he could have made had he not died so prematurely. The final anniversary article is a recent one by Dr Ronald J. Sider who led one of the TC's most successful Study Units, Ethics and Society, from its inception in 1977 until 1986. Building on the gains of his earlier work in raising the level of awareness of evangelicals in holistic mission, Sider's vision in this essay is to 'translate the theoretical theological agreement on holistic ministry into successful, practical, concrete programs' at the grass roots level of the congregation and every day politics, without losing any of the passion for evangelism.

We round off this issue with three other articles which will challenge and inform. Dr Rikk Watts of Regent College tackles one of the central evangelical concepts, salvation, by examining the opening chapter of Genesis, revealing some fascinating aspects of the concept of the divine image in relation to the temple which should provide new insights for evangelism and spirituality. Dr J. B. Jeyaraj finds plenty of biblical material to inform and challenge us on another important area of practice, charity and stewardship. Finally, Dr James Danaher of Nyack College reflects briefly on the 'nature of the good' and how our minds and hearts need to be continually transformed so we can be truly in tune with God rather than being conformed to this world in our moral thinking as well as all other areas of life.

In all, the panorama of insights provided by these articles on contemporary and continuing classic issues will help with the task of 'discerning the obedience of faith' in the exhilarating times in which we live. This slogan, inspired by Romans 1:5 and 16:26, was adopted as the vision statement of the TC in 1986, and continues to guide its work even now.

**David Parker, Editor**

# 'Discerning the Obedience of Faith'

## A Short History of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission

### Part 1: 1968-1986

David Parker

**KEYWORDS:** *Theological education, evangelism, ecumenism, Lausanne movement, culture, social justice, scholarships,*

#### Background

THE ORIGINS<sup>1</sup> OF THE Theological Commission (TC) go back to May 1968 when the World Evangelical Fellow-

ship (now Alliance) (WEF) General Council met in Lausanne Switzerland. A key item of business was the resolution of differing views of the authority of Scripture, which opened the way for European evangelicals to join the movement. Appropriately, it was decided to appoint a Theological Commission to 'review and suggest necessary changes in the Confession of Faith for action at the next General Council'.<sup>2</sup>

At the same meeting, Bruce Nicholls, missionary from New Zealand, teaching since 1955 at Union

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1 The sources for this history are mostly the official records of the WEF/A Theological Commission. Acknowledgement is made to Dr Bruce J. Nicholls and Mr John E. Langlois for their assistance; and to Dr Nicholls for his article, 'The History of the WEF Theological Commission 1969-1986', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Jan 2002 Vol 26 No 1, pp. 4-22. The help of various other WEF personnel is also acknowledged.

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2 David Howard, *The Dream that would not Die: the birth and growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship 1846-1986* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), p. 158.

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Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, India under BMMF (later Interserve) was invited by the WEF General Secretary, Dennis Clark (with whom he was acquainted through his work in the Indian subcontinent), to speak. Nicholls presented an impressive paper dealing with critical issues in the theological scene in Asia, such as the state of the unevangelised, inter-religious dialogue, the indigenisation of the gospel and the secularization of society. As a result, he was appointed Theological Coordinator for WEF. Up to this point, Commissions played only a nominal part in WEF work, but the Theological Commission would change that.<sup>3</sup>

Bruce Nicholls began work immediately by establishing a highly successful Theological Assistance Program (TAP), which took advantage of the resurgence in global evangelicalism taking place at the time. The purpose of TAP, he said, was 'to encourage the development of national theological commissions and societies and the development of regional associations, to offer them consultative help through lecture tours, seminars, workshops and consultations. TAP's function was also to strengthen [evangelical] theological education throughout the third world, with scholarships for graduate training of faculty and support for library development. During the next five years TAP became a catalyst in developing Theological Education by Extension (TEE) projects and accrediting associations in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and in Europe.'<sup>4</sup>

On the recommendation of Gilbert Kirby, Principal of London Bible College and former WEF General Secretary, John E. Langlois, a lawyer from the Channel Island of Guernsey who was completing his theological studies at London Bible College, was appointed as administrator and treasurer of TAP. According to Bruce Nicholls, John, who remained with the work until 1984, was 'God's gift to WEF'. It was a good partnership of a visionary leader and a meticulous administrator.

Publications were an important part of TAP's work. The first was the quarterly *Theological News* commenced in May 1969, produced by Nicholls and then assisted by Langlois.<sup>5</sup> Another of the early publications was a quarterly entitled *Programming News*. This was initiated by Langlois to meet a need in the field of Theological Education by Extension (TEE). A great deal of work was being developed at that time in TEE, but not much of a practical nature was available in programming materials. Martin Dainton was the first editor, and a selection of articles was published in 1977 under the title *Introduction to Programming*. In 1976 this quarterly was expanded and renamed *Theological Education Today*. Patricia Harrison of Australia, who in 1974 became the third member of the TC staff in the position of Theological Education Secretary, became the editor.

Within the first year of TAP's life, several projects had been established or were in planning, including an infor-

<sup>3</sup> Howard, *Dream*, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholls, 'The History of the WEF Theological Commission', p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *TN* continued to be published by John Langlois until 1985 when Jeremy Mudditt of Paternoster Press published it for the following four years on behalf of the TC.

mation service, staff consultative services, regional consultations, evangelical theological societies, consultations, research centres and numerous publications. Nicholls' vision for regional branches of TAP to be developed in all parts of the world came to fruition quickly in Asia.

At the Asia-South Pacific Congress on Evangelism held in Singapore 1968, the need for closer cooperation between evangelical theological institutions was strongly expressed. This led to Dr Saphir Athyal, Vice Principal of Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal, India, undertaking a tour of theological colleges in east Asia. As a result, a meeting of 51 evangelical leaders took place in Singapore 5-7 July, 1970, convened by Dr Athyal, representing the concerns of the Asia-South Pacific Congress on Evangelism and Bruce Nicholls, representing TAP. A commission of nine members was appointed and plans for an advanced centre for theological studies were laid. A further consultation was called for June 8-12, 1971 in Singapore to implement these decisions. At this meeting TAP-Asia was born, Dr Athyal was reappointed General Coordinator and regional and functional coordinators were appointed. Dr Bong Ro became the full time director, a position he held for the next 20 years. TAP-Asia voted to become a member body of TAP-International but maintained its autonomous nature. Three years later it changed its name to the Asia Theological Association.

During this time, there was extensive development in evangelical theological education in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America especially, with the formation of seminaries

and graduate schools and an increase in the level of training amongst faculty. TAP tracked these developments and offered assistance and encouragement wherever it could; it provided international links, especially through the personal endeavours of Nicholls himself and his colleagues, which were invaluable in the entire process. However, as time went on it became evident that regional associations wanted to retain their own identity while remaining loosely affiliated with the worldwide body.

### Formation

By early 1970s, WEF, under the leadership of its International Secretary, Clyde Taylor, was working toward organizing itself better, especially using commissions to do so. A number of commissions had been proposed much earlier<sup>6</sup> but they had not developed, and in any case, theology was not included!

With the success of the TAP under the dynamic leadership of Bruce Nicholls' fertile mind who, it was said, 'plans projects running into hundreds of thousands of dollars', it was clear that the official formation of a Theological Commission was the next step. Therefore, the WEF Executive Committee, which was working towards a more effective organization, voted at

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<sup>6</sup> Howard, *Dream*, p. 157—evangelism, missionary, literature and Christian action had been proposed at the time of the inception of WEF in 1951, while at the 1968 General Council, when Nicholls had been appointed Theological Coordinator, C. Stacey Woods had also been named Youth Coordinator.

Atlanta, Georgia, USA, on 2 July, 1973, to 'authorize the development of the following Commissions: Theology (TAP), Missions, and Communications'.<sup>7</sup> Then at the Sixth General Assembly held at Chateau d'Oex, Switzerland, July 1974, Bruce Nicholls and John Langlois, reported on the progress of TAP since its inception in 1968. Reports were also given by theological associations in Asia (Dr Bong Ro), Africa (Dr Byang Kato), Latin America (Mr Peter Savage), Europe (Mr Daniel Herm), Australasia (Rev Neville Andersen), and North America (Dr Arthur Climenhaga). Dr John Stott addressed the assembly on the question of regional theological associations, suggesting that a fellowship of theologians should be encouraged nationally and regionally, and that theological education should be critically reconsidered.

Later in the meeting it was decided to establish 'the WEF Theological Association and that its principal programme shall be known as TAP (Theological Assistance Program)'. Those named to serve on the commission were Neville Andersen (Australia), Peter Beyerhaus (Germany), Klaus Bockmuehl (Switzerland), Arthur Climenhaga (USA), Zenas Gerig (Jamaica), Daniel Herm (Germany), Byang Kato (Africa), Gordon Landreth and John Stott (England), Philip Teng (Hong Kong), and Paul S. White (Reunion Islands). Bruce Nicholls and John Langlois continued in their staff roles.

## London 1975

The first full meeting and theological consultation of the newly formed Theological Commission was held in London, 8-12 September, 1975, at the London Bible College. Papers were given on the themes of 'The Gospel and Culture', 'The Church and the Nation', 'Salvation and World Evangelization'; in addition there were numerous seminars on strategies and structures for theological education, research and publications, regional associations, and other related matters. The results of this consultation were published under the title *Defending and Confirming the Gospel* (edited by Bruce J. Nicholls, 1975).

During the meeting it was recommended that an international council for accreditation of theological schools should be formed. It was also decided that the name 'TAP' should be discontinued and its activities incorporated within the 'WEF Theological Commission'. The Commission was to be expanded to include between 20 and 30 members, with an executive committee to manage its affairs. Dr Byang Kato, General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar, was named chairman, but sadly, his promising work as a theologian, national leader and Theological Commission chairman was cut short by his accidental death in December 1975. He was replaced by Vice-Chairman, Dr Arthur Climenhaga of USA. The pattern was for the Executive, made up of 6 or 7 members representing all continents, to meet annually and the full Commission every three years. Bruce Nicholls credited these regular Executive meetings as crucial for the out-

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7 Howard, *Dream*, p. 161



standing success of the TC in the years that followed.

Staff were invariably supported by missionary bodies or in some other way rather than being employed by the TC so that salaries were not an issue (although sometimes clerical staff were hired). In 1974, Bruce Nicholls moved from Yeotmal to New Delhi as the founding director of the Theological Research and Communication Institute (TRACI). From this base he continued the work of the TC until his retirement in 1986. During this period he was ably assisted by a succession of secretaries sponsored by BMMF, namely Miss Liz Brattle (Australia), David Muir and Lionel Holmes (UK). They also made valuable contributions in developing the publications of the TC. David Muir initiated a Research Information Bank for the use of theological schools and produced a 40 lesson programmed text book for teaching NT Greek.

Other key figures were the convenors of Study Units, who over the years voluntarily provided strategic and valuable contributions to the work of the TC. Their role was to organize and develop the study, consultation and publication program of their particular unit, which included recruiting members of the group and could include fund raising.

One of the most important functions that Nicholls envisaged for the TC was to undergird the entire mission of WEF by providing a means of developing a sound theological basis for its various activities. This was a particularly vital role since the WEF was by its calling a biblically based movement and committed to the confirmation and defence of the gospel. This view of the TC's critical role was shared by others in the

WEF leadership. This meant that the TC was the most important of the Commissions, and Nicholls was intent on ensuring that it fulfilled this role. So he was constantly looking for ways to advance its work, especially establishing consultations or task forces to examine the theology of such fundamental activities as mission, relief and development and evangelisation, and to clarify WEF thinking on particular issues and problems.

For Nicholls, the TC had five main ministries: theological research and reflection, strengthening projects in excellence in theological education, funding and providing the staff for the semi-autonomous International Council of Accrediting Agencies (when it was formed in 1980) and its members, offering consultative services worldwide through the travel of staff and members of the Commission, and sponsoring consultations and a publications programme.

He was particularly concerned to avoid duplication of work and resources, so cooperation with other bodies already engaged in similar theological work was a high priority. Through constant travel, correspondence and other means of contact, he developed over the years an intimate knowledge of people and organizations around the world, and drew them into the TC circle, either on a long term or an ad hoc basis. In particular, he focused on regional theological associations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and other WEF constituents.

He also actively sought to work with global evangelical bodies, especially the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE). There was good cooperation at the level of the

LCWE Theology Working Group (TWG) whose convenor was Dr John Stott; six of its ten members were also WEF TC members. Consequently, the TC was actively involved in the Gospel and Culture conference, (Bermuda, 1978) sponsored by LCWE; the TC and TWG co-sponsored a number of consultations in the 1980s.

The TC believed that this policy of cooperation also included 'theological conversations with organisations with whom we do not have an agreed theological basis or goals, for the purpose of securing information, overcoming unnecessary misunderstandings, for better self-understanding ...'. This meant that contacts with the ecumenical movement, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches were on the agenda, but this was often seen as controversial by some of the WEF constituency. Byang Kato and Bruce Nicholls took an active part as observers at the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 and Nicholls attended several other WCC consultations.

Nicholls and the Executive were motivated by the view that the TC had a key role, serving the needs of WEF and the broader evangelical constituency by helping develop a sound theological undergirding. But they also saw that it had another role—a prophetic one, calling on evangelicals to develop their thinking and to grow in faith and understanding to meet the challenges of the day.

### Consultations

These twin roles of service and prophetic leadership were fulfilled through a range of activities, although

in line with the architectural dictum of 'form follows function', the TC structures were kept small and flexible. Perhaps the most obvious of the TC activities was the series of consultations, commencing with the initial 1975 London gathering. In some cases the consultations were jointly sponsored with other groups, especially the Lausanne movement, and in other cases, they were conducted in the name of WEF generally rather than just the TC itself.

### 'Church and Nationhood'

The second consultation was held in September 1976, on 'Church and Nationhood' at St Chrischona Seminary, near Basel, Switzerland, involving thirty theologians who issued 'The Basel Letter'. This message summarizing the consultation's thinking on the biblical relationship of the church and the nation in the world was circulated widely through WEF channels and elsewhere. The consultation papers were edited by Lionel Holmes and published by the TC as *Church and Nationhood* (1978).

As the Theological Commission developed, more consultations were planned and organized, and these had an increasing impact on the evangelical church as a whole. The year 1980 was the most prolific with six consultations held together in March at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddesdon, near London. Two of these were jointly sponsored with the LCWE Theological and Education group.

### Hoddesdon, 1980

The first was a gathering of Relief and Development agencies and Third

World receiving agencies under the leadership of the Theological Commission's Study unit on Ethics and Society and its convenor Ronald Sider working on 'The Theology of Development in the 1980's'. Then there was 'An International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle', co-sponsored by Lausanne and the TC unit on Ethics and Society. The Study Unit on Theological Education led by Patricia Harrison convened a study of 'The Teaching of Missions in Theological and Church Education'. Bishop David Gitari and Dr. Pablo Perez with their Study Unit on Pastoral Ministry focused on the topic 'Preparing Churches for Responsible Witness Under Totalitarian Powers'. Similarly, 'Reaching Muslims' was a topic for another section, led by Bruce Nicholls and Frank Khair Ullah and co-sponsored with LCWE.

Dr Paul Bowers headed up a conference on the accreditation of theological education. At this time, there were five regional theological associations in different parts of the world involved in accreditation of theological schools and generally in the development of their activities. These five agencies met under Bowers' leadership and formed The International Council of Accrediting Agencies (ICAA, known since 1996 as ICETE) operating with 'internal autonomy under sponsorship of the Theological Commission'.<sup>8</sup> Under the leadership of Dr Paul Bowers, missionary of SIM International in Kenya, who was appointed General Secretary, the ICAA provided a medium of contact for theological educators worldwide, and

promoted the improvement of theological education through accreditation, sharing of ideas, resources and fellowship. The creation of ICAA fulfilled an early aim of the TC, and it was the agency through which its interests in theological education were channelled until the mid-nineties when it developed into an autonomous body within the WEF family.

One of the most significant of these gatherings was the second, the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle, which drew together 85 evangelical leaders from 27 countries. Out of this consultation, which was responding to the 1974 Lausanne Covenant's call to 'develop a simple life-style', came the most complete and biblically grounded statements which have ever appeared in evangelical circles on the topic. The thorough and provocative papers presented at this consultation were edited by Dr Ronald Sider and published by Paternoster under the title *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle*.

Similarly, the consultation on development dealt vigorously with the theological implications for evangelicals of the problems of development in the modern world and published its results in *Evangelicals and Development: Towards a Theology of Social Change*, edited also by Ronald Sider. A key focus of the conference was the realization that much evangelical response to poverty had been pragmatic rather than based on a biblical understanding of the kingdom of God. It also agreed that the goal of Christian involvement in Development should be not only the provision of basic human needs but also social change which secures just relationships in societies. Major

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<sup>8</sup> ICAA Constitution quoted in Howard, *Dream*, p. 163.

papers were presented, inter alia, by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden of India, who would figure strongly in the future of the TC.

The full Theological Commission also met during this period of consultations, 21—24 March, as did the WEF itself in its seventh General Assembly. The WEF Executive approved the appointment of 47 members for the TC. The TC also recommended to WEF that the LCWE Theology and Education group and the TC form an international theological commission, but this proposal did not eventuate. During the General Assembly, the unexpected reaction of some WEF members to the presence of official observers from the Vatican on the programme led to one of the TC's most enduring yet controversial projects.<sup>9</sup> This was the Task Force on Roman Catholicism (later becoming the Study Unit on Ecumenical Issues), which was appointed in October 1980, initially under the leadership of Dr Pablo Perez of Mexico. It began meeting from 1984.

### CRESR 1982

A significant outcome of the 1980 TC meeting was the announcement that a study programme would be initiated on evangelism and social responsibility, co-sponsored by the Lausanne Theology and Education Group and the Theological Commission of WEF. Small groups in different cultural situations were established and the process culminated in an international consultation which was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, 16—23 June, 1982,

known as the Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR).

Fifty evangelical leaders from 27 countries met in what was regarded as 'the most ambitious consultation on that topic yet attempted in the evangelical world'. Plans were made to 'allow for legitimate differences of opinion and understanding of the teachings of the Bible in this critical realm' and 'participants represented a broad spectrum of theological perspectives'. As a result, 'New ground was broken and great strides were taken towards defining an evangelical consensus in the area of social responsibility'.

The final statement of the consultation appeared in 1982 as the Grand Rapids Report, *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: an Evangelical Commitment*, edited by John Stott. This was undoubtedly the most comprehensive statement on this topic ever produced by evangelicals. The papers were published in 1985 entitled *In Word and Deed: Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, edited by Bruce Nicholls.

CRESR was another highly significant consultation whose findings would continue to be an important influence on evangelicalism in the following years. Yet by the time it was underway, the TC and other sections of the WEF family were already strongly focusing on another crucial consultation, to be known as Wheaton '83, which would also prove to be a major climax and turning point, especially for the TC and its founder.

### Third World Theologians

At the same time, there were other

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9 Howard, *Dream*, pp. 133-5.

gatherings in process which would have significance for themselves, as well for the TC and those it was serving. The first of these was a meeting of evangelical missions theologians in Thailand, 22-25 March, 1982 which considered non-Christian world views and various Christologies arising from the poor and the oppressed to find effective and faithful ways of proclaiming Christ. This group which soon developed into a powerful organization known as The International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT) linked with the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, met again in Mexico two years later to discuss the theology of the Holy Spirit.

The other was a meeting of Third World theologians held in Korea 27 Aug-5 Sept, 1982, co-sponsored by the TC and regional theological associations on the theme of 'Theology and the Bible in Context'. This arose out of contacts made at the 1980 TC meetings and reinforced later at the LCWE consultation held at Pattaya, Thailand. A 1700 word statement, 'The Seoul Declaration'<sup>10</sup> expressed the outcome of the meeting in developing theologies suited to third-world situations.

These two conferences indicated the growing strength of third-world theologians which was one of the goals of the TC. *Evangelical Review of Theology* commented, 'The papers in this number mark an historic moment in the development of third world theological reflection. The degree of unity achieved in the midst of incredible

diversity and tensions of cultures, mission and ecclesiological heritages, economic and political systems is remarkable. It reflects a common determination to uphold the primacy and authority of Scripture and devotion and obedience to one Saviour and Lord. We may find fault with the wording of the Seoul Declaration, but its central thrust is clear and augers well for the theological undergirding of the churches which will embrace three-fifths of the world's Christians by the 21st century.'

### Task Forces, Study Units and Publications

A second major strand in the work of the TC was the system of Study Units and Task Forces which was developed to focus in detail on various topics of concern and importance. Starting from the consultation held at St Chrischona in 1976, the programme was put in place with six 'Study and Encounter Units' (as they were first called) under Lionel Holmes as Project Secretary. They covered the fields of Faith and Church, Theology and Culture, Ethics and Society, Pastoral Care, Theological Education and also Mission and Evangelism (which was conducted in cooperation with the LCWE Theology and Education Group). A budget of \$20,000 was raised, and each member of the Commission was assigned to one of these groups which would be the primary avenue for TC activity. The number, focus and effectiveness of the Units varied over the years, with Faith and Church, Ethics and Society and Theological Education being particularly active.

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<sup>10</sup> Published in *ERT* Vol 7 No 1, Apr. 1983, along with other papers.

Both the consultation and study unit programmes contributed to the publication activity of the TC in the form of books containing papers from the consultations and specially compiled volumes reporting on the work of the task forces.

There was an ambitious plan in 1979 to produce a series of textbooks covering the entire range of systematic theology. Each volume would emphasize the biblical foundations, historical developments and interpretation for contemporary cultural situations, using teams of cross-cultural theologians in the preparation of the series. However, this did not eventuate.

The closest project to it was the series developed by the Faith and Church Study Unit. Consultations were held at Cambridge where the paper writers drawn from all over the world discussed their prepared manuscripts in an intensive session of a few days, after which the work was revised and edited. The project leadership was initiated by Dr Ulrich Betz, and the coordination by Dr Richard France, but Dr Donald A. Carson took over at an early point and edited all five volumes in the series. The first of the books was *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, which appeared in 1984. It was followed by *Church in The Bible and the World* in 1987.

In 1978 a special series of small booklets was initiated, edited by Klaus Bockmuehl under the title, 'Outreach and Identity' and published by Paternoster Press of England and InterVarsity Press, USA. Altogether six were produced until 1983, after which the

series lay dormant for a decade.<sup>11</sup> Bruce Nicholls' volume on contextualization proved to be highly popular, circulating very widely and still in demand more than twenty years later.

### ERT & TN

The publication ministry was significantly advanced late in 1977 with the appearance of a journal, *Evangelical Review of Theology (ERT)*. The original inspiration for it came from John Stott's suggestion at the WEF Assembly in 1974 that a digest of international evangelical theology be published on a regular basis. Launched in October 1977, it contained full length original articles and reprints selected from other publications in six categories of theology and practice, aiming to provide readers with easy access to the best material available without the need to subscribe to a large number of titles themselves. The publication was well received, and was published at first twice yearly by the TC office in India with Bruce Nicholls as the editor. Later, publication (but not editorship) was transferred to Paternoster to improve the production reliability and quality, and in 1985 it became a quarterly. Theological News as an eight page quarterly also continued its valu-

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<sup>11</sup> They were No. 1 *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission*, Waldron Scott, 1978; No. 2 *The Biblical Doctrine of Regeneration*, Helmut Burkhardt, 1978; No. 3 *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, Bruce J. Nicholls, 1979; No. 4 *Evangelicals and Social Ethics*, Klaus Bockmuehl, 1979; No. 5 *Pornography: A Christian Critique*, John H. Court, 1980; No. 6 *Theology & the Third World Church*, J. Andrew Kirk, 1983

able role of sharing information from the TC, WEF generally and evangelical theological interests around the world.

### Theological Education

The work of the TC in assisting the churches and especially through theological education on a personal level was developed most strongly by the lecture tours of TC staff and associates. From the earliest days, Bruce Nicholls, John Langlois and other staff were regularly travelling in various parts of the world.

Of all the activities of the TC, the most strategic and influential was its work in developing evangelical theological education globally because of the potential impact of well trained leaders for the church in the seminaries and colleges. The lecture tours fulfilled a useful role as seminaries, colleges and churches in different parts of the world were able to learn from the insights and experiences of others, and to gradually develop a more global perspective on their work.

Another practical step was the creation of a library development fund in 1977 to assist poorly resourced schools in the third world. By this scheme, a basic set of theological text and reference books in both English and French would be made available at reduced prices to colleges which needed them. This programme continued for many years in assisting schools until they were able to cope better by themselves. Other schemes, such as the Evangelical Literature Trust, sponsored by John Stott, were also active in a very strong way assisting individuals also with grants of books.

Many of the schools were not only

poorly resourced with libraries and buildings, but their faculty often possessed minimal academic qualifications. So an important companion scheme was developed to provide scholarship funds to assist faculty members in evangelical schools to gain higher degrees. The first steps were taken in 1979 with the idea of a \$100,000 fund to underwrite the scheme, administered through the New Delhi TC office. As a result of an anonymous grant, scholarships to six European, African and Asian scholars were immediately allocated.

The scheme was soon in regular operation. It continued for about for 15 years before difficulties in raising funds prevented it from continuing. By then, other means of funding higher degrees, especially the John Stott's Langham Trust Scholarship Fund and the scholarship programme of Overseas Council for Theological Education, were available.

A high proportion of TC investment was focused on theological education. This was especially noticeable in terms of the staff which included Patricia Harrison, Secretary for Theological Education, and Lois McKinney who replaced her on a pro-tem basis. Many of the publications, including *ERT*, were intended to assist theological educators, while the pages of *TN* were filled with news of developments from many parts of the world.

### ICAA

Perhaps the most tangible and strategically important of all was the TC's sponsorship of The International Council of Accrediting Agencies (ICAA). Following its establishing in

1980, the ICAA was instrumental in encouraging and strengthening theological education through its conferences, publications and other activities. It eventually covered all continents through its eight member bodies. In September 1982, Dr Robert Youngblood, missionary of the Presbyterian Church of America and a TC staff member since 1979 based in Holland, was appointed General Secretary. He replaced Dr Bowers who had resigned due to the pressures of other duties. Dr Youngblood was reappointed for another three-year term in August 1985, and after his resignation in 1988, was succeeded by Dr Roger Kemp in 1989.

### Climax of the first decade

By the time it was reaching its first decade, the record of the TC was good, its programme full, and its prospects promising, but 1983, with its busy round of activities, was to be a major turning point. TC membership had been increased to 54 members to provide greater global participation and the executive had also been enlarged.

The Study Unit Program was working well, with groups devoted to Faith and Church (Don Carson), Mission and Evangelism, (Patrick Sookhdeo), Ethics and Society (Ron Sider), Pastoral Care (David Gitari) and Theological Education (Robert Youngblood). There were Task Forces on Church and China (Jonathan Chao) and Roman Catholic Theology and Practice (Paul Schrottenboer). A new study unit had been formed on Ecumenical Issues to incorporate the work of the Task Force on Roman Catholicism. The Scholar-

ship programme was also working effectively. *ERT* had made a name for itself and was ready to be increased to quarterly publication in 1985.

Another significant publication was also being prepared for launching. The work of the Ethics and Society Study Unit, led by Ronald Sider, revealed the need for attention in the field of social ethics. Already, there had been some consultations and meetings on the topic, a textbook had been planned and assistance was being given to theological schools in acquiring library holdings in the field. Now, as a result especially of CRESR, it was decided that there was need for an 'international journal of Christian Social Ethics' from an evangelical perspective. The first issue appeared in January 1984, with the title *Transformation* and it was edited jointly by Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo (chairman of the Executive Council of WEF) and from the TC Study Unit, Dr Ronald Sider, and Rev Vinay Samuel. The editors' aim was to present balanced perspectives on key social and ethical issues facing the church, raising issues, suggesting biblical solutions, and calling Christians to creative action. It was a success from the beginning, but because it was, as the International Director described it, 'creative, progressive and at the same time controversial',<sup>12</sup> it would later be a source of difficulty for the TC.

The ICAA had held its first consultation in 1981 in Malawi focusing on the 'renewal of theological education'. The work of that gathering, published in 1983 as its 'Manifesto on the

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12 Howard, *Dream*, p. 171.



Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education' (revised in 1990 and again in 2002), proved to be a creative and effective guide for theological educators ever since. Further consultations were held in 1982 in Seoul, Korea, in 1983 at Wheaton, USA, and in 1984 at Katydata, Cyprus, where the topic was Theological Education by Extension, papers from which were published under the title: *Cyprus: TEE come of Age* (edited by Robert L. Youngblood).

The TC consultation programme was set to continue in May 1985 when it joined forces once again with the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee to conduct a Consultation on the Holy Spirit and Evangelism, in Oslo, Norway. Its declaration appeared in *Theological News* and there were reports in *Evangelical Review of Theology*.<sup>13</sup> Dr David Wells gave his understanding of the proceedings in *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works in Bringing Men and Women to Faith*, published by Eerdmans and Paternoster in 1987.

### Wheaton '83

The most important event of this period, however, was the complex of consultations known as 'Wheaton '83'. Planning began late in 1980 when the TC Executive Committee met at Amerongen, Holland October 24-27, 1980, and called for continuing in-depth study at local, national, and continental levels on four critical issues confronting evangelicals: The Understanding and Use of the Bible; The

Evangelization of the World's Poor; The Church's Response to Political Power and Religious Persecution; and The Role of Theological Education in the Renewal and Mission of the Church.

It was decided to conduct a study programme for each topic leading to a series of international consultations, with other commissions of the WEF invited to share in the process. While this process was initiated by the TC with Bruce Nicholls as the chief coordinator, other groups, including LCWE and World Vision, were also involved.

The consultation met at Wheaton College in June 1983 (hence 'Wheaton '83'), with the topic 'The Nature and Mission of the Church', bringing 370 men and women from 60 countries. There were three tracks—

I—'The Church in its Local Setting', chaired by Dr Pablo Perez of Mexico concentrated on how the church in its local setting is to fulfil its role as 'God's primary agent in his mission for the world'.

II—'The Church in New Frontiers in Missions'— was chaired by Patrick Sookhdeo of London and focused on how the church needs to cooperate, within itself and with parachurch agencies, in order to reach the unreached.

III—'The Church in Response to Human Need'— This track, under the leadership of Dr Tom Sine, had already been planning its own conference independently of WEF, but then saw the value of integrating with 'Wheaton 83'. It spoke with the conviction that 'Christ's followers... are called, in one way or another, not to conform to the values of society but to transform

<sup>13</sup> *TN* Vol 17 No 3 Sept. 1985; *ERT* Oct 1985.

them.’—The word ‘transformation’ became the key word for what had previously been referred to as ‘development’.

The results of ‘Wheaton ‘83’ were published in a ‘Letter to the Churches’, representing the consensus of participants’ conclusions and in a series of books.

### End of an era

This was a landmark event with a strong sense of partnership during the preparations and the conference itself. Well over half came from the Third World, and a joyous spirit of worship, prayer and celebration was evident. The use of case studies gave a strong sense of the importance, diversity and complexity of the church’s worldwide nature and mission which impacted deeply on participants, who soon came to see that the local church was God’s primary agent for mission in the world.

Of all the people impacted by Wheaton ‘83, none was more significant than the chief coordinator himself, Bruce Nicholls, who said it was ‘the high point of my conference experience’. He was deeply affected by the emphasis of the conference on a closer relationship with the church and in the process, greater accountability of Christian leaders.

But it had more than theoretical significance for him—it touched him personally, with the result that he announced soon after that he would leave his theological work and spend the remaining years of his active ministry in pastoral work within the fellowship of the Church of North India. He gave the TC notice that he would conclude in his role with the organiza-

tion within three years, in 1986.

There were other changes too about this time. In 1983 John Langlois concluded his 14 years of highly significant and sacrificial participation by himself and his wife (although he was to continue his work more widely in the WEF as Honorary Treasurer and member of the WEF International Council, to which positions he was appointed in 1980 and which he still holds).

Paul Bowers also left the ICAA although he remained in contact as a consultant and has continued to be involved actively and behind the scenes up to the present. He was replaced as General Secretary ICAA by Robert Youngblood who had been TC Project Secretary. In a new development, Richard Hart of the Programme for Theological Education by Extension in Jordan was appointed in 1985 to foster interest in this aspect of theological education, indicating its growth and the importance ICAA placed in it. Patricia Harrison who had gone on study leave in 1981 announced her resignation, and concluded by 1983.

The Outreach and Identity series of monographs saw its last issue in 1983 with J. Andrew Kirk’s *Theology and the Third World Church*. The series was to be replaced by volumes produced by the Study Units, but only the Church and Faith Unit ever contributed.

Another setback for the TC was the fate of the new journal from the Ethics and Society unit, *Transformation*. It was anticipated from the beginning that it could be controversial. As early as June 1985, it was the subject of debate at a meeting of the WEF Executive Council, which conceded that it was fulfilling a vital and necessary function. However, there was strong

disagreement over whether it should be associated with the WEF because of the organization's role in fostering unity amongst evangelicals and the potential difficulties of the WEF appearing to endorse views that might be expressed in the journal. Accordingly, it decided (although not unanimously) that 'in view of the nature and purpose of *Transformation*, we strongly recommend that the Theological Commission make arrangements for its continuing publication as an independent journal'.<sup>14</sup>

The next triennial meeting of the TC was planned for mid-1986 in association with a consultation and the 8th General Assembly of the WEF in Singapore. This would be Bruce Nicholls' last event as Executive Secretary, and it would also mark the end of the term of the current chair, Dr David Gitari.

In June 1985, the WEF Executive Committee finalised its quest for a replacement for Bruce Nicholls. The post would be filled by two non-westerners. Dr. Sunand Sumithra of India as Associate Executive Secretary from October 1985, and Dr. Tite Tienou from Upper Volta/Burkina Faso, who would become Executive Secretary from July 1986. Both positions would be full time.

Dr. Sumithra, a former engineer with a D.Theol. from the University of Tuebingen, Germany, had taught at the Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal and in Pune from 1972 to 1985. He also had pastoral experience as a minister of the Methodist Church in India. Dr. Tienou, a member of the TC since 1980, had been offered a staff position

earlier, upon completion of his PhD studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, sharing his time with the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), but this did not eventuate. At the time of this announcement, he was teaching at Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack NY.

The appointment of these two men was regarded as an indication of the growing confidence among evangelicals in the coordinating ministries of the Theological Commission at a global level. However, the arrangement would not be realized, and the stability of Bruce Nicholls' 18 year leadership of the TC would not be replicated, much to the detriment of the organization and its ministry.

Sunand Sumithra assisted Bruce Nicholls at the New Delhi office from October 1985, taking over from Dr. Robert Youngblood who now gave half his time as Assistant General Director of WEF (working under Dr David Howard), while continuing as ICAA General Secretary.

The main focus for the TC, in addition to its regular programme, was the preparation of the 1986 TC meeting and Consultation to be held at the National University of Singapore, 27 June to 2 July, 1986.

The theme chosen for the Consultation was 'Christ our Liberator and Redeemer', focusing on 'the basic issues of a theology of evangelism, peace and justice, the role of the Church in giving practical leadership in a world of escalating violence and death'. It would 'work towards a biblical and evangelical theology of liberation and redemption' and help participants to 'consider appropriate Christ-

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14 Howard, *Dream*, p. 172.

ian practice and lifestyle for today's world'.<sup>15</sup>

It was intended, as *TN* reported, that 'the consultation will mark a new dimension in the evangelical understanding and give prophetic leadership to our churches in times of crisis'. In Bruce Nicholls' understanding, the TC sought to listen to its constituency, and also as a prophetic voice, aimed to lead them forward in the defence and the confirmation of the gospel.

### Singapore 1986

During the meeting, plans for the future leadership of the TC took an unexpected turn when it was announced that there were 'practical difficulties' associated with Tienou taking up the post, and the offer to him had been withdrawn by the WEF Executive Council. Instead, Sumithra was appointed to the position, taking over immediately. He had gained some good experience of the work in the few months he had been Nicholls' assistant, especially in a trip to Europe in late 1985. Here, as he reported enthusiastically in *TN*, he had observed a session of the member TC Task Force led by Dr Paul G. Schrottenboer, visited the WEF European office in Holland, conferred with funding agencies, and lectured at several seminaries in Germany. He came away inspired and convinced about the value of international networking in theological work. 'We can never have sufficient exchange of information from Christians in different parts of the world; there is so much we can learn from one another. Here

the TC has an essential role to play as a bridge building, as a forum for dialogue, and as a service agency.' However, despite this vision, he was to remain in the position for only three years.

Meanwhile, Bruce Nicholls continued to live for several more years in New Delhi carrying out parish work with the Church of North India, before retiring with his wife, Kathleen, to his homeland of NZ in 1992. Through all this time, and up to the present, his vital interest and often his active involvement in the work of the TC has persisted.

Another disturbing development on the agenda of the Singapore meeting was the instruction of the WEF Executive Council concerning the journal, *Transformation*. After full discussion, the decision was taken to oppose the WEF Executive's wishes 'in the interests of the WEF's worldwide constituency's witness and integrity'. The meeting empowered the TC Executive Committee 'to clarify the issue' with the WEF leadership should it be necessary. Eventually, the WEF had its way, and *Transformation* was published by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies from July 1988. It has continued to make a vital contribution as an evangelical witness in the wider ecumenical context. For the personnel of the Ethics and Society Study Unit, it marked the beginning of their movement away from the Theological Commission and the ultimate collapse of the Unit.

This 'robust discussion' in the business sessions was intensified by the topic of the consultation theme itself, 'Christ our Liberator and Redeemer'. Liberation theology was

still at that time a matter of controversy in evangelical circles, and the presence of a strong contingent from Latin America (where this movement had its origins) and sympathetic supporters ensured that the topic would be treated with fervour. Yet it was a topic that was chosen deliberately because of the seriousness of the world context and reflected the determination of the outgoing TC leadership to provide the 'prophetic' lead that they believed was an essential element of the TCs charter.

The papers tackled the relevant issues directly with contributions by Rodrigo Tano (Philippines) on Asian theology, Rene Padilla (Argentina) on the new ecclesiology in Latin America associated with the Base Communities, Valdir Steuernagel (Brazil) on hermeneutical issues, David Gitari (Africa), the Holy Spirit, all introduced by Bruce Nicholls' keynote address and response by Dr Peter Kuzmič.

Although these papers raised a host of questions in the minds of hearers, the small work groups that had been planned to flesh out the major principles developed in the papers and the preceding Bible studies were not able to meet due to pressure of other business. Planned publications never materialized, thus limiting the value of the real gains of the consultation, which covered ecclesiology, the challenge of liberation theologies to Evangelicals, and theological methodology, especially regarding the practical outworking of theology.

Another delicate matter was the presentation by Dr Paul Schrottenboer of the report on the Roman Catholic Church which had arisen from the previous General Assembly in 1980. The

report, prepared by a 17 member task force set up by the TC on the request of the WEF leadership, had been endorsed at the WEF General Assembly preceding the TC meeting, which therefore meant that the division within WEF circles over the matter was formally overcome. The report was also adopted by the TC meeting, and published in *Evangelical Review of Theology*,<sup>16</sup> and in booklet form as *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, P. G. Schrottenboer, (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

It was also recognized by the TC that there were many more issues that needed to be discussed, so it instructed the TC Executive to set up ways for this process to continue. Meanwhile, there was a development from another direction. When Roman Catholic authorities became aware of the report, they were not altogether impressed by its contents. Consequently, meetings were set up to try to resolve the differences, which eventually developed into a longer term series of conversations, expertly led until 1998 by Dr Schrottenboer, and after his death, by Dr George Vandervelde (Canada).

The 1986 TC meeting appointed Dr Peter Kuzmič as the new chairman to replace Bishop (now Dr) David Gitari whose term had expired. Kuzmič, who was to serve for ten years, was already a TC Executive Committee member, and the founder of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia. Later, in 1993, he took up a professorship at Gordon-Conwell Seminary,

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16 *ERT* Vol 10 No 4 (1986) pp. 342–364; Vol 11 No 1 (1987) pp. 78–94.

USA. A native of Slovenia and a citizen of Croatia in former Yugoslavia, he was regarded as the foremost evangelical scholar in Eastern Europe and an authority on the subject of Christian response to Marxism and on Christian ministry in post-Communist contexts.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (Pakistan), who had also served on the Executive, was appointed vice chairman. New members were Pastor R. Daidanso (Chad), Dr Donald Carson (USA) and Dr Rolf Hille (Germany). A new slate of members was also appointed, 41 in all were named at the meetings, leaving seven vacancies to be filled later.

### Bruce Nicholls' achievement and legacy

As Bruce Nicholls concluded his official work with the TC after 18 years, he could look back upon a remarkable achievement. Reviewing the past, he said,

When I became the theological coordinator of the World Evangelical Fellowship following the Fifth General Assembly in Lausanne in 1968, little did I realise how important the era of the 70s and 80s would be for evangelical Christianity. In the 1960s there were few evangelical third world theologians and educators with post—graduate training in the theological disciplines, few institutions that trained beyond the undergraduate level, and quality theological reflection and writing was sparse. Now the situation has radically changed; no one person or movement can claim credit for it—

it is the work of God in response to the willingness for evangelical partnership. But I believe it would be fair to say that the WEF Theological Commission has had a major role as a catalyst in evangelical cooperation in the areas of theological reflection and training worldwide.<sup>17</sup>

The 1986 Consultation would be a culmination of this process for Nicholls, who had been awarded an honorary DD degree from Ashland Theological Seminary in 1982. The legacy that he passed on to his successors was a TC that had strongly developed its main ministries of theological research and reflection through consultations and publications, and strengthening evangelical theological education especially through accreditation, scholarships and lecture tours. As Dr Nicholls saw it, the TC had many roles but above all else, he said,

It provides an open space where theologians and educators can meet. It is a catalyst for new ideas and projects. Where necessary it coordinates projects on a global level and initiates new ones. The Commission is careful not to overshadow the work of national and regional bodies and is sensitive to their autonomy and self-image. The Commission was not born out of a desire to oppose other bodies, but to encourage and help evangelical theologians and educators to more effectively fulfil the programs and projects they have set for themselves.<sup>18</sup>

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17 *TW* Vol 18 No 2 April-June 1986

18 *TW* Vol 17 No 4 Oct-Dec 1985.

Theological Education had been a prime part of the TC work, and would remain so for a few more years still. Bruce Nicholls could fairly claim:

We have been a catalyst and in some cases a pioneer in extension education, in developing accrediting associations, in library development, curriculum development and scholarships for faculty training. However, theological education is more than building institutions. It begins with good theology which is biblically grounded, contextually relevant and pastorally orientated. Theological education is more than teaching subjects; it is shaping men and women to know God and to go out to make him known in the world. Men and women need to be trained to be good counsellors, to have a missiological vision and to be accountable to their sponsors. There can be no dichotomy between theological conviction and ministerial formation. Spiritual formation is fundamental to theological excellence.<sup>19</sup>

## Discerning the Obedience of Faith

At the conclusion of the Singapore consultation, he handed the work over to his former assistant, Dr Sumithra, who was faced with the task of taking the Theological Commission on to its next phase of development. Sumithra adopted as his goals the principles that had been 'masterfully summarised' earlier by the founder— 'the prophetic ministry of leading evangelicals around the world in current theological debate, and also a servant ministry to meet the needs of the churches, national fellowships, and evangelicals in general'.

In view of this twofold aim and the needs of the times, the new Executive Secretary announced that the TC had adopted as its motto, 'discerning the obedience of faith'. As he emphasized, 'Christian ministries of any type, anywhere in the world must start—not just with action or reflection—but with faith itself'.<sup>20</sup>

(to be continued)

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19 Nicholls, 'History', p. 21.

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20 *TN* Vol 19 No 1-2 Jan-June 1987

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# Our Christian Response to the Global Environmental Crisis

Bruce Nicholls

**KEYWORDS:** *Environmental degradation, creation, biblical mandate, Trinity, sin, redemption, stewardship*

THE ENVIRONMENTAL crisis on planet Earth is global; no part of the world is excluded. The earth is one interlocking system. Air pollution in the northern hemisphere is largely responsible for the destruction of 70% of the ozone shield in the Antarctic, thereby increasing the number of skin cancer sufferers in the southern hemisphere. Massive deforestation in Nepal is resulting in devastating floods in Bangladesh with the loss of thousands of lives. Radiation from the Cherynobl countdown in 1986 continues to contaminate cows' milk in parts of the UK.

Several global consultations since 1987 have alerted the world to the seriousness of the environmental crisis. As a result, governments have passed appropriate laws, but with a few exceptions have been unable to implement them. Juergen Moltmann of Tuebingen has warned, 'The nuclear catastrophe

is only one possible catastrophe, but ecological death will occur because of the irreversibility of the development of humanity if we do not succeed in fundamentally altering this development.'<sup>1</sup> This crisis threatens all of life, human and all other living creatures.

## The Environmental Issues

Calvin DeWitt, director of the Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies in Michigan USA, outlines seven degradations of creation<sup>2</sup>

1. Alteration of the earth's energy exchange leading to acceleration of global warming and the destruction of the ozone shield. (This is resulting in extended droughts, desertification in the Sahel region of Africa

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Ecological Crisis: Peace with Nature', presented at a conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Studies in New Zealand, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 17. No.2 (April 1993), pp. 134-136.

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**Dr Bruce J. Nicholls** was the founding Director of the WEA Theological Commission (1974-86), and editor of this journal for 15 years. He was educated at the University of Auckland and London Bible College, and holds an MTh degree (Princeton Theological Seminary) and D.D. (Ashland Theological Seminary). After serving as theological educator in India for 39 years, he retired to his home country of New Zealand in 1992 where he is active in numerous theological and church ministries. This paper is one of our 30th anniversary series featuring former leaders of the Theological Commission. Used by permission of the author, it was prepared for the Golden Jubilee of the Union Biblical Seminary, Pune, India, and was published in the UBS Journal vol.1 no.2 September 2003.



and increase in human poverty, disease and starvation).

2. Land degradation leading to erosion, salinisation and desertification and the depletion of irreplaceable natural resources of oil, gas and minerals.
3. Deforestation at the rate of twelve million hectares a year (tropical rain forests cover only 7% of the land surface of the planet, yet they are home to 60% of the world's species). In the Philippines only one million of sixteen million hectares of rain forest remain.
4. Species extinction (11,000 species a year).
5. Water quality degradation (the pollution of wells, rivers, lakes and oceans, the lowering of the ground water table). The future crisis of India and Pakistan is not food, but drinking water.
6. Waste generation and toxification. Pesticides and industrial waste and nuclear waste lead to disease and death. For how long can Auckland rely on water from the Waikato River or Delhi on the Jumna?
7. Human and cultural degradation. Over-population leads to poverty and violence. 1.3 billion people now live in abject poverty, creating enormous pollution problems.

To this list we may add other crises:

1. The spread of old and new animal diseases.
2. New human diseases, often animal based. (35 million people have been affected with AIDS/HIV. Over 20 million have already died; influenza after WW1 killed 19 million people.)
3. War and terrorism. The war in the Middle East—Kuwait, Afghanistan,

Iraq, Palestine and now global terrorism in the past 15 years have led to the great increase of air and land pollution.

### Spiritual and Moral Issues

Dr Ghillean Prance, formerly Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens in the UK, wrote 'If environmental degradation were purely, or even primarily, a problem demanding scientific or technological solutions, the resolution would probably have been accomplished by now...There is obviously a growing realisation in the secular world that the environmental crisis is indeed a moral issue, and so the world is turning to religious leaders and philosophers for help.'<sup>3</sup>

We are grateful that some governments are making strong efforts to reduce the crisis. For example, the Government of India, facing one of the worst air pollution problems in the world in Delhi, succeeded in reducing the level of carbon dioxide by banning all diesel vehicles, including trucks, buses and auto rickshaws in the city. Most countries have banned CFC gases for domestic use. Germany has introduced environmental taxes.

But this is not enough. A sustainable society must be motivated by ethical values that transcend human material greed. Ultimately such values need a religious base to succeed.

The need for a global environmental ethic has again and again been endorsed by international conferences

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<sup>3</sup> Ghillean T. Prance, 'The Earth Under Threat' in *The Care of Creation* ed. R. J. Berry (Leicester: IVP, 2000), p. 117.

during the past fifteen years. The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 1991, was followed by the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993 which called for 'a transformation in individual and collective consciousness, for the awakening of our spiritual powers through reflection, meditation, prayer or positive thinking for a conversion of the heart'.<sup>4</sup> Governments and other public bodies have the knowledge, but not the will to implement change, as we see in the failure of some nations to sign or adhere to the Kyoto Accord of 1997 to curb greenhouse gas emission.

Among Christian organizations, the World Council of Churches sponsored the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation consultation in Seoul, 1990. The Anglican Consultative Council 1990 added to the four-fold definition of Mission a fifth, namely 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.<sup>5</sup> The Lambeth Conference, 1998, outlined an eco-theology including the creation covenant; the sacrament of creation; priests for creation; the Sabbath feast of 'enoughness'. Pope John Paul II has also made a number of calls for the care of creation.

Among evangelical organizations, the Au Sable Institute in North Michigan is giving leadership in North America. The A Rocha Trust in Europe and John Ray Initiative in the UK (launched 1977) are giving leadership in western Europe. In 1992 the Au Sable Institute and the Ethics Unit of the Theological Commission of WEF (of which I was the Director at the time) sponsored a

consultation at Mancelona, Michigan, 'Evangelical Christianity and the Environment'. The declaration and papers were published in *Transformation* and the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.<sup>6</sup> This consultation led to the formation of an International Evangelical Environmental Network and the declaration, 'An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation', 1994.

In some cases, it is 'the uncertainty factor' that paralyzes government action, and in many others, it is widespread bribery and corruption that are the problems. For example, forestry officials in countries such as India, Malaysia and the Solomon Islands are constantly harassed and bribed by powerful logging contractors. Passing legislation is no guarantee of the protection of creation. Ghilleen Prance suggests that it is not ecologists, engineers or economists who will save the earth, but 'the poets, priests, artists and philosophers'.<sup>7</sup> We would add 'the church as the people of God'.

Humankind must commit itself to a moral imperative to save the environment. A global ethic must have the support of all people, irrespective of race, creed and political persuasion. It must be grounded on moral absolutes, anchored in religious commitment to God the Creator or the Supreme Being, however understood. As Christians we are committed to obedience to the Creator-Redeemer God whose attributes are love and righteousness and who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ through

4 'Rationale' *Care of Creation*, p. 187.

5 *Care of Creation*, p. 30.

6 *Transformation* Vol 9 No 4, Oct-Dec 1992, 27-39; *Evangelical Review of Theology* Vol 17 No 2, Apr 1993, pp. 122-133.

7 *Care of Creation*, p. 116.

the Holy Spirit. As Christians we cannot save the world by ourselves; we need the goodwill of humankind. Ultimately it is only God who can save the earth from global disaster

### The Limitations of Contemporary Responses

Having acknowledged the necessity of a global ethic, we can now critique some contemporary responses.

Modernity, as the continuing Age of the Enlightenment, places its confidence in rationality, scientific truth and individual self-confidence. It offers a secular and purely scientific and technological response based on human ability to solve the global crisis. However, the tragedy of the crisis is increasing, leading to unprecedented human suffering and the destruction of the environment. It is clear that self-centred humanity does not hold the key to the future. Global bodies are becoming increasingly aware of this fact. People and nations are searching for sustainable alternatives.

Post-modernity, supported by New Age philosophies, signals a new way of looking at reality. Its catchwords are 'community' rather than 'individual', 'intuition' rather than 'reason', 'inclusive non-dogmatic' solutions rather than 'absolutes'. Any western bookshop reflects the present paradigm shift—books on astrology, magic and eastern mysticism and morality and the writings of the Dalai Lama have replaced Christian titles. Education based on the goodness of humanity and evil as ignorance is said to hold the key to the solution of the crisis. New Age philosophies are appealing for new lev-

els of inner consciousness to sustain the earth. This new identity is to be found in identity with nature itself, symbolized by Mother Earth.

Matthew Fox, a defrocked Dominican priest and now a Protestant, is one who has sought to reconcile Christianity with this new paganism. His 'creation spirituality' replaces the dogma of biblical revelation, sin and the redemptive work of Christ with the deification of humankind. The cosmic Christ becomes Mother Earth. Identification with the spirits of nature, gods and goddesses which are traditional to primal religions worldwide, are being restated. In New Zealand, Maori self-identification is being rediscovered in traditional animistic beliefs, ignoring the Christian heritage of the last two hundred years. The sacredness of mountains, forests, lakes and the sea replaces the Creator God. The same worldview of conflicting good and evil spirits who dwell in all of nature, dominates the lives of the animist tribal people of India too.

The traditional Asian religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, shamanism and Shintoism offer in varying degrees a pantheistic solution and a non-violent ethic for the solution of the global environmental crisis. In Hinduism, for example, God is the timeless cosmic energy symbolized in Nataraja; the dancing Shiva, the physical creation, is *maya* or illusion, and *ahimsa* or non-violence the ground of ethical response. Since all life is sacred, mankind is powerless to change nature. He can only identify with it in worship. Therefore Hinduism is unable to offer any ethical motivation to redeem creation.

## A Truncated Christian Response.

It is a common belief among some conservative Christians that the gospel has little or nothing to do with the care of non-human creation. Salvation is Christ's redemptive work in reconciling the individual with God. Revelation is in Christ alone and not in creation. There is no place for a natural theology; the world of nature is peripheral. This spiritualistic response is reinforced by the commonly held interpretation of 2 Peter 3:10 that when Christ returns the earth and everything in it will be 'burned up' (KJV, RSV). Further, it is thought that the focus of the New Testament is on the church only with little or no reference to creation. The word 'world' refers only to people. Such people accuse liberal Christians and eco-feminists of being preoccupied with social justice and the saving of the earth to the neglect of personal salvation. The issues raised by the advocates of Green politics are irrelevant to such Christians.

## The Biblical Mandate for the Care of Creation

The Bible begins with God the Creator putting man in a garden with the instruction to 'work it and take care of it' (Gen. 2:15) and culminates with a Holy City, the New Jerusalem descending from heaven and the leaves of the tree of life healing the nations (Rev. 21-22). Thus the redemption of humankind is set between the framework of creation and the re-creation of the natural world now abused by human sinfulness.

The Hebrew mindset of the Old Tes-

tament focuses on life in this world. Not to live the full span of seventy years is a tragedy. History is the story of Israel from the pilgrimage of Abraham to the post-exilic blessings of those who bring their tithes and offerings to God's storehouse (Mal. 3:8-10). Israel's identity is the land and its prosperity—a fact that is at the heart of the Middle East conflict between Jew and Arab today. Israel's eschatological hope was the coming of the Messiah to bring justice on the earth (Isa. 58-61) and the harmony of all creation (Isa. 65-66).

In the New Testament, the glory of God is seen in the Word becoming flesh, in a painful death on the cross and in the transformed body of the resurrected Christ. The fact that Christ took his very humanity into God's eternal presence is the greatest of all mysteries. The gospel stories of Christ's earthly ministry abound with accounts of Jesus healing the bodies of the sick and the diseased and his parabolic teaching was illustrated from nature and human experience. He saw God's glory in the beauty of the lily, the fruit of the vine and in the life of the common sparrow. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, expounded the kingdom of God from the baseline of God's providential care of creation as seen in his evangelism at Lystra (Acts 14:8-15) and at Athens (Acts 17:16-34).

I believe that the story of creation and the care of it is perhaps the most effective bridge to proclaiming the gospel to our contemporary neo-pagan society. Issues in the environment are the concern of all people. They open opportunities for the good news of Jesus Christ our Creator and Redeemer-God.

A biblical mandate for the care of cre-

ation begins with the declaration, 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Ps. 24:1). The opening words of the Bible, 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen. 1:1) is the watershed between Christianity and all other faiths, with the exception of Judaism and Islam, both of which share the same premise as that of Christianity. The biblical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is the Christian response to the central issue of the relationship between the transcendence and immanence of the one Creator-Redeemer God. God is the 'holy other', separate from all creation and never to be confused with it as in eastern religions and their New Age equivalents. He is the creator of space and time.

God is imminent in his creation, sustaining every part of it in love. The harmony of the colours of the rainbow, the permanent symmetry of the mountain flower and the snowflake, the daily rising and setting of the sun and the constant flow of the tides all reflect God's divine nature and his eternal power. Because of this, Paul is able to declare 'that all men are without excuse' (Rom. 1:20). It is inconceivable that God who created this unique planet at the beginning of time, a unity in diversity with 30 million species, would in the end destroy it because of selfish abuse of it over 6000-8000 years. God loves his creation and will surely redeem it.

The Psalms in particular in inspiring language speak of the relationship of creation to its creator, who provides water for the beasts of the field, trees for the nesting birds, grass for the cattle (Ps. 104:10-13). In an extraordinary statement, the psalmist declares, 'The lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God (v. 21). The works

of the Lord are many and in wisdom he made and sustains them all. It requires an enormous leap of faith to accept an atheistic neo-Darwinian view of the origins of life. In striking poetic imagery, the whole of creation 'praises the Lord' (Ps. 148).

The relationship between the transcendence and immanence of God is to be understood in terms of the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in the function of God as Creator, Redeemer and Giver and Sustainer of life. A trinitarian acceptance of God enables Christians to reject a deistic interpretation of God's detachment from creation and from a pantheistic interpretation which denies any distinction between them. In either way the moral imperative is weakened and accountability for the abuse of creation denied. Only a trinitarian view of the creator holds together the truth that the creator who stands over against creation in judgement is also immanent in it in costly love.

The early Church Fathers, Irenaeus and Athanasius and contemporary theologians including Juegen Moltmann, Colin Gunton and John Zizoulas are chief among those who expound a trinitarian understanding of the complementary relationship of God, humankind and the created world. In the words of Jeremy Begbie of Cambridge, 'The Son has taken flesh and, as it were, offered creation back to the Father in his own humanity, and now through the Holy Spirit invites us to share in the task of bringing creation to praise and magnify the Father in and through the Spirit.'<sup>8</sup> Only a trinitarian

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8 *Care of Creation*, p. 58.

God harmonises love and judgement in creation and in redemption. The Allah of Islam, a strict monotheistic faith, merges creation and redemption in one transcendent Creator God. Allah is merciful to those who act rightly, but is not the saviour of sinners. The incarnation and the cross are anathema to Islam. Evangelicals emphasize Christ's redeeming work, but when they bypass Christ's work as creator of the world, they fail to relate Christ's resurrection to Isaiah's promise of harmony in creation (Isa. 65-66).

In his great Christological hymn (Colossians 1:15-20), Paul declares that Christ who is the visible image of the invisible God is the creator of all things. He holds them together in harmony and through his crucified and resurrected physical body reconciles the whole of creation to himself. Here the cosmic vision is actualised in a historic event whose description is unmatched in any of the world's religious literature.

### The Human Abuse of God's Perfect Handiwork

At each day or stage of creation God declares that it was good, but climaxes on the sixth day with 'it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). Here goodness is in terms of completion and perfection in accord with the divine plan. Good in a moral sense only followed the manifestation of evil in man's Fall. God's creation is good in terms of order, beauty and harmony, a goodness that continues to abound in nature today and is the inspiring subject of much of human poetry, music and art.

I believe that physical death in cre-

ation is an integral part of God's goodness and mercy. Creation declares the glory of God (Ps. 19) and God's attributes of love and righteousness abound in creation. However, the impact of the Fall on creation has been devastating, leading to the present global ecological crisis. Every advance in enhancing human life for good has been turned to evil by selfish human greed and boasting. Scientists can no longer control what they have created. The effect on humanity and nature of a possible suicidal terrorist attack on our atomic power stations is too horrible to contemplate. After the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York this horror is no longer an idle threat. All our ecological crises began with good intentions, only to be abused by human sinfulness. Calvin DeWitt constantly warns that those who destroy the earth will themselves be destroyed (Revelation 11:18).

The curse of the Fall (Gen. 3) had consequences for both humankind and for creation. Mankind lost the rightful dominion over creation. Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden. The ground was cursed, thorns and thistles became destructive weeds. Work became painful toil. Disease increased and the human life-span steadily declined. Women became oppressed by men. To physical death was added the spiritual death of separation from God. The day that Adam and Eve sinned, spiritual death became a reality

Throughout their history, the people of Israel lived in the midst of idolatrous nations. They struggled to maintain their monotheism against the syncretistic pressure to worship Yahweh in the form of the Canaanite fertility images of Baal and his consort

Asherah, and later in the astral deities of Assyria and Babylon. God raised up prophets to call the people back to true worship. When they failed, God allowed Israel's enemies to destroy their cities, their land and crops and to take them into captivity.

I believe that idolatry goes to the heart of our environmental crisis. The worshippers of idols create their own gods in their own images or in the images of creation, and they worship what they create. In rejecting God's reign in their lives, idol worshippers open their lives to satanic powers whose goal is destruction. The worshippers seek to manipulate God with their cultic practices and mantras. It is an undeniable fact that idolatry results in the neglect of the care of creation. According to Paul, their foolish hearts are darkened, their minds depraved and their physical bodies abused (Rom. 1:18-32). Idolatry is self-imprisoning, creates fear of the future and superstition in agricultural practices. Paul adds covetousness and greed to this long list of personal and social evils (1 Cor. 5:11, Eph. 5:5 and Col. 3:5). Sadly, in the history of Asia, wherever idolatry dominates people's lives, corruption increases and the environment is neglected or abused.

### The Redemption or Re-creation of Creation

As a first step to creation, God instituted sacrifice as a way of forgiveness and peace with humankind. The principle of sacrifice is common to all religious Faiths. Sacrifice is a central element of God's general revelation to the human race, but is fulfilled only in

God's special revelation at the cross. Salvation is God's covenantal relationship with human beings and with creation. Beginning with Noah, God established an everlasting covenant with humankind, with Noah's descendants and with all living creatures (Gen. 9:8-17). Then God promised Abraham a multitude of offspring and inheritance in the Promised Land. This covenant relationship was expanded with Moses, confirmed with David and with a new promise to Jeremiah.

In Jesus Christ, God's covenant took on a sacrificial meaning symbolized in the Lord's Supper. In partaking of the bread and the wine, symbols of the earth, the worshippers affirm their commitment to Christ, to the church and to the whole of creation. The care of creation becomes a sacramental act of identity for the believer. It is a solemn commitment to be in partnership with the Creator and his redeeming work.

Without this spiritual and moral commitment to the Lordship of Christ, the church is powerless as leaven to permeate the whole of society and to work for the care of creation. We are committed to the view that the universal church should give leadership in the rescuing of creation from certain disaster. We are committed to safeguarding the integrity of creation and the sustaining and renewing of the environment. In the Day of Judgement, we will be called to give an account of our response.

The idea of stewardship is inherent in the nature of our humanity, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). It demands relational accountability between mankind and the Creator, between male and female in marriage

and with the rest of creation. Our relationship is one of the stewardship of property on behalf of another. The earth is the Lord's, he created it, in love he sustains it and he renews it through the symbol of the Sabbath rest. Mankind is to have dominion over creation for the benefit, not of himself, but of its owner. Stewardship requires accountability as Jesus Christ stressed in several of his parables.

The criticism of Lynn White and others that these verses from Genesis are an excuse for Christian exploitation of nature is totally unfounded, despite many of the home truths in White's argument. The glory of God is not for human benefit, but is the only valid motivation for Christian stewardship. It is a call to protect and preserve creation, including its non-commercial value and to heal its damage from human greed and exploitation. The protection of wastelands from human exploitation is an essential part of this stewardship responsibility, even though wastelands such as mangrove swamps are of no direct value to human productivity.

The image of stewardship is but one symbol of this relationship—that of a gardener responsible for the care of God's garden is another. Colin Gunton suggests 'priests of creation'. Paul argues that creation has been wounded by human action and is groaning in travail and waiting to be liberated from the bondage of decay (Rom. 8:19-23). Our Christian calling is to cooperate with God in the healing of creation. Just as we humans await our liberation as the sons and daughters of God, so creation awaits its renewal by the same Spirit. In dependence upon God, we have the same hope, though at

markedly different levels of consciousness. It is therefore appropriate to speak of Christ redeeming creation alongside the redemption of humankind. God 'forgives all our sins and heals all our diseases' (Ps. 103:3). In the same way, he has promised to renew creation by purifying it by fire (2 Peter 3:10), so that 'we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' (v.13). We are part of God's cosmic process to bring all things together under one head, Christ (Eph. 1:10), in which God reconciles all things together through the cross. (Col. 1:20).

### Some Practical Steps in the Care of Creation

Since doing begins with being, actions must begin with a settled mind and purpose. Our Christian motivation to care for the environment flows from our desire to glorify God, to worship him as Creator and to praise him for all his works. Wisdom to know how to respond to the multiple crises that are enveloping us begins with reverence and humility to listen to the Lord and to other people with similar concerns. Technological knowledge is not enough to overcome the despair that is enveloping us. The Lord requires of us that we 'act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God' (Mic. 6:8). As we meditate on the amazing difference between the greening of this planet and the barrenness of the other planets of our solar system, the balanced mix of the gases released by the vegetation and the animal kingdom, we marvel and wonder at the greatness of our Creator God and worship him.



Further, our motivation to care for creation arises from the Sabbath principle. The climax of creation was not the creation of mankind, but the seventh day in which the Lord God blessed his creation as holy and as a day of rest from their work. The command to keep the Sabbath, the longest in the Decalogue, is comprehensive in its application to the extended family and to all animals in their household care. Keeping the Sabbath is the single most important factor in the survival of the Jewish community throughout its long and tumultuous history. Likewise keeping the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest is crucial to Christian identity. The present trend to secularize Sunday, the New Testament equivalent, will be equally disastrous for the witness of the Christian church.

The principle of the Sabbath was extended to the whole of creation. In the Mosaic law the principle of sabbath rest includes the land. Every seventh year was an opportunity to allow the land to recover its fertility (Lev. 25:2-7). Without this regular replenishment of its goodness, grasslands and forests become deserts. The 50th year or Jubilee was to be a time when Israel acknowledged God's reign over the whole community. By returning the land to its original owners, freeing labourers of their debts and giving slaves their freedom, God's lordship over the whole of life was acknowledged. The principle of stewardship was reinforced. Only then was the sustainability of creation to be assured. When Israel failed in its obligations, God sent his people into Exile so that the land could be replenished (Leviticus 26: 31-35).

If the churches are to be signposts

to the care of creation, then stewardship in all its fullness must be preached from the pulpit and taught in small group activities. Misinterpretation of Scriptural principles needs to be corrected and culturally conditioned attitudes to creation critically examined. The idea of being a skilled and dedicated gardener is one that will appeal to everyone.

At the environmental level, the practices of recycling of packaging and the proper disposal of industrial waste materials must be implemented. Alternative energy sources must be developed and non-renewable elements including oil, gas and many minerals preserved for use by future generations. Further, greater effort is needed to protect endangered species for future generations. The preservation of wildernesses and wetlands is essential to eco-stability. At the social level, the causes and consequences of poverty need to be addressed. The status of women must be enhanced so that population growth will be self-regulating. Violence and terrorism and religious fanaticism are major causes of human suffering and must be restrained by those of good will. At the political level, unbridled capitalism and free trade based on consumerism must be controlled at a global level and be made accountable to God and to the needs of the poor and the marginalized. Bribery, nepotism and corrupt officials and business leaders must be exposed and rightly judged. Greater integrity and accountability of the media are urgently needed.

Governments may have good intentions to do these many things in order to reclaim the environment and so improve life for all their citizens. But

few governments are able to implement them. They are powerless to change human nature from material greed to sharing equally the resources of the earth. Communism tried to do this by force and failed. Capitalism tries to do it by the democratic process, but the gap between rich and poor widens daily. The hope of every nation, including India, lies with the Christian church—but only when the church makes visible the reign of Christ's kingdom on earth.

The church is called to be a servant community, working and sharing for the good of others. There is no one definition of a simple lifestyle, but we can

all strive to live more simply, sharing our possessions, so that 'others may simply live'. This is possible only when we are willing to take up our cross daily and deny ourselves for the sake of Christ and our neighbours and with a goal of restoring the beauty and productiveness of the garden in which God has placed us, 'to work it and take care of it'.

The biblical text on the gate of the Old Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge, epitomizes our Christian response to the global environmental crises,

Great are the works of the Lord; pondered over by all who delight in them (Psalm 111:2).

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**Paternoster Press**

**PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK**

# History Comes Full Circle

Byang Kato

**KEYWORDS:** *Syncretism, contextualization, pluralism, culture, persecution, colonization, citizenship, traditional religions, ecumenism, social concern, ancestors, universalism*

CHRISTIANITY ORIGINATED in the Afro-Asian Middle East. Then it spread to Europe and relatively recently to the Americas and Australasia. It has expanded to the rest of Asia and Africa at different periods with varying degrees of success and failure. Thus, the gospel has reached 'the remotest part of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The very circumstances that prevailed at the inauguration of the church in the Greco-Roman world are now asserting themselves in the world. The parallel is more pronounced in the primarily agricultural economics where man lives closer to nature. The challenges that confronted the church in the first two centuries are now, and will increasingly confront the church.

## Religious confrontation

Donald McGavran has given an accurate assessment of today's situation as Christianity meets other faiths:

It seems clear that in the next decades, Christians again, as in the first two centuries, will fight the long battle against syncretism and religious relativism. And for the same reason—namely, that they are again in intimate contact with multitudes of non-Christian *peers* who believe that many paths lead to the top of the mountain. The concept of the cosmic Christ, some maintain, is a way out of the arrogance which stains the Christian when he proclaims Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father. Other Christians believe that the concept of a 'cosmic Christ operating through many religions' sacrifices truth, for if there are, in fact, many revelations, then each voices approximation of the truth... As hundreds of Christian and non-

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*Dr Byang Kato was the first Chairman of the WEF Theological Commission, appointed in 1975 but serving only a few months before his accidental death later that year. Born in Nigeria in 1936, he was converted and after initial training at a local Bible college and service as a youth worker, counsellor and teacher, studied at London Bible College (BD) and Dallas Theological Seminary (STM, ThD). He served as General Secretary of Evangelical Churches of West Africa and of The Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM—now AEA). He was also Vice-President of the WEF. This article is presented as a tribute to Dr Kato's commitment, vision and faith as part of our 30th Anniversary project. It is reprinted from chapter 13 of his book, Theological Pitfalls in Africa (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975) with the permission of the publishers (Private Bag 28963, Nairobi 00200, Kenya). Other contributions from Dr Kato were published in our first issue, October 1977 and in Vol 4 No 1 (April 1980).*

Christian denominations spring into being across Africa, Asia, and other lands of earth, some will inevitably hold Biblical and others syncretistic views, of the Person of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The religious challenge of the second century is reasserting itself today. Religions ranging from Greek individual gods to the emperor worship of the Roman world were the order of the day. Whether it was *numen Augusti* (emperor worship) of Rome, the Serapis, derived from Egypt, or the Atargatis of Syria, or even Mithraism of Parthia, religious confrontation was awaiting Christianity. The challenge of syncretistic universalism was to be the task before the apologists.

A similar situation prevails in today's Africa. The defunct gods of African traditional religions are now rearing their heads. A Caius Caligula or Marcus Aurelius (emperors who posed as gods) will sooner or later call for their resuscitation. There are indications that African Christians may even be called upon to pour libation before a political leader instead of serving the unique Lord Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, many Christians in Chad have already laid down their lives to defend the uniqueness of Christ. Persecution is likely to increase.

But the devil has many other avenues for fighting against Christ and his church and he knows where best to succeed. Christo-paganism appears to be the area of attack within the next generations. The battle has started. The unique claims of Christ are

regarded as eccentricities. The relativity philosophy is seeking to make the Scriptures only one of many revelations rather than a special revelation. Christianity is not repudiated but is given the largest room in the camp of religions. It is claimed that the difference lies not in kind but in qualitative teachings. 'Thus saith the Lord' as a propositional revelation is reduced to merely a segment of general revelation or a fulfilment of other revelations. By this process it cannot dislodge other revelations but only improve upon them. That being the case, salvation is no monopoly of Christianity. It is just as possible to be saved through other religions as it is through Christianity though the latter may bring salvation faster. Such is the kind of thought prevailing today. These are theological pitfalls that only a discerning, Spirit-filled Bible-believer can see and refute.

### Cultural complexities.

Besides the religious confrontation, there is the cultural challenge that faces Christianity. Christianity was launched within the matrix of Greco-Roman culture. If the Judaistic background provided the revelation, the Greek and Roman cultures were the means of expressing and spreading the revelation. 'But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law' (Gal. 4:4). The fullness of time means more than *pax Romana* (peace in the Roman Empire), or Greek intelligentsia. It includes the total cultural milieu of the Mediterranean world where 'Africans, Teutons, Greeks, Jews, Parthians, and Phrygians mingled in the provinces and cities and

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1 Donald McGavran, ed., *Eve of the Storm* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1972), p. 17.

shared their national heritages with the Latin people.<sup>2</sup> Christianity was soon to unravel its riches to meet the longings of all these peoples. The test for Christianity, however, was going to be whether it would survive as a unique faith, as the only answer to the human dilemma. Would it baptize cultures or would it be polarized and enmeshed by the multitudes of cultures it would invade?

This is where the battle rages the fiercest in Africa. The constant cry one hears is that 'missionaries have destroyed our culture'. The accusation is made in spite of the fact that some of the articles destroyed were charms or objects of idol worship. It is often forgotten that the twentieth century convert is not the first Christian to burn up the bridges linking him with his past life of idol worship. The first converts in Ephesus went to the point of literally burning their books of magic arts for the sake of Christ, thus breaking with their culture (Acts 19:18-20). Not all the so-called African culture is *de facto* culture. So much in the guise of culture is actually idolatry.

It is extremely difficult to differentiate religion from culture; nevertheless, a careful discernment is imperative. Idowu's observation is worth careful consideration. 'A fair attempt at differentiation may be that while culture covers the whole of a people's scheme of life, religion gives direction and complexion to the scheme.'<sup>3</sup> If religion is

what gives direction to life, Christianity must necessarily change the lifestyle or culture of the African. Where such a differentiation is not possible, two alternatives are called for. Either the culture is abandoned or Christianity is compromised. To be more concrete, Stonehenge in England may be used as an example. The shrine was used by the cults for the worship of Druidism. Human beings were offered in pre-Roman days. When the primitive practice was outlawed, the shrine was left for cultural reasons. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a veneration of the shrine was revived. Today, spirit worshippers from the United States spend thousands of dollars on pilgrimages to the pagan shrine in England. They go not for admiration but spiritual adoration. The British Department of Antiquities may be making money and the cultural heritage of the British may be boosted, but what of the rivalry of loyalties between Jesus Christ and Stonehenge?

Applying the same analogy to the African situation, is it worth preserving the 'juju' if the converted Christian will be tempted to go back to 'Egypt' or 'the house of Laban'? Where lies the unique claim of Christ which is supposed to supersede even kin relationships (Mt. 12:46-50)? Should national pride or cultural heritage come before Christ? New Testament Christianity has a strong negative answer to that. 'I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ' (Phil. 3:8).

The matter of either/or affects only the questionable instruments of reli-

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2 Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), p. 67.

3 E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1973), p. 5.

gio-cultural heritage. Culture as such can be baptized by Christianity. But once it is done the other way around; compromise has set in. Syncretism will be the end result and the unique salvation of Christ will be made non-effective.

One common error which also may be cited is the lumping together of some fundamental biblical principles with the western culture and repudiating both. The error begins with some early western missionaries who identified the kingdom of God with western civilization. This naive concept is rejected today. On the other hand, there is a call for a new type of African Christianity illustrated in the so-called African theology. To adhere to the inerrant, inspired Word of God as the only *special* source of Christianity is contended.

It is often forgotten that the Apostolic Creed, on which most western church creeds are based, was composed by Europeans, Asians, and Africans. Athanasius, the great architect of the earliest Christian creed and defender of Orthodoxy, arose out of Africa. Other theologians of Africa, Anus and Origen, of course, were not condoned in their false views. Inevitably, many cultural tendencies were passed on to the converts by the western missionary.

Not only was Christ brought to Africa for shelter (Mt. 2), but an African was made to carry the cross for Christ (Mt. 27:32). Monica, the mother of St. Augustine of Hippo, was a Tuareg from Africa. Her terrific influence on Augustine was evident in the latter's theology. Because Africa has made a great contribution to the Europeans, there is no historical basis for

assigning Christianity to the West. As a matter of fact, it was Asians and Africans who organized the first mission board (Acts 13:1-3).

What has been said of African culture, can be said of the western culture. The cultural trends imported with the gospel do not have to be rejected as long as they do not imprison the gospel. Why insist on worshipping in a round building if Africans have begun to build their own homes in the square pattern as the churches built by the missionary? If the organ is already there, why not supplement the organ with drums and other locally made instruments? Africa stands to gain by becoming more creative [rather] than by expending energy on cultural demythologization. It is childish to water down or compromise the gospel in order to impress the world with African contribution. The Spirit-filled believer bathed in the study of God's word has a great contribution to make to the universal Church of Christ.

### Political Challenge

Christian martyrs in the second century stood by the mandate of their Founder and Saviour, Lord Christ. They were prepared to render to Caesar his own dues, realizing that he was the minister of God for executing justice here on earth (Mt. 17:27; 22:15-22; Rom. 13:1-7). But when the powers that be overstepped the boundary, the response was, 'We must obey God rather than man' (Acts 5:29). With such an affirmation Polycarp and Pothinus, among others, marched triumphantly to their execution. Salvation to them was not political liberation but eternal redemption from sin. It

might even call for loss of property and/or life; they were prepared to serve their Lord in life or in death (Philp. 1:20-24).

It is gratifying to note that within a few years from now Africa will be entirely free from colonial domination. A Christian should be the most loyal citizen of his country because he is aware of the fact that God has ordained even a dictatorial type of Neronian rule. Moreover, as a citizen of two dominions, he knows what it means to submit to the higher power. But his belief in the absolute authority of the Word of God also forces him to acknowledge the equality of all men. That being the case, the awareness of the existence of other nations becomes imperative. Blind nationalism of a Nazi type should have no place among Christians.

The tendency to identify African culture and religions with political ethos seems to be arising. A rejection of non-Christian beliefs is sometimes taken to mean a rejection of one's own heritage. Adherence to biblical principles is taken for lack of patriotism. It is hoped that no African ruler or politician will think that the evangelical Christian is being unpatriotic when he rejects a religio-cultural practice that contradicts the Christian belief. The persecution of Christians in Chad is very deplorable. The Christians there are not being disloyal to the civil authority. They are only fulfilling their obligation to Jesus Christ in rejecting idol worship. Bible-believing Christians in Chad and elsewhere should be, and in many cases are, the most patriotic. We hope the civil authorities in Africa will take note of this appeal. The evangelical rejection of liberal ecu-

menism should not be taken for rejection of unity either. That evangelicals are also interested in unity is demonstrated in the organization of evangelical fellowships in many African countries. The continent-wide Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar is a further evidence that evangelicals are interested in unity. Rejection of liberal ecumenism is based purely on doctrinal matters. The deviation from biblical teaching so evident in world ecumenism presents a threat to the survival of orthodox Christianity.

The evangelical also rejects veneration of African traditional religions. This is not due to lack of patriotism. It is only to safeguard the unique gospel of Christ, which alone provides the way of salvation. African culture as such is not all bad. But like any other culture it is tainted with sin. It needs to be redeemed. The redemption is a surgical process which hurts. Practices incompatible with the Bible will have to give way. This is not a lack of respect for one's culture. The good part of African culture which meets the biblical standard will be preserved and promoted. Christians encourage the use of local languages through Bible translation. True respect for individuals is the Christian stance. The abuse of what Christianity stands for must not be taken for its norm. Cultural heritage compatible with Christianity can be baptized into Christian enrichment. The gospel content, of course, needs no addition or modification. It is because of this irreducible, immutable message, that Christianity has produced the third race comprising men and women from all races. What is said of Mediterranean cultures can be applicable universally. 'To each of these

three cultures the Christian church owes some of its characteristics, though its genius is not the product of any one of them.<sup>4</sup>

The test for loyalty and patriotism should not lie in ecumenical cooperation, nor in the area where the ruler has overstepped his humanly ordained position. In this area obedience to God and defence of the faith is the necessary prerogative of the Bible-believing Christian. The plea of the early apologists is the same plea by their spiritual descendants in twentieth century Africa:

For we call upon God for the safety of the Emperor, upon God the eternal, God the true, God the living, whose favour, beyond all others, the Emperor desires. ... Examine God's words, our scriptures, which we do not conceal, and which many accidents put into hands of those without the Church. Know from them that a superfluity of benevolence is enjoined on us, even so far as to pray God for our enemies and to entreat blessings for our persecutors.<sup>5</sup>

### Humanitarian considerations

Christians in the second century were ignorantly considered antisocial by outsiders who did not know what Christianity was all about. In his directives to Pliny, Trajan vaguely described the Christians in this vein: 'They constitute a very bad precedent,

and are also out of keeping with this age.'<sup>6</sup> In a similar manner the conservative evangelical can be misunderstood today. He is charged with preaching 'pie in the sky' religion. This is in spite of the numerous schools, hospitals, and clinics that have been operated for many years by evangelicals.

The Christian, walking in the steps of the Saviour, must follow the Lord's example. While it is true that Christ cured the sick and fed the hungry, he rhetorically asked the ephemeral adherents, 'For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?' (Mk. 8:36). Although man is a total personality, Christ did put the soul's salvation in reference to future life above earthly existence (Lk. 12:5). Social concerns have their place in the Christian mandate. But the serving of tables must be given second place (Acts 6:2, 4). Man's life does not consist of material possessions. Affluence in the western world has not necessarily promoted spiritual life. For Christians to make social concerns their primary task and neglect the effort to win souls for eternity amounts to fattening a calf for slaughter. This the Bible-believing Christians cannot afford to do.

Dehumanization is the socialist slogan commonly employed to ridicule the soul-salvation concerned believer. But is it not in the Bible that true humanization can be seen? A person without Christ has not attained the ideal status God meant him to have. Man was made in the image of God. The image has been defaced and the unbelievers are

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4 Tenney, *New Testament Times*, p. 77.

5 Henry Scowcroft Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 10.

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6 Bettenson, *Documents*, p. 6.



considered dead and estranged from the living God (Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:21). Humanization comes only when one becomes a Christian. From that moment of encounter with Christ, the hell-bound Christian becomes truly man as he is 'mystically' united with God-Man, even Jesus the Christ of God. This is the true humanization the Christian is commanded to proclaim (Jn. 20:21; Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:1-3). The Christian may feed all the hungry people in the world, and pay all the bills of liberation movements of the society. His primary task is not done. His primary task is preaching the gospel of soul salvation. He should mourn, 'It would be misery to me not to preach' (1 Cor. 9:16, New English Bible).

One final sentimental issue in Africa is the matter of the ancestors who died before they ever had the opportunity to hear the gospel. The solution ranges from those who affirm that they are in heaven because they were good or religious people to those who call for prayer by the living Christians with the hope there is still a chance for the dead. Aloysius Lugira strongly objects to any thought that his non-Christian, but good, religious grandparents, will be in hell.<sup>7</sup> Harry Sawyerr suggests, 'We would therefore, go on to suggest that the prayers of African Christians might in the providence of God lead to the salvation of their pagan ancestors.'<sup>8</sup> He further bases universal sal-

vation on God's omnipotence.<sup>9</sup> John Mbiti calls for *Sanctorum Communio* in the sense of direct communication between the living and the departed saints.<sup>10</sup> If this communication is possible and cherished by the Christian, it is not farfetched to suggest that one can also witness yet to one's unsaved ancestor. There is, however, no scriptural basis either for second chance repentance or for direct communication with the deceased.

On a humane basis alone, can one suggest the possibility of the unevangelized ancestor? By logical deduction some theologians have proposed salvation for such people on the basis of God's grace. J.N.D. Anderson places it on the basis of God's mercy.<sup>11</sup> According to Anderson, salvation is possible for those who have never heard. He pleads their cause as those in 'whose heart the God of all mercy had been working by his Spirit, who had come in some measure to realize his sin, and need for forgiveness, and who had been enabled, in the twilight as it were to throw himself on the mercy of God'. It should be noted that Anderson isolates certain ones whose heart the Lord might have touched somehow. Such persons, if there were any, would not be the ardent religious worshippers. Rather, they might be 'atheists' in regard to pagan worship, like Socrates. Such promptings should also be differ-

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<sup>7</sup> Aloysius Lugira, private interview, Kampala, Uganda, January 20, 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Towards a New Christian Encounter with Africa* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism*, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup> John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 148-49.

<sup>11</sup> J.N.D. Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 101, 102.

entiated from the claim of a direct special revelation. The latter is contained in the canonical Scriptures (Heb. 1:1; 2:3, 4). Anderson's position may be granted on the basis of deductive speculation. The more scriptural basis would rather be that if God had been dealing with any person apart from the gospel witness, he would provide the way for that would-be Christian to hear the gospel and accept it to be born again. The case of Cornelius is the precedent (Acts 10:35).

For the rest of the heathen who died before the advent of Christian evangelism, it is humanely wished that they found their place in eternal bliss. But the Word of God gives no warrant for such a view. Humanity does not live in neutrality. Since the original fall, the total race of Adam has been condemned to death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Salvation in the biblical sense is passing out of this death dungeon (Jn. 5:24) into the dimension of life. The members of the Adamic race are all stillborn (Rom. 5:12). Not one of them deserves to live. But the undeserving favour of God has made salvation possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of the second Adam is described as to only 'abound to many' (Rom. 5:15). Christ is universally available to all men everywhere at any time. This is how far biblical universalism goes. But its effectiveness applies *only to those who receive the offer*:

If it is certain that death reigned over everyone as the consequence of one man's fall, it is even more certain that one man, Jesus Christ, will cause everyone to reign in life who receives the free gift that he

does not deserve, of being made righteous (Rom. 5:17, Jerusalem Bible).

The biblical answer to the question concerning those who died before hearing the gospel seems to be that they go to hell. There is no clear basis for optimism in this case. No one deserves to be saved in any case. So the question of God's partiality does not arise. Humanely speaking, one would wish that all men will be saved. But there is no scriptural warrant for that position. God's omnipotence must be matched with his omniscience and judicious action. His grace and love must not overshadow his justice and holiness. The challenge for the Christian is to weep over the two and a half billion living souls without Christ. An implicit faith in God's Word and an absolute assurance in Jesus Christ as the only solution to the sin problem which is responsible for all human ills is the only bulwark and offensive weapon of the Christian.

### Safeguarding Biblical Christianity in Africa—A Ten Point Proposal

*One:* Adhere to the basic presuppositions of historic Christianity.

1. That God has revealed himself in general revelation, in creating man in his own image, through man's conscience, and through creation of the world as a whole (Rom. 1:18-23; 2:15-18).
2. That non-Christian religions prove man has a concept of God but they also show man's rebellion against God (Rom. 1:18-23).
3. That God has redemptively become

incarnate in Christ for the redemption of mankind, but only those who accept his offer of salvation can be saved (Rom. 5:17).

4. That the principle of continuity in the sense that God's image in man has not been obliterated, and general revelation, though it cannot be read correctly, is still a *de facto* revelation. But running parallel with this is the fact of discontinuity in the sense that God is now producing a new man in the formation of the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:15).
5. That the Bible alone is the final infallible rule of faith and practice. Its verdict cannot be challenged in any court of law since he is the final court of appeal. This propositional revelation is fully inspired, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and faithfully transmitted (2 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 10:35).

*Two:* Express Christianity in a truly African context, allowing it to judge the African culture and never allow the culture to take precedence over Christianity. To do otherwise would isolate African Christianity from historical Christianity, biblically based. This cannot be done by creating an 'African Theology' as understood by some African theologians today, but rather by:

1. Expressing theological concepts in terms of the African situation. The insights of western theologians over the years must be appreciated. But the squabbles of the West do not have to be the pattern for the younger churches. The final word has not yet been said in expressing Christianity. But the Bible content remains unchanged.

2. 'Scratching where it itches.' The African problems of polygamy, family structure, spirit world, liturgy, to mention a few, need to be tackled by evangelical African theologians and biblical answers presented.

*Three:* Concentrate effort in the training of men in the Scriptures, employing the original languages to facilitate their ability in exegeting the Word of God. In-depth knowledge rather than mere superficial mechanics in the ministry should be the primary concern.

*Four:* Carefully study African traditional religions as well as other religions but only secondarily to the inductive study of God's word. The New Testament writers and the early church evangelists did not consider it worthwhile to spend too much of their energy in the study of non-Christian religions. All non-Christians belong to one and the same group—unsaved. The sinful nature needs no study analysis as its networking is clearly manifested in daily life.

*Five:* Launch an aggressive programme of evangelism and missions to prevent a fall into the error of the doctrinal strifes of third-century Christianity in North Africa (at the expense of evangelism).

*Six:* Consolidate organizational structures based on doctrinal agreements. Fraternal relationship such as is being shaped by the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), is strongly urged. The gregarious nature of the African calls for a fellowship so much needed; yet it does not need to be an organic union, neither does it need to be a unity at any cost.

*Seven:* Carefully and accurately delineate and concisely express terms of theology as a necessary safeguard against syncretism and universalism.

*Eight:* Carefully present apologetics towards unbiblical systems that are creeping into the church. This calls for more leadership training.

*Nine:* Show concern in social action but bear in mind at all times that the primary goal of the church is the presentation of personal salvation. As individuals are converted, they become instruments of revolutionizing the society for good. The church is not a department of social welfare for the

government. It is a body of individuals called out to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.

*Ten:* Following the steps of the New Testament (Church, Christians in Africa should be prepared to say, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Philp. 1:21). Africa needs her Polycarps, Athanasiuses, and Martin Luthers, ready to contend for the faith at any cost. The Lord of the church' who has commanded Bible-believing Christians to 'contend earnestly for the faith' (Jude 3), has also said, 'Yes, I am coming quickly' (Rev. 22:20). May we give the reverberating response, 'Amen, Come Lord Jesus.'

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# Toward an Evangelical Political Philosophy

Ronald J. Sider

**KEYWORDS:** *Lordship of Christ, religious freedom, family, justice, poverty, power, economy, creation.*

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, evangelicals have had more political influence in the U.S. than at any time in this century. But we are not certain what to do with it. Unless we find out, we will squander an historic opportunity to nudge this society toward moral renewal and justice for all.

To be sure, there are many evangelical voices loudly promoting political agendas. But the voices are often confused, contradictory and superficial. Evangelicals lack anything remotely similar to Catholicism's papal encyclicals and episcopal pronouncements on social and political issues that have provided Roman Catholics with a careful, integrated foundational framework for approaching each concrete political decision. (This deficiency, as Mark

Noll points out, is one important aspect of the 'scandal of the evangelical mind'.<sup>1</sup>) On the other hand, when evangelicals have acted politically, we have usually jumped into the political fray without doing our theoretical, theological homework. That our confused, superficial activity has had little lasting impact should not surprise us.

If that is to change, we urgently need to develop a careful systematic political philosophy to guide and sustain our activism. That, of course, is a task requiring years, indeed decades of communal work. Here, I want briefly first to illustrate some problems that arise because we lack an evangelical political philosophy; second, to outline how I try to move from a biblical nor-

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

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mative framework and careful societal analysis to a political philosophy; and third, to point to a few ways to move forward.

Some may object to my assertion that we lack an evangelical political philosophy by pointing to the fact that Reformed, Lutheran, and to a lesser extent, Anabaptist evangelicals all have developed systematic reflection on politics. One thinks, for example, of the marvelous Kuyperian tradition of political philosophy that James Skillen articulates so well.<sup>2</sup>

Careful political reflection within each of these evangelical traditions is very helpful for our work. But I do not think it is adequate to guide evangelical political engagement today and tomorrow. Why? There are a large number of evangelicals in this country and in many countries around the world who represent a vast array of different theological and ecclesiastical traditions. The Pentecostals, Wesleyans, African-Americans—to name a few—are not about to fully embrace a Reformed political philosophy even though they are glad to learn from Abraham Kuyper. But all these evangelicals from a vast array of traditions have some common sense of identity as evangelicals and to some extent want to work together on many things, including politics, in spite of their theological differences. In order to do that effectively, they need to embrace at least a common set of principles for a political philosophy.

## Present Confusion

It is not hard to illustrate the way the absence of a foundational political philosophy leads evangelical political activists to rush off madly in all directions. (In the early years of Moral Majority, according to Ed Dobson, it was often ‘ready, fire, aim.’)

Take the area of moral decay. Virtually all Christians, and certainly all evangelicals, agree both that serious moral decay threatens this society and also that religious communities are the only place to look for that radical spiritual conversion that transforms persons and that such communities are the primary moral teachers of the virtues that decent societies require. Some evangelicals think the solution is a constitutional amendment to restore prayer in the schools. Others want constitutional, or at least legislative, action to guarantee equal benefits to adherents of all religious views. And other evangelicals think both of the previous proposals would violate the First Amendment and destroy both church and state.

Or consider evangelical pronouncements on the role of government. Sometimes, when attacking government programmes they dislike, evangelical voices adopt libertarian arguments that would preclude almost all government activity to promote economic justice (‘Helping the poor is a task for individuals and churches, not the government’). Then when the issues change to abortion, family, euthanasia, and pornography, the same people loudly demand vigorous government action. There might be a good case to be made for private programmes in the first case and legislation in the second. But if one uses argu-

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<sup>2</sup> For example, James W. Skillen, *Recharging the American Experiment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

ments in one area that run counter to one's agenda in another, one appears confused and superficial.

The absence of a consistent ethic of life leads to absurd inconsistency. Some evangelical political voices make the sanctity of human life (up to birth and just before death) the overriding issue and neglect the way poverty and smoking destroy millions. Other evangelicals point out that racism, poverty and environmental decay all kill and yet seem little concerned with millions of abortions each year.<sup>3</sup>

Some of our superficiality and confusion result from the fact that we have seldom taken the time to work out carefully the specific policy implications of biblical faith. Too often we just assume that traditional American values or the Republican (or, less often, the Democratic) Party's platform are right. Former Christian Coalition Director Ralph Reed, for example, says that when he became a committed Christian and started attending an evangelical church, 'my religious beliefs never changed my views on the [political] issues to any great degree because my political philosophy was already well developed'.<sup>4</sup> Without testing political agendas on the basis of biblical norms, Christians often uncritically endorse left-wing or (more often) right-wing ideological agendas.

I need not go on illustrating this basic point. Evangelical political impact today is weakened because our voices are confused, contradictory, and

superficial. We contradict each other. Our agendas are shaped more by secular ideologies than divine revelation. We have no systematic foundational framework for careful dialogue about our specific policy differences or even for successful repudiation of extremists. And, oh, how the secular media love to publicize the worst examples such as intolerant attacks on the civil rights of gay Americans or the murder of doctors who perform abortions.

Evangelicals urgently need some commonly agreed upon principles of a political philosophy. It would not solve all our political problems. But it would help.

## Methodology

Here I want to sketch the methodology I seek to use in approaching political questions.

### A. Jesus Is Lord

The centrepiece of all genuinely Christian politics is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that the Galilean champion of the poor and marginalized is the Creator of the galaxies, the Sovereign of the universe. Therefore all who believe in him seek to submit every realm of life—whether family, economics or politics—unconditionally to Christ the Lord.

Christians therefore reject the uncritical embrace of any and every secular ideology—whether right, left, 'Green', libertarian, or communitarian. The Christian's starting point must be the Word of God which is revealed partially in creation, more fully in the Bible, and most completely in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word become flesh.

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<sup>3</sup> See my *Completely Pro-Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> *Active Faith* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 23.

Founding political engagement on ideologies of left or right rather than Christ is fundamentally un-Christian.

## B. Four Components

Starting with the Lordship of Christ, however, does not instantly provide detailed political guidance on specific policy issues. Nor does citing specific biblical texts instantly solve complex political questions. Serious Christian political engagement must recognize the complexity and ambiguity of political decisions. Every political judgment rests finally on a normative framework on the one hand and careful study of society and the world on the other. It is helpful to distinguish four different, interrelated components of every political decision: 1) a normative framework; 2) a broad study of society and the world; 3) a political philosophy; and 4) detailed social analysis on specific issues.

1. *Normative Framework.* If one's political activity is to be genuinely Christian, then the guiding norms for one's politics must come from the core of one's faith. Since biblical faith teaches that some sense of the true and good is embedded in the human conscience, common wisdom (call it natural law if you like) can offer some guidance. Some Christians, especially Roman Catholics, believe that it is still possible to derive major input for one's normative framework from general revelation.<sup>5</sup> My own inclination is to think that since the Fall has deeply

clouded the understanding of God's law written on all hearts, general revelation by itself cannot be the primary source of the Christian's normative framework for political engagement. For clarity, therefore, I turn to the revealed truth of the Scriptures.

Discovering relevant biblical norms for specific political issues is not, however, a matter of simple proof-texting. The Bible is full of commands, stories, proverbs—in short, a wide variety of materials written over many centuries. To develop a fully biblical perspective on political issues, we need two things: a) a biblical view of the world and persons (I call this the biblical story); b) an understanding of biblical teaching related to many concrete issues—for example, the family or economic justice (I call these biblical paradigms). To develop a normative biblical framework, we must in principle examine all relevant biblical passages, understand each text according to proper principles of exegesis, and then formulate a comprehensive summary of all relevant canonical material. The most sweeping comprehensive summary would deal with the biblical story. The other comprehensive summaries (or biblical paradigms) would cover things such as the poor, the family, work, justice, the dignity of persons, etc.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, and J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997).

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<sup>6</sup> See for example my 'Toward a Biblical Perspective on Equality', *Interpretation* (April-June, 1989), pp. 156-69, where I work toward a biblical paradigm on 'economic equality'. It is obvious that developing a canonical biblical paradigm on any issue involves many different steps: detailed exegesis of all relevant biblical passages, a hermeneutical understanding of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, etc. Disagreement can arise at any point.



2. *Broad Study of Society and the World.* By itself, however, the biblical framework is insufficient. Nothing in the Bible talks explicitly about the pros and cons of a market economy or multinational corporations or the impact of five billion people on the natural environment around them.

In addition to a normative framework, we need a broad, comprehensive study of our world. That study takes many forms. It includes reflection on the historical development of society, the economy, political systems, etc. (As finite, historical beings, we come to see some things more clearly as history unfolds.) It also includes, in principle, detailed, comprehensive socio-economic, political analysis of everything relevant to any particular political question.

This careful study becomes central at two stages of analysis. One's analysis of the history of economics, politics, etc., helps to shape one's political philosophy (see below). For example, as the Marxist experiment worked itself out in the course of the twentieth century, it became more and more clear not only that Marxist philosophy contradicted the biblical view of persons but also that in practice Marxism led to economic inefficiency and political totalitarianism. Similarly, it is becoming increasingly clear that substantial injustice accompanies the functioning of today's market economies. Detailed social analysis of everything relevant to a particular politician or piece of legislation is also crucial (see below).

3. *Political Philosophy.* In addition to a biblical framework and a broad study of society and the world, Christians engaged in politics also need a political philosophy. It is simply

impossible, every time one wants to make a political decision, to spend days (actually years) reviewing the mountains of relevant biblical material and complex studies of society. We need a framework, a road map, a handy guide—in short, a political philosophy. But we dare not adopt our political philosophy uncritically from some non-Christian source. It must emerge from our normative biblical framework and painstaking, extensive socio-economic, political analysis.

4. *Detailed Social Analysis on Specific Issues.* Even after a Christian has a political philosophy shaped by both a normative biblical framework and careful study of society and the world, one still needs to do painstaking, detailed social analysis on everything relevant to a particular legislative proposal or a specific election. Two people could, in principle, have identical normative frameworks, identical historical analyses of modern society and identical political philosophies and still disagree on whether or not, for example, to raise the minimum wage. Why? Because they rely on different economic analyses of the actual effects of raising the minimum wage. The only way to make progress on settling such a disagreement is to go back together and do further detailed economic analysis. Careful detailed social analysis of all the available information relevant to any specific political judgment is the fourth essential ingredient of any responsible Christian political engagement.

### C. Other Introductory Points

1. *Complexity and Political Necessity.* The method just described is com-

plex—in fact, far more complex than I have been able to suggest here. Every one of the four steps intersects with all the others. Our reading of history shapes the questions we put to the Bible as we seek to develop a normative framework. That framework in turn shapes everything else.

In real life, we cannot wait to make political decisions until we have completed all the study that is desirable. We must make decisions based on our best current understanding and then keep open to further insight and information.

2. *Cooperation and Humility.* The kind of study required for faithful Christian political engagement is far too complex for any one individual. We need communal activity, teams of scholars and activists, and organizations and networks working together to develop a common vision and agenda. For successful Christian political engagement, then, we need groups of Christians who can integrate a normative biblical framework, study of society and world, a political philosophy (derived from the former two ingredients) and detailed social analysis as they all approach every major issue of contemporary political life. That means working out concrete public policy proposals on everything from welfare reform to family policy to peace-making in Bosnia.

Knowing the complexity of such political judgements and the possibility of mistakes at every step, we must always hold our specific political conclusions with great humility and tentativeness. But we should dare to advocate boldly for specific policies because we have sought to ground our specific conclusions in a biblical framework

and responsible social analysis even as we invite friend and foe alike to help us improve our analysis of both the Scriptures and society at every point.

3. *Resolving Disagreements.* It would help immensely to reduce political disagreements among Christians if we would be more precise about where we disagree. It is unhelpful to confuse a disagreement over the proper interpretation of Matthew 25 with lack of compassion for the poor or disagreement over the relative merits of more or less government intervention in market economies. To the extent that we can be precise about exactly where we disagree, we can make more progress in overcoming our differences.<sup>7</sup>

4. *Common Language.* In a pluralistic society one additional crucial step is essential. Many citizens have no interest at all in political proposals advocated on the basis of a biblical framework. Therefore we must develop a common language grounded in the common good of all citizens when we take our specific proposals into the public realm. We must try to develop reasons for our policies that are intelligible and convincing to all people, not just Christians.

5. *The Starting Point: The Christian Community.* It is absolutely crucial, however, that Christians first articulate and develop their political agenda and concrete proposals within the Christian community on the basis of biblical norms. If we do not, we will end up adopting secular norms and values and their corresponding political ide-

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<sup>7</sup> See my further comments on this in my 'A Plea for More Radical Conservatives and More Conserving Radicals,' *Transformation* (January-March, 1987), pp. 11-16.

ologies. The result will be a compromised, often fundamentally un-Christian, political engagement.

That is exactly what has happened with many Christians in politics. Too many Christians have uncritically adopted left-wing or right-wing politics. The result has been a sub-Christian religious right that correctly championed the family and the sanctity of human life, but neglected economic justice for the poor, uncritically endorsed American nationalism, ignored environmental concern for God's creation, and neglected to struggle against racism. Equally sub-Christian has been a religious left that rightly defended justice, peace and the integrity of creation but largely forgot about the importance of the family and sexual integrity, uncritically endorsed Marxism, the sexual revolution, and almost everything championed under the banner of gay rights, overlooked the fact that freedom is as important as justice, and failed to defend the most vulnerable of all, the unborn and the very old.

This essay is written first of all for the Christian community. Therefore, it first outlines a normative biblical framework, and then sketches a political philosophy. Little attention is given to developing the common language for advocating these policies in the larger pluralistic society—although that is also an essential task.

## Normative Biblical Framework

### A. The Biblical Story.

The biblical story provides an essential framework for Christian political

thought. The entire created order is good and precious because it comes from the hand of a loving God. Persons created in the image of God are called to a servant-like stewardship of the rest of the Creator's handiwork. Tragically, humanity rebelled against God and the result is selfish persons, twisted social relationships and institutions and even a groaning, disordered creation. Unwilling to forsake fallen humanity, however, the Creator began a long historical process of salvation to restore a right relationship among God, persons, and the creation around them. At the centre of that redeeming grace is Jesus Christ, Nazarene Carpenter and Eternal Word, who models perfect humanity, atones for our sins, and rises from the dead to break the power of evil. History is moving toward the Risen Lord's return when all things will be restored to wholeness.<sup>8</sup> This biblical story provides a foundation for thinking about the nature, dignity, and destiny of persons, the status of the non-human world, the importance of the historical process, and the ultimate meaning of all things.

From this biblical story as well as all the other relevant biblical material, we can develop comprehensive biblical summaries or paradigms of specific topics that are especially relevant to politics. The following are some of the most important.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to argue for universalism (i.e., the salvation of every person).

<sup>9</sup> Note: In principle one would need to examine every relevant biblical passage using appropriate exegetical tools, understand the trajectory of biblical revelation on that issue, and then formulate a comprehensive canoni-

## B. Biblical Paradigms.

1. *The Special Dignity and Sanctity of Every Human Being* Every person—and only human beings—is made in the image of God, called to stewardship of the non-human creation, made to find fulfilment only when rightly related to God, neighbour, the earth, and self, summoned to respond in freedom to God's invitation of salvation, and invited to live forever in the presence of God.

We must act on the belief that from the moment of conception, we are dealing with human life. No extended biblical passage explicitly teaches that; none denies it. A number of texts use words for the unborn that are normally applied to those who have been born. For nineteen centuries, the Christian church has been overwhelmingly opposed to abortion. Modern science now demonstrates with astounding detail that from the moment of conception, a genetically distinct human being with a continuous biological development exists. If one is uncertain whether this developing foetus is a human being, one should adopt this as a working assumption. To do otherwise would be like shooting blindly into a darkened theatre with the justification that we cannot know whether we

will hit empty seats or murder innocent persons. The directly intended taking of innocent human life—whether in abortion or euthanasia—is wrong.

2. *Freedom of Belief.* Throughout biblical history, God gives persons enormous freedom to respond in obedience or rebellion, unbelief or faith to God. Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares shows that God chooses to allow this freedom to persons until the final judgement. Therefore, religious freedom is an essential element of a good society.

3. *The Family.* Strong, stable families (persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption) are essential for a good society. Keeping marriage vows, accepting God's design that sexual intercourse be reserved for a man and a woman united in life-long marriage covenant, and valuing singles in the extended family are all important aspects of strengthening the family.

4. *Justice.* The two key Hebrew words for justice (*mishpat* and *sedaqah*) are used both to call for just courts and just economic arrangements.

Fair courts require honest witnesses and impartial justice which is not biased toward rich or poor. Fair economic arrangements<sup>10</sup> require—as the Old Testament treatment of the land (the basic capital in an agricultural society) shows—an arrangement

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cal paradigm in each specific area. To develop each such paradigm requires a lifetime of exacting scholarship. Here I can only sketch in the briefest fashion what I believe would be the result of that kind of task. Undoubtedly, of course, my understanding is only partial. Wherever better exegesis and more faithful integration of all canonical material requires modification of the following brief parts, I eagerly agree to change them.

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<sup>10</sup> See an extended treatment of this issue in Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider, 'Economic Justice: A Biblical Paradigm', in David P. Gushee, ed., *Towards a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), Chapter 1.

where all families and persons have access to the productive resources needed to earn a decent living and be dignified participating members of society. Sometimes, of course, wrong personal choices rightly result in the loss of these productive resources for a time, but God does not want that to continue forever. Frequently, too, according to the Bible, powerful oppressive people seize these resources from the poorest. Justice requires restoration of equitable arrangements where all have the opportunity to work and thus obtain a generous portion of the necessities of life. In addition, those who are unable to work and provide for themselves must be cared for by their family and the larger community.

5. *A Special Concern for the Poor.* Hundreds of biblical texts declare God's special concern for the poor and demand that God's people imitate God's concern. One crucial measure of how obedient people judge societies and policies is by what they do to the poorest, weakest and most marginalized. This special concern to strengthen the poorest is not a bias toward the poor but rather a concern for equal justice for everyone.

6. *Work.* Work is essential to the dignity of human beings who are called to be co-shapers of history with God. Every able person has the responsibility to work and people have the obligation to structure society so that every person can work in a way that respects human dignity and earns a decent living.

7. *Peacemaking.* Christians look forward to the time when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war anymore'. Until the Lord returns, unfortunately, per-

sons persistently resort to wars and rumours of wars. Many Christians believe they should, as the lesser of two evils, engage in just wars for the sake of preserving some order and peace. Other Christians believe that killing is always contrary to the teaching of Christ and that he calls us to overcome our enemies with suffering love rather than the sword. But all agree that Jesus' words 'Blessed are the peacemakers' are urgent in our time.

8. *Individuality and Community.* Biblical faith holds together both the inestimable value of each person and each person's freedom to shape their own life and also the fact that persons are made for community and achieve wholeness only in right relationship with others in the family and the larger society.

9. *Rulers.* God ordains rulers both to restrain evil and promote good. In biblical thought, the justice which God calls the king to do (Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14) includes nurturing both fair courts and economic systems that strengthen the poor.

God stands far above every political ruler. No politician or government has ultimate authority. The story of Naboth's vineyard demonstrates the rights of individual families over against the king. When the king defied God's law, the prophet challenged and condemned them. Everyone and everything, including rulers and government, have only a limited authority which is subordinate to the Divine Sovereign.

## Political Philosophy

The Bible does not prescribe any par-

ticular political philosophy. Political philosophies emerge as people in community over a period of time integrate a normative framework and careful study and reflection on historical experience. As long as we understand our political philosophy as a useful guide (to be improved by further normative reflection and social analysis) rather than an unchanging dogma, it can be a helpful tool for navigating complex political decisions.

The following components of a political philosophy are, I hope, consistent with biblical revelation and rigorous social analysis.

### A. Democratization and Decentralization of Power

There is both a positive and a negative reason for decentralizing all forms of power. Each person is called to exercise her creation mandate and become a co-worker with God in shaping history. If a small elite makes most decisions, the majority cannot exercise their God-given mandate. Negatively, as Lord Acton pointed out, power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. Sinful people in a fallen world will almost always use unchecked centralized power to benefit themselves unfairly and oppress others. Therefore to avoid totalitarianism and injustice, power must be decentralized.

The principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching rightly stresses that other things being equal, activity should be undertaken by a lower level of government or by a smaller societal institution rather than a higher. At the same time, it must be clearly recognized that some things can only be

done (or at least done well) in a more centralized way. Careful analysis is needed in each situation.

### B. Democracy

A concern for human rights, individual freedom, and the decentralization of power all lead to a democratic political order. When freedom of speech, secret voting and universal suffrage exist, people—at least in theory—have the political power to shape society for the benefit of the majority. Separating legislative, administrative and judicial functions and balancing national, state and local governmental realms also decentralize power.

### C. Non-Governmental Institutions

A large group of institutions intermediate between the individual and government decentralize power and provide smaller contexts for human communities to flourish. These include the family, the church, the media, the schools, the economy, and a host of smaller voluntary associations. These intermediate centres of power provide a check on governmental power and thus are a significant foundation of freedom.

### D. Private Ownership and a Market Economy

The history of the twentieth century has shown clearly that when the state owns and controls most of the economy, economic and political power is so centralized that totalitarianism is almost guaranteed. Genuinely decentralized private ownership, on the other hand, nurtures free individuals

and serves as a counter balance to political power. Determining prices and production via supply and demand has also proven to be far more efficient than central planning.

Huge privately-owned corporations, of course, can also become centres of enormous economic power. When the same corporations own the media and provide most of the funding for election campaigns, economic and political power is again dangerously centralized.

A concern for justice and freedom demands a continuing vigilance against all forms of centralized economic power and constant effort to strengthen smaller centres of economic life including family-owned farms and businesses, cooperatives, and widespread home ownership.

### E. Religious Freedom and Church/State Relations.

In the United States, the first amendment's prohibition against the government's establishing any official religion or preventing its free exercise is a crucial aspect of a society that truly respects human dignity and individual freedom. Religious freedom is a gift from God, not the state. Government can only acknowledge and defend it.

Avoiding established religion, however, does not mean that religious expression is banished to the private sphere. Everyone, including religious people, should be free to develop and state the implications of their deepest convictions for public policy. Faith-based institutions have a long and venerable history of engagement in education, health care, and social welfare. When government adopts programmes

to enable the voluntary sector to serve the public good in these areas, there should be no discrimination in eligibility on account of religion, nor should there be exclusionary criteria that force these providers to engage in self-censorship or to otherwise abandon their religious character.

### F. Human Rights

The right to life and freedom are inalienable because they come from God, not government. Government should recognize and protect freedom of religion, speech, and political activity.

### G. Family

Government rightly recognizes and favours the family (those related by blood, marriage and adoption) and especially the nuclear family (wife, husband and children) with its larger circle of extended family (grandparents, etc.) as an essential element in a stable society. The family, not government, has the primary responsibility for raising children. Religious institutions can do far more than government to strengthen the family, but government should do what it can. That includes discouraging (although not preventing) divorce and sexual promiscuity and recognizing that children are best served when they live with both of their parents. It also includes not broadening the definition of marriage to include gay partners and not defining family as any two or more people cohabiting. Government rightly offers tax and other benefits that favour marriage rather than cohabitation or divorce.

## H. Care for Creation and a Sustainable Planet

Responsible care for creation flows from a biblical worldview. We face a long-term environmental crisis. Utilitarian attitudes must be balanced by a recognition of the intrinsic worth of all God's creation and human responsibility to act as God's faithful stewards. Human beings have far more worth than plants or animals. But very seldom, if ever, do we have to choose between taking a human life and destroying an endangered species. Usually it is a choice between growing affluence and obliterating the handiwork of the Creator.

We must aim to develop sustainable economic practices that reduce the stress on natural systems and make it possible for us to pass on a lovely, sustainable planet to our descendants. The needs of the poor and most vulnerable must be central in all environmental decisions; the rich must pay the major cost of reducing environmental damage. We must encourage alternative sources of energy that decrease our reliance on non-renewal sources. We must balance the needs of workers and the environment.

## I. The Role of Government

Government should both restrain evil and promote the common good. Nurturing an economic order where everyone, especially the poorest, has the resources to earn a decent living is a central concern of good government. Government is responsible for providing the legal and social framework in which the other institutions in society can flourish. Government should carefully strengthen rather than replace

society's intermediate institutions when they experience trouble.

What should be legislated and what not? Why should there be laws against something like racial discrimination in the sale of housing and not against an act of adultery? The following considerations are relevant: 1) Individuals should normally be free to harm themselves (e.g., get drunk regularly at home) but not be free to harm others (drive while drunk); 2) laws must be enforceable in a way that does not undermine other important values (e.g., even if it were good in spite of the first principle, to have a criminal penalty for adultery, it would be impossible to enforce such a law without the kind of police state that would destroy freedom); 3) laws have a teaching function—to some extent people think (wrongly) that what is legal is moral.

## J. Work and Workers

Since work is essential to human dignity, every able-bodied person should have the opportunity to work at a job that pays a living wage that can support a family. An unemployment rate that denies the dignity of work to people other than those properly in transition from one job to another is immoral and socially destructive. Conversely, people who can work have an obligation to do so in order to earn their living. Welfare policies should assist those who cannot care for themselves but dare not discourage work and responsibility.

Workers have a right to safe working conditions, a living wage and reasonable job security. The legal right of workers to organize unions counterbalances corporate economic power,



encourages justice, and nurtures dignity and self-respect.

### K. The Priority of the Poor

Poverty has many causes. Those who are poor because they are unable to provide for themselves should be given a decent living by their family and/or other non-governmental groups where possible and the government where necessary. Those who are poor because of personal irresponsibility should suffer appropriate consequences. Those, however, who are poor—whether through accident of birth, or the neglect or oppression of others—because they lack the education and the capital to be productive, self-sufficient members of society should be empowered by both private institutions and government.

Justice at least demands that every person has equal opportunity to acquire the basic capital (whether land, money or education) that will enable that person to earn a decent living and be a dignified participating member of society. Strengthening the poor by providing such opportunity should be a central concern of government. Every significant governmental decision should be judged by its impact on the poorest.

### L. A Consistent Ethic of Life

The first and most basic human right is the inviolable right to life of every human being. The first and most basic responsibility of civil law is to ensure that this right is recognized and protected.

Abortion involves the direct, intentional and violent taking of human life.

No law which legitimizes the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion can be just. Therefore, we must work for the legal protection of the unborn, and oppose all public funding of abortions.

At the same time, we must develop a wide range of alternatives to abortion—both to reduce the evil of abortion and also in recognition that two people are directly involved, not just one. A caring society will surround women with unwanted pregnancies with love and concrete support including financial assistance and better adoption alternatives.

Euthanasia—the direct killing of the aged and infirm either with or without their consent—is wrong. That does not mean that it is immoral to refuse or withhold extraordinary medical treatment when death is imminent or inevitable. But we dare not blur the distinction between on the one hand *allowing* a person to die and on the other *killing* a person.

Concern for a consistent ethic of life does not end with abortion and euthanasia. Life does not begin at conception and end at birth. Tens of millions of people die unnecessarily each year of starvation and malnutrition. Tobacco kills millions of people prematurely each year. Capital punishment kills human beings. We should seek to protect the sanctity of human life wherever it is threatened and violated.

That is not to deny a significant moral difference between abortion and death from lung cancer caused by smoking. The direct, intentional taking of innocent human life in abortion, euthanasia, and genocide is morally more grave than the indirect, unintentional taking of human life in starva-

tion or death from smoking. But all are wrong and all reflect disregard for the inestimable value of human life. Respect for human life is a seamless garment. A consistent ethic of life opposes and seeks to reduce not only abortion and euthanasia but also capital punishment, starvation and cigarette-induced cancer.

### M. Peacemaking

Those who threaten society, from within or without, must be restrained. Historically, that has usually been done through lethal force as a last resort. Historically, too, it is true both that vast numbers of people have been killed and also that a variety of non-violent methods of conflict resolution have successfully replaced lethal force. The courts, for example, replaced duelling. In the twentieth century, Gandhi, King and a host of others successfully used non-violent techniques to end oppression and seek justice.

Christians today disagree over the extent to which non-violent models of conflict resolution can successfully replace most or all use of lethal force. But all agree that the search for non-violent alternatives must be greatly strengthened. Wherever possible, non-violence must replace lethal force.

## Towards an Evangelical Political Philosophy

I have tried to sketch, very briefly, my own developing understanding of some of the principles for an evangelical political philosophy. But I am not content simply to have individual thinkers work on this in their academic and pro-

fessional colloquia!

I think evangelical leaders in this country need to come together and try to hammer out a declaration—let's call it 'Principles for an Evangelical Political Philosophy'—that could be endorsed across a broad range of evangelical traditions. I think the same needs to happen in every country where substantial numbers of evangelicals exist and are engaged in politics. It also needs to happen at a global level so that people from other countries can help us overcome our one-sidedness and blind spots.

How might we arrive at such a declaration that would help us? It would be foolish to try to sketch a detailed process for developing a document on principles for an evangelical political philosophy widely embraced by a broad cross section of evangelicals in the United States. The venture is enormously difficult. Success can come only at the end of a lengthy journey that will inevitably involve detours and land mines. Pilgrims on the journey will need to improvise at each stage.

However, three things, at least, seem clear to me. The process must include a wide range of evangelical voices; the goal should be limited; and the engagement of major evangelical gatekeepers is indispensable.

If the result is to be of any lasting significance, then we must involve a *wide range of evangelical voices*. I could sit down today and sketch an evangelical political philosophy that many members of Evangelicals for Social Action would largely endorse. Gary Bauer could do the same for Family Research Council. What would help, if it could be developed, is a broad framework that both Gary and I, plus a wide

cross section of people who identify as evangelicals, could embrace as a guide for our concrete political engagement.

Second, our goal must be *limited*. Not even this raving optimist supposes that we could agree on a detailed, full-blown evangelical political philosophy across the range of views that exist within the evangelical community. For example, we do disagree, however incoherently, about the proper role of government. Therefore a comprehensive, common statement on the role of government would be impossible. But would it not help if a broad range of evangelical voices could together reject both libertarianism and socialism and then together define some general criteria for when and how government should and should not intervene in market economies?

The same would be true in a variety of areas. It would be helpful if we could agree together on the basic parameters of a consistent pro-life position, on how to balance the free exercise and non-establishment clauses of the First Amendment, and so on. If from the beginning we agree that our goal is a limited, incomplete evangelical political philosophy that different groups can develop further in divergent ways, we might at least be able to state a basic framework that would help us overcome some of our naiveté, confusion, and disagreement.

At first glance, our task appears to be nearly impossible. Evangelicals do not have a pope or bishops who can, with some authority, articulate an evangelical political philosophy. Instead, we have a confused Babel of more or less influential *gatekeepers* whose words are respected within their larger or smaller constituencies.

Thus, the project will succeed only if leaders representing this broad spectrum within the evangelical community endorse the process and sign the resulting document.

I have no illusions that most evangelical political disagreement would disappear even if multiple miracles produced a widely accepted set of principles for an evangelical political philosophy. Finite sinners that we are, we would still argue about its implications for specific public policy proposals. A common framework, however, would help in several ways.

*First*, agreement on a basic framework would help us identify more common ground on specific issues, which could help us have a greater impact.

*Second*, only if we develop a common vision that can sustain evangelical political engagement over the long haul will we produce any lasting political change.

*Third*, if evangelical Protestants (I include African-Americans and theologically orthodox Christians in the older Protestant denominations) developed even the beginnings of a common political philosophy, we would be in a better position to cooperate with Catholics in shaping public life. Few potential political developments are more important. If evangelicals and Catholics learn how to cooperate, this majority could significantly reshape American politics.

That brings me to my last point. I think one of the most urgent political tasks for American Christians is for white evangelicals, Catholics, African-American and Latino Christians to discover how to work together politically around a pro-life *and* pro-poor, pro-family *and* pro-racial justice agenda. A well

organized coalition of those groups could significantly reshape our public life for the better.

I see the beginnings of this kind of new coalition in several quarters. From the liberal side, the Call to Renewal and from the conservative side the signers of 'We Hold These Truths' have formally embraced this four-part agenda. In practice, of course, conservatives still tend to major on pro-life and pro-family issues and liberals still emphasize economic and racial justice. These one-sided approaches need to end.

I think the approach that I have sketched in this paper could help that happen. If a wide cross section of evangelical leaders prayerfully, thoughtfully sought to listen to what the Bible and historical experience tells us about principles for an evangelical political philosophy including the kind of balanced political agenda that reflects the full range of God's concerns, then I believe we might be able to overcome some of our differences and work together in a way that could bless this society and the world.

## More Than a Methodist: The Life and Ministry of Donald English

Brian Hoare and Ian Randall

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ISBN: 1-84227-203-9 / 197x130mm / 240pp / £11.99

**Paternoster Press, PO Box 300, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, UK**

# What Does it Mean to be Saved?

Rikk Watts

**KEYWORDS:** *Creation, divine image, incarnation, Exodus, temple, priests, restoration, destiny*

I'VE ALWAYS STRUGGLED with the idea of what it means to be a Christian, and it is not because I did not think God was real. I was brought up in the Pentecostal church. I knew God was real, but there was some sense of dislocation between my Christian experience and the life of the world around me. The more travel I have done, the more I realize that for many Christians there is a deep sense at a profound level of not knowing why we are here.

In my tradition the primary goal of Christians was to get away from this world as quickly as possible, so we made films about that like 'Left Behind'. However, we need to ask ourselves the question, 'What does it mean to be saved?' I remember when I was working at IBM this was often satirized. A poster in a friend's cubicle said, 'Jesus saves—at First National'. I remember at first being greatly

offended by this, but with the passage of time I began to wonder if we haven't deserved it. Because after I calmed down I began to realize how odd the language must sound to a late 20th or early 21st century person.

It was only when doing some work on an article by Craig Evans about the influence of Roman political thought on the prologue to Mark's Gospel that it began to dawn on me that we were using a word that really did not mean what it meant back then. 'Saviour' was in fact a well-known political term. There is a famous inscription (the Priene Inscription) where they speak of Caesar Augustus;

It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia and in the opinion of the High Priest to say the following: 'Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as

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a saviour (soter), both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things. And since he, Caesar, by his appearance, excelled even our anticipations, and surpassed all previous benefactors, not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done; the birthday of the god Augustus marked the beginning of good tidings (*euangelion* the gospel) of his coming ...'

The inscription goes on to suggest an offering of thanks for the coming of Augustus.

Now I want you to pay attention to some of the language here. No one is talking about going to heaven. No one is talking about sins forgiven. The language 'saviour' has to do with concrete changes in the lives and the world in which people of the first century were having their social existence and seeking to bring up their families. There is nothing here about somewhere beyond the blue. Being saved by a saviour had a well-known economic and political meaning; it was a word from everyday life, and sat very nicely alongside the title 'benefactor'. Augustus was considered the people's 'saviour' because he had done just that—he had restored peace to the empire.

Now it seems to me we have made the kind of mistake that no decent mis-ologist would make today—we have hung on to the word and lost the meaning. Perhaps we ought to be going for the meaning and think about changing the word, otherwise we might find other posters about Jesus saving at First National.

## Understanding salvation

So what does it mean to be saved? Let us track the imagery that Genesis gives us in order to understand salvation. In my tradition we have spent a lot of time talking about salvation but we really did not understand why God cared in the first place. Why should he want to save us anyway? Of course that means that you cannot really talk about salvation until you talk about creation. There is a reason for beginning in Genesis.

One of the striking things about the Hebrew Bible's conceptualisation of creation is its use of the following kind of language—'*the foundations of the earth... the pillars of the heaven ...the beams of God's upper chambers... stretching out the heavens like a canopy (or a tent)... the windows of the heavens... storehouses...*' This is architectural language. The thorough-going conception in the Hebrew Bible is of creation as some kind of architectural construction. Now what kind of building is this?

Nowadays we really do take culture seriously, so we want to pay attention to the way language is used in the surrounding cultures. In many of the ancient near-eastern traditions the act of creation was seen as an act of the gods building their palace. This is not a new idea. The word for palace in Hebrew is the same word that is used for temple. That is exactly how Israel sees creation. Note Isaiah 66:1: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.' Where do you find a throne and a footstool? In a palace. What do you call the palace not of the king but of a god? You call it a temple.

Now we are quite happy to see

heaven as God's temple, but the point of Isaiah is that the earth is his footstool, the earth is right there in the very throne-room as well. And he then goes on to say: 'What is this house that you build for me?'—and in language reminiscent of Genesis 2:2-3—'where is the place that I can take my rest?' This is exactly the language that is echoed on the seventh day where Yahweh rests in his temple palace, in his cosmic pavilion. This is the first century Jewish perspective as well. Josephus talks about the temple in cosmic terms. Philo goes on to say 'the whole universe must be regarded as the highest and in truth the holy temple of God'.

How do you think about creation? What do you know about a temple? Is it not a holy place? However, when you think of creation, do you think of it as a sacred and holy place? Tragically when we say things like that there is likely to be a kind of knee-jerk reaction, 'This is New Age'. Whether it is or not, it is biblical. It is a tremendous affirmation of the created world.

It seems to me that for too long we have been living in this Platonic tradition that has denigrated the goodness of the physical world. God gets excited about timber. It is miraculous. There are some very odd things that happen at the sub-atomic level. Things are in two places at the same time. They behave in very odd ways. Maybe it is right to say that the God of all creation through his word has imposed order upon this and he loves this stuff. 'It was good.' In my tradition we believed the only reason God made this place was to burn it up, and the sooner we were out of here the better. The rapture was the great hope. It was a bit of a shock to realize that later on while I am

going up there, I am passing Jesus on the way down!

An unparalleled seven times in Genesis 1, God says 'This is good'—finally, he says, 'very good'. Note that John 3:16 states, 'For God so loved ...' not our souls, not even human beings, but the cosmos. Do I love the cosmos? I started to realize—no wonder I was having trouble being a Christian, because I really did not understand the way God thought about his world.

### The divine image

What about Adam and Eve in all of this? What is the last thing that is put inside a temple? The image of the deity. What's the last thing God creates in Genesis 1? The divine image: 'let us make humanity—male and female—in our image' (Gen. 1:26-27). It all moves towards the formation of the image-bearers and their placement in the Garden of Eden.

Several features emerge from this image language. One is that we cannot get away from the physicality. Whatever else 'image' means, it involves our physicality. We must understand that images in the ancient world were never intended to depict the deity's appearance. When Israel makes the golden calf (if that is meant to be the image of Yahweh), it is not suggesting that Yahweh moves around on all fours lowing in the heavens. No, the images portray the function and attributes of the deity. They are pictograms, if you like, rather than portraits. The reason you choose the young bull is because of the power and virility it symbolizes.

Somehow our physicality is essential. It says something about what it means to be the image of God in the

temple he has created for us. One of those is that we have completely opposable thumbs. This gives us the kind of dexterity that enables us to imitate Yahweh in this small realm of the cosmos he has given us by carrying out his creational work, imitating him. Far from being inanimate objects, these images were indwelt by the very life of the deity and became the very focus of his presence upon the earth. That is what it means to be human, from the biblical point of view.

We are living pictographs of Yahweh the creator, enlivened by his breath, and ultimately his indwelling spirit. (We start to realize that the central focus of the NT is not 'Christ died for sins'—that's important, but not the centre.) Our job is to imitate him—and that is what Adam and Eve do. They do the work of the garden and they protect it, guarding the sanctuary. Imitating God in their creational activities, as it were, little gods enthroned between the knees of Yahweh the great God, imitating him.

What is going on here? Partly there is a polemic against idolatry. We do not build temples for Yahweh—he made one for us, and it is called creation. We do not form Yahweh in our image, but he makes us in his. We do not open his eyes and ears. He gives us sight and hearing, and ultimately fills us with his breath. Neither do we provide for him—he provides lavishly for us in a garden called Eden, which means 'the light'.

### God's character and human joy

What is God like? Abundant joy char-

acterizes the Christian life, as we see in the letter to the Philippians. People are made for Eden, and for a God who is full of delights! In case you missed it, the first thing that Jesus does in John's gospel—the most theological of all the gospels—is to turn water into wine, 120 gallons of it. Oh that Nietzsche had understood that! We might not have had the terrible disasters of our age if the Lutheran church of his day had actually understood creation as Eden and the point of John's gospel and the opening mighty deed. God is not anti-body. He gives us good gifts—Eden. No wonder the Psalmist can say, 'Who are we, that you should be so mindful of us, crowning us with glory and honour?' (Psalm 8). To be human (Lewis has got it right) is an extraordinary gift. It's a glorious thing,

People say, 'I do these things like this—bend the truth, cheat,—because I'm only human'. No—a thousand times, no. We do these things not because we are human but because we are not human enough. That's what this is about. To be made in the image of God, to be a human-enfleshed being is a glorious and wonderful thing. May God grant us eyes to see this.

Genesis 1 is not about how long God took to do anything. The primary point is that this is his palace-temple built for human beings. The problem is what happens in the garden. When Adam and Eve take the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil it is basically an assertion of autonomy, a refusal to trust, a desire to take control. That is what destroys our marriages and our societies—autonomous living, where the issue is control and we will not trust. We refuse to be vulnerable, but we are worshipping a God



who is not some sort of blob of jelly radiating holiness somewhere. No, he is first and foremost a community of persons. This is relational, and you cannot have relationship without vulnerability, trust, and the willingness to give over control.

I think that is the garden story. And what happens? The moment we deny we are made in God's image and we will decide ourselves what it means to be human, we deny the very thing that we are. If an image-bearer denies the one whose image it bears, what is it? It's annihilation—'in the day that you do this you will surely die.' That is, in fact, what happens—the sad descent into the long night of Cain, Lamech who has two wives (one is not enough for him—someone insults him so he kills him) right down to sons of the gods who have as many women as they choose. Injustice runs riot and they call themselves 'sons of the Gods', so swollen to madness is their arrogance.

Creation is bound up in all of this, and it too stumbles into decay. Why? Because the image-bearer is no longer carrying out his job of guarding and doing the work, because he has no idea who he is. Human beings are designed to know who we are by looking into other people's faces. Yet only by looking into the face of God do we know what it is to be human. For scholars and pastors, that is our ministry. Sunday morning is about helping your congregations and students see the face of God. That's what will transform them.

### The new Eden

So Adam and Eve depart the garden. Notice this action—they are clothed as they go out. I am not sure this has any-

thing to do with anticipating sacrifice—it is more likely that clothing in the ancient world was highly significant, far more than it is for us. For example, taking on certain kinds of clothing indicated the acceptance or acquisition of throne rights. David strips off his robe before the Lord. That is significant—it is making a statement about who is the king. Adam and Eve go out with their little aprons, inadequate as they are, and what does Yahweh do? In a great act of mercy and grace, he clothes them. The Akkadian word for 'clothe' means to accede to the throne. As the rebels go out of the garden Yahweh clothes them as a way of affirming, 'I made this place for you—and by hook or by cross I will get you back here. This is for you.'

That is what the exodus is all about. Israel arrived in the darkness. The wind begins to blow over the stormy sea. Light appears as Yahweh comes—a column of fire. The sea divides and the dry land appears. Where have you seen that before? Where do you think Israel got its Genesis 1 story from? As they stood by the Red Sea, the Sea of Reeds, the Sea of Chaos, dwelling place of the chaos monster, they discovered there that it was not Tar or Atton, the great gods of Egypt, who had crushed the little people. No, it was Yahweh who brought these little people out of Egypt in a new creation.

He brings them to a new Eden—Canaan, flowing with milk and honey. In this process, what happens to Israel? Jesus is not the first person called 'Son of God' in the Bible. God says to through Moses to Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first-born son' (Ex. 4:22). Now that does not mean Israel is divine—that is not what sonship lan-

guage means. It is Wisdom language—good sons and good daughters imitate their parents. This is the re-formation of humanity in the image of God; it is part of getting us back to the garden.

When Israel accepts Torah, they are repudiating Adam and Eve's decision to be autonomous. The ten words of the Decalogue repudiate autonomous existence. In accepting it, Israel says, 'We trust you and hence obey you.' Listen to Psalm 19: *'The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of Yahweh are sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of Yahweh are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of Yahweh is clear, enlightening the eyes...'* That sounds like a deliberate echo and therefore a deliberate repudiation of Eve's assessment of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:6). So the answer is that Israel is going to discover what it means to live, not by reaching out to the tree autonomously but by accepting this Torah. Thus we begin to have the formation of the image of Yahweh.

That is why you get striking language in Ezekiel 16, where the prophet contrasts Israel's adornment of her idols with God's adornment of Israel. As far as we know Israel was the only religion at that time that had no image in the temple. In the ancient world Egyptian temples were actually maps of the universe; in them they had their deities that they would clothe and feed every morning. But you do not have such images in Israel's temple. Crispin Fletcher-Louis has shown that the clothing of the high priest is actually very close to the clothing of the cult objects in pagan temples. So you have Israel's high priest as the only 'image' in Yahweh's temple. Why? Because the

high priest in the Holy of Holies models Israel's calling as Yahweh's holy nation-kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6) living in their holy, sanctuary land, a new Eden. On a macro-cosmic scale Creation is his palace-temple and Israel is meant to be the image of God being priest between God and the rest of the world, for the blessing of the nations.

### Incarnated reality

Just as the great King reigned in his cosmic temple-palace in Sabbath rest, so his people incarnate this reality, living in the larger cosmic temple of the earth. They rest on their Sabbath day, keeping it holy both to remember the original Sabbath and to anticipate the destiny that God has for this temple palace that he has built, and seven times declared to be good.

What is the task of Israel, as a kingdom of priests, as those who adhere to Yahweh's way of being human and enjoying Yahweh's personal presence? To be the example of how to be human to the watching nations, who will look on them and say 'What a wise people!' This raises an interesting question: when was the last time a local chamber of commerce, or your local mayor or government approached your church and said 'We've been watching you—teach us how to be human.'? If that's not happening it is a good time to become a Christian. To be Yahweh's image-bearer means to look like him, and reflect Yahweh's justice, righteousness and compassion—that's the focus.

Of course, one of the implications of being made in God's image is that every act of abuse against the image of

a king is an act of high treason. Thus, every act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason against God. It does not matter how often I go to church, how well I recite the catechism or whether I speak in tongues more than you all. The big issue is how do I treat people, and Jesus knows that. What are the commandments? The only two that matter are 'love God' and 'love your neighbour as yourself' That is the reason for which we have been saved!

The restoration of the image of God and the restoration of his creation is the focus, but Israel loses this, they lose direction. Why? Because they start to love the blessing more than people. Listen to Isaiah in his early chapters. Israel has this magnificent worship building—no expense spared—and brilliant worship team. They have conferences on prayer and they even fast. These people had got it all together, surely, and what does God say? *'Who invited you into my house to make this racket? I am sick to death of your solemn worship assemblies. I am tired of your conferences.'* Why? Because the church building is not made in God's image, neither is the worship service, neither is the prayer meeting, or even fasting. One thing only is made in God's image. You want to worship God? Then you clothe, feed, house, take care of his image. That's what it means to be saved. James says that: *Don't prattle on about having faith. Let me see it by what do you do.*

No surprise then that Vincent Carrol and David Schiflett in their book on *Christianity on Trial* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002) mention that one of the key factors in the conversion of the Roman Empire was the extraor-

dinary generosity of the Christians. Where do we stand in relation to this? Some of us are saving up shekels for the wrong thing. You can't take it with you. Why don't you invest it in something that will change people's lives? That new car you were planning to get—do you really need it, is it more important to you than equipping young people for the work of the kingdom? The one great sin we in the affluent west do not talk about is our greed, which is the same as idolatry—because we put that stuff ahead of people. There is nothing wrong with a nice car and other possessions, but where is our heart in terms of the kingdom? Israel loved stuff more than people. It's interesting to see what happens.

Remember all that language about idol imagery? Those who worship idols (Ps. 115, 135) will become like them, having eyes that do not see, ears that will not hear, mouths that cannot speak. We see the same in Isaiah chapter 5 where there are six woe oracles (5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21). They are actually patterned—three large ones, three small ones (as in Genesis 1). It concludes with the land having no light but only darkness in the midst of a roaring like that of the sea (5:30)—imagery which, to my mind, echoes the amorphous pre-creation at the beginning. In other words, the six curses of chapter five appear to be an ironic echo of the six days of creation but with Yahweh's word effecting instead the dissolution of the good order of Israel's new Eden-sanctuary land

Immediately after this, you find yourself in a temple (Is. 6). What is the biblical metaphor for creation? Temple! What happens in this temple? Isaiah is given a task: *'Preach to them, that*

*seeing they may not see, hearing they may not hear*'. What is going on? The ironic re-creation of Israel in the image of the idol she worships—and that is what leads to their destruction. Israel has become just like Pharaoh. To deprive one's fellow Israelites of the clothing, food and shelter necessary is to deny worship of Yahweh.

In the fourth century (if my data is correct) the church in Rome would regularly call for fasts in order that they might feed the hungry, providing one million rations a year. The monastery at Cluny fed 17,000 people a year. And what is this? This is what salvation is about—because physicality matters. The body matters. It is part of the bearing of the image. It is simply our Platonic attitude that thinks that only souls need to be saved. It is amazing how rare the language 'saving souls' is. In some ways it is not really Christian at all. It seems to relate to the immortality of the soul, but that is not a Christian doctrine. God made embodied beings, he is going to give us back our bodies, he thinks they are a great idea. When we are resurrected we are going to have them and they are going to be special, if the resurrected body of Jesus and Paul's word about 'spiritual bodies' (1 Cor. 15:44) are any guide.

The land becomes cursed and a desert—there it is, the loss of creation, the loss of the image. But because God loves this place he will not abandon his people in exile. He promises to bring about a return. He did not create the earth to be uninhabited (Is. 45:18) and he is going to bring back his people. That is what Ezekiel chapter 37 is all about—the resurrection of the dead, the body and the spirit, the re-formation of the image and the indwelling of

the Spirit. Back they come as true human beings, imitating the God in whose image they are made.

## Jesus—Creation and Exodus

I want to suggest that is exactly the focus of Jesus in his ministry. What are the most common things he does? He opens eyes, ears, mouths, restores limbs. He feeds people in the desert and tells the sea what to do—where have you seen that before? Isn't that the exodus? The feedings in the desert and Jesus' power over the sea also recall the exodus, and along with the marvellous provision of wine (Amos 9:13; Joel 3:18) and abundant catches of fish (Ezek. 47:9f), testify to the new creational activity of Yahweh among his people. It is therefore no surprise that the evangelists speak of mighty deeds, signs, works—exactly the language of creation and the exodus (Ps. 65:6; 101:25; Dt. 3:24; 4:34; Ps. 106:8; 44:1).

When Jesus calls his disciples he calls the twelve; this is not surprising for someone who himself has just gone through the waters, the Spirit has descended on him and called him 'my beloved Son'—and then sent him out into the desert for forty days. Who do you know who was called God's son, went through the water into the desert? Israel! Here is the formation of a new humanity. So now in Jesus we see God who comes among us as the Son of God, very God, but he is also Son of Man. How can you put those two things together? We wrestle with this—how can one be God and human? That is a problem for Platonists, for Paramenides, for Heraclitus, but it is not a problem for us because we are

made in God's image. What else would you expect? This is the destiny of his creation! He comes among us and shows us what it means—the great glory of being a human being.

The great threat of the origin stories in our present culture is that they denigrate being human. They say, 'You're an accident, you're a freak... you won't last... you have no meaning.' Then we wring our hands when our children behave just exactly like that. The older ones among us who probably do not care about our kids, wring our hands because companies like Enron do what they do and that hurts us where it really matters. More to our shame.

Jesus calls twelve to be with him, and they submit to his word. He teaches on a mountain. However, unlike the mountain in the exodus where they put a fence around the bottom because everyone had to be perfectly pure, in Matthew's gospel there's no fence around the mountain. Everybody can go up. Immediately after that Jesus does ten mighty deeds—but not plagues—acts that restore our humanity.

### Restoration of humanity

It seems to me that this is what it is all about. Salvation is not about the denigration of our human-ness. It is about its restoration. You and I will never be so human as when we are truly spiritual. We will never be so truly spiritual as when we are truly human. That is the narrative. It is picked up in the New Testament. Jesus is the only true image of the Father—the invisible God, the new Adam, our great high priest. See what that means! This is the one who bears the image, in the temple, our

great high priest imitating Israel's high priest, God present among us and in us. God in Christ causes the light to shine in the darkness (where have you heard that before?), transforming us from glory to glory, having the same mind as Jesus. We are in Christ, members of one another and his body. We are in fact indwelt by God's Spirit, nothing less than the very presence of God upon the earth.

Talk about a high anthropology! This is the glory to which Paul presses. He understands what we've been called for. Galatians 3:26ff is probably the most radical passage written in a good 300 years either side of the first century, in a world where men had all the power over women, masters held all the power over slaves, and Jews and Greeks traded insults about who was really the better off of the two. What does Paul say? *'In Christ—no longer male or female, no longer Jew or Gentile, no longer slave nor free.'* It is hard to imagine a more radical statement than that, and yet that is the Christian vision.

Now please understand those things matter, but do not forget the crucial matter in all this is the indwelling of the Spirit. Yet that is often our tension. We will go to one extreme or the other, with the emphasis on some sort of private spirituality or on some kind of fixation with social action; and we both end up making a mistake. Both aspects are required. That is the high point of the coming of the Spirit. That is what the gospel and the New Testament is about. You can have your sins forgiven in the Old Testament, but the Torah cannot do what the Spirit can. Even the prophets knew that, and said, *'I'm going to write the law*

*upon your hearts. I'm going to write the repudiation of autonomy, of control, of lusting after the power, I'm going to write the repudiation of that on your hearts through the Spirit.'* We are Spirit people. Those who walk by the Spirit are the true children of God, bearing his image. That is why in Galatians the fruit of the Spirit are nothing other than the character of God expressed in us, and the gifts of the Spirit are that same God at work. What are they doing? Restoring humanity!

### The destiny of creation

Now for my last point. If you watch what Jesus does, most of his focus is not on restoring creation. This is not because it does not matter! It is because Jesus understands the key to all of this. Paul does too. You see the destiny of creation is not to be burnt up. Romans 8:18ff makes it certain what the destiny is—and that is, its redemption. The key to that redemption is you and I being revealed as the true sons and daughters of God by living in step with the Spirit. What does this look like? Look at Jesus the cross-bearer. That is what changes the world. If you study the history of some of the early Christians, that is exactly what they did—imitating Jesus.

So Revelation 21 has it right—we are not going to heaven. That idea crept into the church in the second and third century from Platonists who

could not imagine God would ever care about this stuff that is the world. Yet God says, '*It's good, it's good. it's good...*' He loves it enough to send his son, and come in his son to reconcile this world to himself. Read Revelation 21—heaven is coming here. That is why it is the new Jerusalem.

There is something very odd about this new Jerusalem—there is no temple. Furthermore, it is a cube. What is cube-shaped in the Old Testament? The Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, and the Holy of Holies in the temple! There is no temple in the new Jerusalem, not because it has become the temple. No, the temple has the court of the Gentiles, the court of the women, the men, all of which is eradicated according to Galatians 3. No, the city is itself the Holy of Holies! And it's huge. Does it help, maybe, to know that the dimensions of the entire known world in the first century were approximately 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia (approximately 1,500 miles)?

The whole of creation is going to become the Holy of Holies. John, picking up the language that comes from the conclusion of the book of Exodus, states that God is coming here to live with us to be our God, and we will be his people. This is no surprise if you have read Genesis 1. He loves this place, and he loves the image-bearer. To be saved is to live that love out concretely with real people in this life. This is your moment. Seize the day!

# Charity and Stewardship: Biblical Foundations

Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

**KEYWORDS:** *Alms, Sabbath, poverty, fellowship, service, spirituality, missiology, sociology, justice*

ONE OF THE MANY different social services is charity. Today, the word 'charity' carries a negative tone since it refers to the people at the receiving end. One of the demerits of charity is that it makes people dependent and does not enable them to stand on their own feet. It makes them lose their dignity and respect. As I have pointed out elsewhere<sup>1</sup>, charity fails to address the cause of their poverty or misery but deals only with the resultant situation or its consequences. Charity is a temporary relief or help rather than an effort to develop self-esteem and justice. Although charity has its own limitations, it is helpful to people in dire

need, particularly in times of calamity and tragedy. Charity reveals the positive aspect of the need to share with the needy. It underlines the Christian concept of giving and stewardship.

## Charity in the Old Testament

Charitable service was not new to the Jews. The Old Testament insists on giving alms and taking care of widows, orphans, slaves, aliens and the poor (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:33-34; Dt. 26:12). Abraham and Lot expressed charity by extending hospitality to those who came to sojourn in the midst of them (Gen. 18:1-4; 19:1-3). Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel came forward to help the servant of Abraham by giving him water to drink (Gen. 24:15-21). Reuel, the priest of Midian, helped the fugitive Moses (Ex. 2:20-22). Special laws were created after the covenant at Sinai to strengthen charity towards needy members within and outside their community. These laws were further

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<sup>1</sup> J. B. Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry: Models of Ministry and Training* (Bangalore: TBT Publications, 2002), pp.133-138, 183-186.

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modified during the Settlement period to meet the growing needs of the poor.

The basis for charity in ancient Israel was the command to love one's neighbours. Charity laws in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy emphasize proper relationship between human beings. One of the important laws was the sabbatical year of land (Ex. 23:10-11). The land holders in Israel were asked to let their land lie fallow on the seventh year. The purpose was to enable the poor people in the land, particularly those without land, to have access to grain, fruit and vegetables grown on the land during the fallow year. They could gather their food from such land and did not need to starve to death.

The sabbatical year was not uniformly observed by all in one region. Each family calculated the sabbatical year for their own land and let the land lie fallow on the seventh year. Some scholars suggest that families could have apportioned their land into seven sections and allowed each section to lie fallow for a year, as they rotated and cultivated the rest of the six sections to meet their food supply. Whatever was the method of observing the following year, the poor people were able to find some land left for their sake in one or another region and they moved to such places where they gathered their food and survived.

The law of the sabbatical year in respect of the land had sociological implications and served as a means of providing charity for the needy.<sup>2</sup> Exo-

dus 22:25-27 insists that the Israelites lend money to the poor without levying interest. This discouraged them from becoming creditors or demanding security pledges. If a poor person's cloak was taken on pledge or pawned, it should be returned before the sun went down in order to provide protection from the cold. Lending money to the needy was not regarded as giving of alms. The borrower had to try sincerely to return the money to the lender but most of the time, the poor debtor could not make it and the money lent to the poor was lost forever. This law of lending money without interest implies the risk of losing the money. Knowing this risk, families lent money and were prepared to lose it. However, they derived joy from helping the poor financially.

These two laws of social concern helped the poor, and committed the families in Israel to be charitable to individuals or families. The well-to-do families could either be charitable voluntarily or neglect the laws of social concern. In order to make it compulsory to provide charity to the poor, orphans and widows, the law of tithing was emphasized (Dt. 26:12). Part of the tithe went to the priests and Levites, and the rest went to the poor in their society. This mechanism which was integrated with their work and worship promoted charity. The Book of Proverbs instructed families to help their poor in the midst. The Psalms reflect the cry of the needy and call on the worshipper to be sensitive to people in distress and pain.

Prophets individually helped many families, particularly the families of widows irrespective of their socio-religious background. For example, Elijah helped the widow of Zarephath in the

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<sup>2</sup> J.B. Jeyaraj, 'Land Ownership in the Pentateuch' (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), University of Sheffield, 1989.



region of Sidon through the miracle of providing flour and oil at the time of famine, saving the life of the widow and her son (1 Kings 17:8-16). Later Elisha saved the widow of a prophet in Israel and her two children, who were almost bonded into slavery by providing enough oil for sale to clear their debt (2 Kings 4:1-7). These miracles, I believe, were performed for the liberation of marginalized people from the powers of famine and debts. They were immediate relief measures.

Boaz, the owner of the land instructed his workers to deliberately allow the grains to fall on the field so that Ruth, the widow, could gather them to prepare food. By this charitable action, Boaz saved the lives of Naomi and Ruth, the two widows and protected them from going into slavery or begging or prostitution (Ruth 3-4). David not only showed charity to Mephibosheth, the disabled son of Saul (2 Samuel 9) by providing him with food each day but also restored his rights and properties.<sup>3</sup>

These examples show that charity was practised by individuals, families and rulers in ancient Israel. Whether there was any organized unit or infrastructure or not responsible for charitable acts in different places in the land is a matter that needs separate research. It is possible, as some scholars believe, that Judaism in the post-exile period had a system of distribution of food to the poor. Religious communities like Essenes had their social service team in important cities, par-

ticularly in Jerusalem, and provided shelter and clothes to travellers.<sup>4</sup> There are some evidences of almsgiving to the poor by the Pharisees and Essenes in the New Testament and Rabbinical writings.

### Jesus, the church and charity

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount warns the hypocrites against publicizing their giving of alms in the synagogues and in the streets to gain praise from others, and taught that alms must be given in secret without expecting any reward (Mt. 6:1-4). This showed that Jesus accepted the practice of almsgiving. He asked the rich young man who desired to have eternal life to sell all his wealth and give the money to the poor (Mk. 10:17-22).

For Jesus, charity was not a matter of giving out of a state of plenty but involved the possibility of losing everything for the sake of the needy. This is a radical principle. According to Jesus there are no limitations in sharing resources with needy people. This teaching was unacceptable to the rich and hypocrites of his day. Jesus underlined this principle of charity when Zacchaeus confessed to returning his accumulated wealth four- or five-fold to the poor. Jesus knew that Zacchaeus would lose all his wealth if he returned it in multiples and acknowledged that action as real repentance, charity and justice and the evidence of true salvation of Zacchaeus' life (Lk. 19: 1-10).

3 J.B. Jeyaraj, '2 Samuel 9: Caring for the Disabled' *AJTR* (Jan-Dec. 1998), pp. 138-145.

4 E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE to 66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), pp. 230-234 and J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the time of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1969), pp. 126-134.

Disabled persons deserted by their families and marginalized by their religion and society sat on the way to Jerusalem or in front of the Temple to beg for alms from pilgrims to Jerusalem (Mt. 20:30; Acts 3:2). As a mark of their piety, the Jewish worshippers would normally give alms to these beggars. Peter's act of healing the lame man at the entrance of the Temple reveals the fact that the poor need liberation and a rightful place in the society more than they need charity. Some Christians tried to sell all their property and put the money in a common fund as was done in an 'ashram' community. The story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) points out that such an experiment did not work out well and did not last for long.

### Fellowship and Service

The next chapter of Acts 6 depicts an emerging structure for charity in an organized manner in the early church. It began with the distribution of food to the widows in the churches. From the report of Luke, it is understood that the early *koinonia* cared for the widows. But with the constant increase in the number of converts from Judaism to Christianity the responsibility of taking care of the widows also increased. More and more widows joined the church and enjoyed the new fellowship. Many of them were so poor or not cared properly by their families that the church had to feed them and take care of their needs. The limited resources at their disposal naturally led the persons-in-charge to show favouritism and nepotism in the distribution of food. Since the persons-in-charge were predominantly Hebrew or

Aramaic-speaking Jews, they showed favouritism to the Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking Jewish widows, neglecting the Greek-speaking Jewish widows. Such discrimination was not good for true *koinonia* and *diakonia*.

The complaints about discrimination were taken in good spirit by the leaders of the assembly. The positive attitude of the leaders towards criticism urged them to analyze the reasons for the neglect in their service. These apostles realized the need for an organized group to raise resources and supervise the distribution of food. They understood that it was a time-consuming job. They consulted the whole community of disciples and shared their problems with them, mentioning their priority for preaching and teaching the word of God. They worked out a special arrangement to distribute food to the widows. This unit had seven men for the special service and was regarded as an official structure with the authority of the apostles and approval of the community.

The apostles defined the qualification for this task. These men had to be of good standing which meant filled with integrity, the Holy Spirit and wisdom. These were regarded by the apostles as the most important qualifications for charitable service. The selection was done by the community. It is worth noting that the apostles did not select their own candidates or appoint them at their own will. The decision-making power was given to the community. Authorization was given by the apostles by the laying on of hands. *Koinonia* and *diakonia* can be strengthened by listening to the problems and criticisms of the poor and making corporate decisions. Such a democratic

procedure is healthy for relief and development.

## Charity and Spirituality in Paul

Christian stewardship as an integral aspect of spirituality gained more importance with the beginning of the missionary journeys of Paul and Barnabas. In his letters, Paul mentions various reasons for giving. The three major ones identified in his writings are the support of the Christian preacher/teacher, the missionary who brings the gospel and the poor people in the churches. From Gal. 6:6, 1 Cor. 9:11-14 and 1 Tim. 5:17-18, it is clear that those who received preaching and instruction in the Word of God had an obligation to share their goods with their preachers and teachers. The elders who ministered the Word of God had the right to receive their support from their congregations. Not only the preachers and teachers, but also the missionaries who brought the gospel to a particular city needed the support of the believers. The church at Philippi supported Paul while he was with them and later, sent their support while he went to preach the gospel to the nearby cities like Thessalonica and Corinth and later to Rome when imprisoned (Philp. 1:5; 4:14-18; 2 Cor. 11: 9). One of the very few churches which was in constant touch with the missionary Paul was the church at Philippi. Paul thanked God for the Philippians and called their relationship a 'partnership in the gospel'.

The major focus for the study of giving to the poor in the churches is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. Knowing

the need and suffering of the poor in Jerusalem, Paul urged the churches in Macedonia (Thessalonians and Philippians), Ephesus and Corinth to raise some money and send it regularly to the church in Jerusalem. Paul suggested a systematic way of giving in 1 Cor. 16:1-4, encouraging the Corinthians to set aside a sum of money on the first day of every week according to their income so that the help would be readily available. Thus they would not need to rush to collect the money at the last minute. The Corinthians followed this suggestion and sent the collection regularly to the poor in Jerusalem. However, they started showing slackness and irregularity, and so in urging them to keep up this good work, Paul made explicit the ideal model of the churches in Macedonia.

As we analyze this chapter (2 Cor. 8) more intensely, we notice three foundations in Paul's writing on Christian stewardship. I would like to call them the *theological*, *missiological* and *sociological* bases. They are all closely connected.

## Missiology

First of all, in highlighting the model of Macedonia as a challenge for the Corinthian church, Paul emphasized the *missiological* basis. The Thessalonians and Philippians gave themselves first to the Lord and then to the support of the poor in Jerusalem. According to Paul, by accepting the gospel and acknowledging Jesus Christ as their Saviour, they gave their lives to the Lord. Giving begins by surrendering one's life to the lordship of Christ and then it flows to help the lives of others. Surrendering to the gospel demands

practising the kingdom values of sharing and supporting. Giving one's life to Christ naturally leads to giving up one's possessions and life for others. Both are inter-linked. One without the other is meaningless.

The mission of proclamation of the gospel leads to the mission of sharing. A person can very easily contribute money and other resources without surrendering his or her life to Jesus. Such an act is basically humanitarian and done out of common concern, and it need not be based on the missiology Paul is talking about. To Paul, Christian stewardship is not based purely on secular humanism but on missiological, sociological and theological bases.

The Macedonians were not rich. They were living in poverty and facing persecution. Yet, they gave voluntarily beyond their means. They even pleaded that their gift for the poor people in the congregation of Jerusalem be accepted. Their experience of the gospel motivated them to give in spite of their poverty and affliction. Their sincerity and eagerness to give was the criteria for accepting their charity. Those who are in need and at the receiving end need to see the positive aspect of sincerity and eagerness on the part of the giver in order to accept their help. Paul's point was that if a poor church could share their money, then the rich Christians in Corinth could do much more. He challenged them to excel in giving also apart from their excellence in many other aspects. It is the test of one's love for God and for others.

### Theology

Paul states the *theological* basis for giving in 2 Cor. 8:8-9. Although the Lord

Jesus Christ was rich, he became poor for our sake and that is the theology of giving. Jesus Christ left everything to come and die on the cross that humanity could enjoy the richness of salvation. In stating this 'theology of God becoming poor', Paul mentioned that the 'Lord Jesus Christ' became poor. God in entirety, according to these verses, became poor not holding anything for himself. If God could become poor for our sake, then the Corinthians who received God's richness of forgiveness and eternal life had to show the same kind of love for others. Sharing their wealth with those in need proved their genuine love for God. Paul called it 'a ministry to the saints' in 2 Cor. 9:1. Although he spoke of help to the poor among the Christians in Jerusalem, Paul did not rule out the need to help the needy outside the church.

### Sociology

Paul was not satisfied with the mere act of generosity to the poor, just to console their conscience. His *sociological* basis is stated in 2 Cor. 8:13-14: '... but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance'. It was a tremendous challenge and radicalized the giving to use the phrase 'fair balance'. He contrasts the 'abundance of having' with the 'need of the people' and proposes a *fair balance* between possession and distribution of wealth. I do not like to push Paul's idea of fair balance too much to mean Christian communism or socialism. I think, Paul was aware that the accumulation of wealth and earnings would go on but

he desired that those who accumulated wealth share with the needy.

In sharing, two things happen. The accumulated possession in the hands of the rich is reduced and the needy rise to the stage of having resources. This flow of abundance from the rich to the poor should continue to create at least a 'fair balance' if not 'equal balance'. Achieving economic and social equality demands more than charitable giving. Charity can only offset the situation of accumulation and narrow down the gap between the rich and poor to a certain extent. For Paul, this sociological challenge, is linked to the 'theology of God becoming poor' and the missiological basis of 'partnership in the gospel'. Christian charity should work towards fair balance and not stop with a token or symbolic ritual of alms-giving.

The charity model challenges both the 'giver' and the 'receiver' in the Christian context. As has been mentioned above, sincerity, eagerness and willingness are expected on the side of the giver. Furthermore, the giver is expected to give according to his or her ability and even beyond his or her means, realizing the love of God and the benefits of the gospel. The receiver need not feel ashamed to accept the gift or the generosity of the giving because it has theological, missiological and sociological implications. When the status of the needy changes to one of abundance, they are expected to follow the same principle of eagerness and willingness in giving to others. It is only when the 'giver' and the 'receiver' commit themselves to the theological, missiological and sociological bases, that the model of charity or Christian stewardship becomes more meaningful and significant.

## Charity in practice

The charitable service of individuals and institutions in contemporary society needs attention. In my country, out of sympathy, love and concern, some individuals give some money to the beggars who roam the streets and sitting in front of the churches, bus and railway stations. Most of these beggars are either lepers or deserted women with children or children who ran away from homes. They ask for some money to buy food or medicine. Giving some money to these people does not meet all their needs. Some criticize these poor people, believing they make a lot of money through begging. Cartoons and jokes are written in magazines to ridicule them. Whatever the suspicions about these victims may be, helping them with money is not wrong unless their misuse of alms to buy drugs, alcohol or tickets of gambling, is obvious.

There is the need to be sensitive to poverty. The helplessness of the needy as they look to us for assistance should touch our mind and heart. By giving a few paise or rupees we are not encouraging them to continue begging but trying to quench their thirst and hunger temporarily. However, some Christian families have a systematic and well-planned pattern of charitable service. Having been acquainted closely with individuals or families in poverty and knowing their needs clearly, these Christians help poor children to get educated by paying their school fees, buying school uniforms and books. Regular help is given to buy medicines for some poor families. Annual financial assistance is provided to clear part of their debts. Adopting the poor, understanding their difficulties and

sharing resources with them is a good way of fulfilling charitable service.

## Problems of Institutional Charity

Christian institutions such as churches, schools, colleges, hospitals and orphanages are involved in charity. They run several programmes such as Sunday lunches for the poor, free medical check-up, provision of free shelter and food and scholarships for studies. These acts express their concern and commitment for the poor. However, two major problems have risen in the past few decades with regard to institutional charity.

One is the tendency to commercialize institutions due to increasing requests for help and the lack of funds to meet all the requests. Schools, colleges, hospitals and even orphanages have started charging those who seek help in spite of the subsidizing of the cost of operation by well wishers. The donations are not proportionate to the demand. Because of this commercialization the poor are unable to have access to certain services. Only those

who can afford to pay some money can have access to the services of these institutions. Some institutions which started as charitable services have now become fully commercial and serve the rich and the middle class. The poor are gradually excluded.

Another problem is the lack of volunteers to work in these institutions as service to the poor. Many Christians see these institutions as avenues for employment rather than volunteer service for honorariums or low salaries. Some teachers employed in our schools are doing extra tuition outside class hours and run coaching centres at home for earning more money rather than giving their time to coach poor students. The increased cost of living, loans and debts and indifferent attitude towards the needy is affecting individual and institutional charitable service.

In view of these problems, biblical teaching on Christian stewardship and a deliberate effort to retain the vision of Christian charity and its practical outworking are needed today. Christian life and ministry cannot ignore charity and justice.

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# The Nature of the Good

James Danaher

**KEYWORDS:** *Modern, post-modern, culture, sacrifice, creation, pleasure, transformation*

CHRISTIANS, PERHAPS more than the rest of the contemporary world, naively suppose that the basic concepts they possess are somehow God-given and provide a sufficient understanding of the reality into which God has placed them. They resist the contemporary insight that our concepts are the product of our culture and language community. They seem to believe that if they were to embrace such a view it would undermine their faith. This is surprising. Christians more than anyone should embrace such a truth since the Scripture tells us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa. 55:8), and that we need to be 'transformed by the renewing of (our) mind' (Rom. 12:2).

Even if we believe that we have been equipped with some kind of God-given hardware that causes us to form some concepts that do correctly reflect the reality into which God had placed us, it seems obvious that we have also been

given liberty concerning most concepts. Therefore, our concepts may be altered over time and from culture to culture until their meaning becomes something very different from the understanding God originally tried to impart to us.

Nowhere is this more true than with our idea of the good. This is not to deny that there may be some universal sentiments which nearly everyone recognizes as praiseworthy and others which are nearly universally seen as despicable. But in terms of those things that we see as good and which we pursue in the hope of giving purpose and meaning to our lives, our ideas certainly do vary enormously over time and from culture to culture. Even from one individual to the next, we find great variation between what we conceive to be good.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that our idea of what is good has an enormous effect upon the rest of our understanding. The structuralism and post-structuralism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have made us aware of the fact that words have their meaning, not

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because of their reference to things but because of their reference to concepts, and these concepts do not simply have atomic meanings but take their meaning from their relationship to other concepts. The consequence of this is that my understanding of any concept is affected by my understanding of a host of other concepts. Of all our concepts perhaps none affects our other concepts as much as our ideas of what is good.

Plato claimed that we all want what is good, or at least what we believe is good. Few of us, however, truly have excellent lives, simply because we do not have an adequate idea of what is truly good. This is as true for Christians as for anyone else. Indeed, although Christians may make the pretence to the good life, it should be obvious to them that their idea of the good life and God's idea of the same is very different. If you have trouble believing this, consider the fact that an all wise God, who we believe does have a perfect knowledge of the good, chose for his son a life that none of us would ever willingly choose for ourselves or our children. Obviously, if God is good and only does good, he has a very different idea of the good from what we do.

The college I teach at was originally a missionary college. The first graduating class in the 19th century numbered five missionaries who went off to the mission field and all died. The college never puts that fact in the catalogue—not a good way to recruit students. Why? Because our idea of what would be good for our lives is very different from what God thinks is good. For his own son, God chose a short and difficult life that led to a painful death. God chose this for his son because he

knew what was ultimately good in a way that we do not. We choose the lives we do because of our own immediate pleasure and ill-conceived idea of what is good. We have the misspent lives we do because we cannot get over our ill-conceived idea of the good and confess to God that we do not know what is good, and need his wisdom and direction in this regard.

So much of what we call Christianity is either about me trying to become good in order that God will love me, or about me having God bless me in order that my life will be good so I can love it. If my life does not conform to my idea of what is good I hate my life. We love only that which we think is good. We think we don't have the fullness of the Christian life because we're not completely healed or in a constant state of euphoria. We even sometimes doubt our faith, and that can't be good.

Based upon our idea of what is good, we believe that we somehow are missing the fullness of the Christian life, so we change churches or try to find someone who promises us what we believe will be more than what we presently have. We want a new formula for prayer, worship, or whatever will increase the missing blessings in our lives. But do we know what the true blessings from God are? Or is our idea of a blessing based on our very inadequate and all-too-human idea of what is good. Both Job and his comforters interpreted the circumstances of Job's life based upon their own very inadequate idea of what is good.

True, we, like God, love what is good but our idea of what is good is very different from his idea of what is good. What God loves and sees as good is his creation. In the first chapter of



Genesis, God repeatedly says of his creation that 'it was good' (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25). But of all of God's creation, the greatest good and what he loves above all else is to create the image of his son in human flesh. Since what God loves and has a passion for is creation—especially that creation which produces the image of his son—God's idea of what is good or evil is very different from ours.

We deem something good if it satisfies our desire for pleasure or aids us in realizing some end we set for ourselves. The same is true of God, but since the end he has set for himself, and what pleases him above all else, is to reproduce the image of his son in sinful flesh, what God sees as good within human beings is their willingness to allow God to accomplish that purpose. By contrast, what is not good in human beings is their resistance to that purpose.

We see this quite clearly in the Gospels. Jesus seems not to like the people who are 'good people' but instead likes sinners or people who by our standards are not 'good people'. Jesus obviously has a different standard. Indeed, it is not a human standard at all but a divine standard which sees evil as resistance to God's purposes, and good as cooperation with those purposes.

Since God's purpose is to bring radical transformation about in our lives, those people who resist that transformation are not good in God's sight. Such people are good in their own sight, however, and it is for that very reason that they resist the transformation God wants to bring about within them. By thinking they are good, such people see no reason for radical trans-

formation. By contrast, sinners often do see the need for radical transformation. Their desperate situation often produces the kind of willingness and surrender God is looking for in order to accomplish his purpose.

The insight which Jesus has and we generally lack is that good people or people who by human standards are good have no pressing need to change and allow God to continue his creation within them. The Pharisees of Jesus' day were what we would call good people. They probably kept the law better than any Jews ever had. But with that goodness came a pride and contentment which closed them to the further creation God wished to bring about within them. Their goodness brought an end to God's creative work in their lives.

In order for God to continue his creation within us, we can never lose sight of our desperate need to be transformed. We need to live in a constant state of repentance in order to be open to God's grace and the kind of transformation he wants to bring about within us. In order to live in such a state of repentance, we need to continually see our shadow or dark side—our need for continual grace and mercy because of the sin in our lives.

Of course, like our idea of the good, our idea of sin and evil is also all-too-human as well. What God sees as sin is separation from his purpose for our lives. That purpose is that his creation would continue in our lives and we would be made into the image of his son. Our separation from that purpose is the sin that keeps us from the abundant good God has for us, and it is that sin from which comes all manner of evil. We, however, for the most part, do

not see sin and evil in that way. We imagine that our sins are only those evils that our culture tells us are not good, but our real sin is our resistance to the great transformation God wants to bring about within us. This is the deeper sin for which we need to repent. Our sin is that we want so much less than what God has for us and we insist that our pitiful idea of what is good for us is better than what God has for us.

We need to surrender our idea of goodness and take on God's idea. If we fail to do so, heaven will not be very heavenly. The Medieval philosopher, John Scotus Erigena made the rather outlandish claim that everyone went to heaven, but many did not like it. His point was that unless we are changed and made like God, especially in regard to our idea of the good, to be eternally in God's presence will be more of a hell than a heaven.

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**Roger Beckwith** has taught liturgy at Tyndale Hall, Bristol, and Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He is a vice-President of the Church Society and the Prayer Book Society.

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*BibleWorks 6:*

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*Logos Bible Software Series X*

Biblical Languages Supplement, 2003

Reviewed by David Parker

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and

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## Book Reviews

ERT (2004) 28:2, 178-181

**BibleWorks 6: Software for  
Biblical Exegesis and Research**

BibleWorks: Norfolk, VA, 2003  
[www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com)

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

BibleWorks 6 aims to be the premier software package for serious exegetical work. Its resources, power and flexibility bring it very close to achieving that goal. In contrast to some other packages, it

does not set out to be an e-book library, so there are only a limited number of additional resources besides the biblical texts and lexicons. The major unlocked reference works are mostly old—*Easton's Bible Dictionary* (1897), *International Standard Bible Dictionary* (1st edition, 1915), *Faussett Bible Dictionary* (ca 1888). Robertson's *Word Pictures* is also 70 years old.

This is in strong contrast to the lexicons which include recent ones such as Friberg, Louw-Nida, UBS (Barclay Newman), along with old classics like

Brown Driver and Briggs, Liddell-Scott and Thayers. But the authoritative Greek and Hebrew lexicons—Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG, 3rd ed.) and Koehler-Baumgartner-Stamm are available in BibleWorks 6 only as optional extras. This is because of heavy royalty fees imposed by the original publishers, and it pushes the standard US price of \$300 up to \$500 (if both are bought together)! Yet without them, the package is severely limited since it has no full modern Greek or Hebrew lexicon. This problem is further exaggerated by the lack of a theological word book for the NT, although for the OT, there is at least the 1980 edition of *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Harris, Archer, Waltke).

Other unlocked references included in Version 6 include *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* (Mark Futato, 2003), Burton's *Syntax of Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek* (1898) Gesenius' *Hebrew Grammar*, Matthew Henry's *Commentary* and the works of Josephus (completely parsed and lemmatised). With this version, BibleWorks is changing its previous policy by providing more add-on modules for the convenience of users. These now include full biblical language grammars (Futato, Wallace and Waltke) and the Qumram manuscripts, at competitive prices.

Since the package offers limited help with reference works, its practical value for the user depends on its Bible version and translations—and this is where it certainly excels. It contains more than 25 Greek (NT and LXX), Hebrew, Aramaic and Latin texts (most in morphologically tagged versions) including the standard academic and key historic editions; English translations (e.g., historic ones—Tyndale, Bishops KJV, and modern—NRSV, NIV, ESV etc, including

Apocrypha)—25 in all, and over 50 national (mostly European) versions. Despite this first-rate list of biblical texts, Tischendorf's is the only critical apparatus available.

This is an impressive collection which would be extremely useful for those who can make use of such a wealth of resources, although some users may prefer to look elsewhere for a less expensive package with fewer resources. Yet the BibleWorks databases can be accessed and searched extremely quickly and easily in a great variety of ways on both the text and morphology, with the results being displayed flexibly and available for copying readily to other applications. Only a fraction of the possibilities can be noted here, but more details are available from the web page [www.bibleworks.com](http://www.bibleworks.com)

The user interface can be accessed at three levels—beginner, standard or power, and there is also a graphical advanced search engine for complex work. The screen is divided into three basic sections—the command centre where the search parameters are entered, the results window, and the text editor (which also supports Greek and Hebrew fonts and multiple documents). There are several further sub-windows for displaying the text, morphological information, lists of verses and references and statistics; some of these windows could be labelled more fully for ease of use, especially when learning. The functions can be called (in normal Windows fashion) from the main menu, icons, the status bar, and also from powerful context menus. Results of searches, biblical text, contents of lexical and other data can be copied easily to other programs and printed, and in addition, other reports can be generated and passed on for further editing. Verse, word and references lists can also be exported and further manipulated.

The text can be searched for word, phrase and reference with full Boolean, wildcard and proximity conditions, in simple or compound form, and can be displayed (with or without morphology as required) in browse form allowing continuous scrolling of the passage and in parallel versions (columns or rows); the morphology or other notes, and lexicon (selectable) entries are displayed when the cursor is moved over individual words, making in-depth understanding easy; this feature also includes access to the paradigms for the words selected.

Any number of versions can be displayed as well as the search version itself, and searches can helpfully be conducted across all versions of the same language. Words in Greek and Hebrew can be searched according to their particular form or by their root with a mouse click, and searches can be limited to any section of the Bible, down to a few verses. There is also a separate user-friendly morphological search engine. Searching with Strong's numbers also adds extra power. Basic statistics of every search (number of hits and verses) are displayed by default, but in addition, results can be graphically displayed in advanced forms, and printed and copied in a variety of formats allowing for easy inspection of their distribution and frequency. Multiple and additional windows can be opened to preserve results for easier comparison and reference, and fully configurable clone versions can be opened.

All required fonts are included, with automatic selection of keyboards for the language of the text being used. The keyboard layouts in the various languages can be displayed on-screen for assistance and learning. Accents and vowel points are fully supported and can be used optionally in searches. All the books can be browsed as well as searched. Bible

translators will be pleased to note that they can add their own versions (using an in-built compiler) which can then be searched in the same way as the rest.

Besides the main functions there are other helpful features such as Bible outlines and Gospel synopsis (editable), a synopsis tool and user-defined notes. Of particular interest for study and teaching purposes is the facility for creating and editing graphical timelines which can be customised, printed and copied to other programs. Just as useful are two new easy to use features for this version—sentence diagramming and vocabulary flashcards (including audio recording for pronunciation drill). Another bonus feature is the ability to highlight the selected text and search results with colour, bold or other formatting for easy recognition, while colour can also be used to show differences between more than one set of parallel texts.

BibleWorks comes on one CD, and installs easily (customisable, and with network support). There is another CD for the instructional videos which are clear, practical and well-paced (although they annoyingly loop continuously). The videos can be run separately or called from the context-sensitive help screens. There is also a 400-page printed manual, which contains not only tutorials and reference material, but technical details of importance for serious users such as full copyright and publication information and morphology codes. Help and updates are available without charge to registered users online, by email and phone. The program is fully configurable and provides so many options that a 'restore default settings' option would be useful. System requirements are modest, apart from storage space for the databases.

Overall, it is highly commendable as a tool for in-depth concordance type study of the

biblical text and morphology, but the value of the reference works is limited.

ERT (2004) 28:2, 181-182

**Logos Bible Software Series X  
Biblical Languages Supplement,  
2003**

Logos Research Systems Inc.  
Bellingham, WA, USA

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

Logos Research Systems have released a further module for their current Logos Bible Software Series X (see ERT (2003) 27:3, pp. 272-275). The 'Biblical Languages Supplement' is aimed especially at scholarly users and includes several new features as well as a number of additional resources. It also includes an update of the main engine (to Version 2) and fixes for some of the earlier resources. The morphological search window is now easier to use.

The new resources include the Friberg Greek NT and Lexicon, the Barclay Newman lexicon (the print edition is familiar as a companion to the UBS Greek Testament) and an LXX lexicon. There are also a number of historic Greek texts (such as Scrivener's TR, Stephen's TR, Westcott and Hort and Elzivir) which will be of interest to some students. Burton's Moods and Tenses is included, as is the enhanced Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew lexicon and Davidson's Hebrew syntax. Of more specialised interest are three volumes of Egyptian literature and two old Syrian gospels and the Peshitta along with a Syriac lexicon. A particularly useful addition is the 'parallel passages' module which includes Robertson's *Harmony of the Gospels*, Aland's *Synopsis of*

*the Four Gospels*, the Eusebian Canons, OT quotes in the NT, some Old Testament parallels and other resources which provide synopses of various parts of the Bible.

The supplement contains some useful add-ins to improve functionality, mostly by exploiting the graphics to produce helpful visualisations of the data. One of the most interesting of these is the 'verb river' which allows the user to display a graph of the use different verb forms throughout a passage or book—e.g., the occurrence of imperatives, or the use of the first person, thereby making clear changes in the nature of the text.

Differences between versions can also now be displayed by a similar 'river' and by plotting an X-Y cluster graph to show the variations. Ordinary searches can also be graphed to show the distribution of hits over the whole or portion of the Bible selected or in a large variety of other ways (such as the ratio of hits to words, verses or chapters in a book) to give statistical correlations.

All of these features should help in gaining a better picture of the text and a clearer and faster understanding of the data if they are used with discernment. Similarly useful is the morphological filter which enables words matching a given morphology (say, all the optative verbs, or all the prepositions) to be colour highlighted for easy recognition. Of far less value is the 'summarising filter' (now part of the new 'Visual Filters') which simply highlights a given percentage of a text, but the results do not appear to be very reliable. Other bonuses are the module which allows the user to draw sentence diagrams to display grammatical structures, and a graphical query editor to use instead of the normal Windows interface.

The extra resources now available and the additional features in this module when coupled with the Scholar's Library,

and the vast (and rapidly expanding) array of e-books available by extra purchase, make a powerful package which should be attractive to academics and students. Most of the graphical features should be particularly useful in classroom situations. Users will need to weigh up the cost benefit of the additional (special) price of US\$159 of this module. More details: [www.logos.com/bls](http://www.logos.com/bls)

ERT (2004) 28:2, 182-184

**Mary: A Catholic-Evangelical  
Debate**

by Dwight Longenecker and  
David Gustafson

Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003  
ISBN 1-58743-072-X  
pb pp 240 bibliog indices  
and

**Blessed One: Protestant  
Perspectives on Mary**

edited by Beverly Roberts  
Gaventa, Cynthia L Rigby

Louisville, Westminster John Knox,  
2002  
ISBN 0-664-22438-5  
pp 158 pb

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

With continuing emphasis on devotion to Mary in parts of the church, it is not surprising that some of the steady flow of books on the topic (said to exceed 2000 in the 20th century!) are addressed to Protestant, and even evangelical, audiences. This review considers two recent such examples. The first is an interesting attempt to find agreement between strongly contrasting positions. It consists of a dialogue between two former Bob Jones University friends who reconnected

after about twenty years—one, David Gustafson (a trial lawyer in the US Justice Department), has remained within his conservative context but the other, Dwight Longenecker (former minister and now freelance writer in UK), has moved on through Anglicanism (as an Oxford-trained priest) to Roman Catholicism. The resulting friendly discussion (not always equally balanced) covers all the major topics in the debate in 12 chapters—from the biblical data about Mary, through virginity, assumption, veneration and the rosary, to Mary and redemption and Mary as a means of unity.

The personalised style of the presentation does help to reduce the tension, but there is little substantively new in the arguments (although there are many helpful examples of early church and contemporary views). So the value of the book is mainly on the nature of the debate and the perspective of each of the proponents. While the exchange is usually fairly robust, the evangelical is overall the weaker of the two. His frequent comment that he sees no reason to follow particular aspects of the Catholic view is altogether too gentle and quite inadequate in the light of the undisguised zeal of his erstwhile friend to 'share the treasure of the Catholic tradition' that he has found to be 'invigorating, true and life-changing'.

The result of the exercise to find common ground is largely a failure. The earlier sections on the biblical and historical data reveal the usual insoluble hermeneutical problems as each one places his own interpretation on the texts, mostly resulting in a stand off. The later discussion of wider theological matters shows how far apart the two are—for the evangelical it is a question of the uniqueness of Christ as Saviour and Lord, and what the biblical text permits and requires, while for the Catholic, it is church teaching, the ancient

traditions, the consensus of history, and the development of implicit doctrine. Of particular note is the 'rhetorical method' used on the Catholic side, characterised by the evangelical: 'a Marian title [for example], defensible in a *minimalist* sense, is accepted as a *permissible* pious opinion .... eventually, though, the title is defined as *binding* dogma, and it *develops* well beyond its minimal sense' (p. 196).

Both proponents concede the severe limitations of the interchange—from the Catholic side, so much of the material is the subject of papal teaching and has been enshrined as dogma, thus putting it beyond debate (although discussion might produce better mutual understanding). This simply underlines the difficulties of trying to reconcile not just divergent understandings of a particular belief, but entire systems of theology, church and spirituality. So there is little hope of achieving the aim of the book, despite the Catholic view expressed in the last chapter that Mary is a means of unity and that Protestants could begin to enter into this experience through the use of the rosary.

This leads to the second book which offers new approaches to Mary specifically for Protestants, based on some insightful theology, exegesis and experience. It is a collection of eleven essays from widely different perspectives, although all of them are from the United States and all but two by women. In the opening section, 'Encountering Mary', there is Katherine Sakenfeld's chapter on 'Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah: The company Mary keeps in Matthew's Gospel' and Elizabeth Johnson, 'Family values in Mark', both of which highlight surprisingly unconventional perspectives on Mary. The paper by Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, in Part 2, 'Living Mary', focusing on 'Proud Mary: contextual constructions of a divine diva' reinforces a positive view of Mary's confi-

dent self-image, in contrast with the commonly encountered model of a self-effacing, submissive person.

From another angle, Nora Lozana-Diaz' reflection on how Protestant women in Mexico need to take account of the widely pervasive impact of the Virgin of Guadalupe may be less directly relevant to many readers. However, like the previous book, it does uncover some of the personal and cultural aspects of the topic which evangelicals with their focus on doctrine are often likely to miss. Other chapters refer to Mary at the cross (Beverly Roberts Gaventa—one of the editors), Mary and motherhood (Bonnie Miller-McLemore), 'What Mary has to say about God's bare goodness' (Lois Malcolm) and 'Mary and the artistry of God' (Cynthia Rigby—the other editor).

However, two chapters are of particular value in developing a deliberate Protestant approach to Mary and in breaking the deadlock so noticeable in the first book. In Part 3, 'Bearing Mary', Daniel Migliore proposes a 'Reformed Understanding of Mary', which offers a comprehensive theology centring on the gospel as a transforming power, God's grace and call, and the biblical witness. He portrays Mary essentially as a 'woman of faith' and a fellow believer with other Christians, thus providing a framework which counters the larger questions raised by the Catholic side in the first book, especially the strong tendency to progressively exalt her status. This approach is also asserted strongly in a rather different type of paper from Nancy Duff, 'Mary, the servant of the Lord: Christian vocation at the manger and the cross'. As the introduction points out: 'To elevate Mary to a status beyond ordinary personhood is to abdicate the very hope of the incarnation'.

The opening essay by Joel B. Green,



'Blessed is she who believed: Mary, curious exemplar in Luke's narrative' offers a way of dealing with the hermeneutical impasse. Using the techniques of narrative exegesis, Green interprets Mary as an 'accessible exemplar' whose story functions as a window on God's kingdom and the challenge it offers to conventional attitudes. The point about Mary is that she seems to more 'at home in this curious world of God's reign than in the world inhabited by others' and she seems 'readily to embrace the patterns and rhythms of God's kingdom'. The narrative then serves, says Green, to assault 'the theological imaginations of its readers' and 'invites the conversion of the imagination, together with reformed allegiances and dispositions' with the context of 'the newly found understanding of God's purpose in the good news'.

*Blessed One* therefore succeeds in offering 'new ways' to think about Mary from a Protestant point of view, with the conviction that 'Mary is who we are'—'a person of faith who does not always understand but who seeks to put her trust in God.' She is a model of discipleship who calls us to a deeper and more radical devotion, rather than the Catholic method of seeking ever increasing ways of exalting her.

ERT (2004) 28:2, 184-186

**Il Popolo dei Discepoli:  
Contributi per un'ecclesiologia  
evangelica**

Pietro Bognesi  
L. De Chirico (ed.)

Caltanissetta, IT: Alfa e Omega, 2002  
176pp + bibl.

*Reviewed by Mark Hutchinson  
Southern Cross College, Sydney, Australia*

There is probably no more pressing issue

for evangelical theologians than the form of the church. For most of their history, evangelicals have been a minority within larger church traditions, quite often acting as a ginger group or a renewal movement. From the end of the Second World War, however, neo-evangelicalism expanded globally, filling the vacuum of declining liberal-modernist hegemony and (if we include the Pentecostals) becoming the second largest Christian movement on earth. In many areas, they have *become* the church, while in others (such as Italy) they represent a significant minority vitally connected to movements which majority traditions have to take into account. 'What is the Church?' thus becomes a central question, particularly as evangelical churches face defections to more coherent ecclesial traditions such as Orthodoxy.

Its contribution towards answering this question is both the strength of this collection of essays by senior Italian evangelical theologian, Pietro Bognesi, and a pointer towards a weakness in much of evangelical ecclesiology which must eventually be dealt with. There is probably no more important contemporary question, but the reasons for the question being asked are wider than strictly theological.

This collection makes a valuable contribution to evangelical thought in Italy, a community which has struggled over the years to define itself against the pervasive cultural significance of 'The Church' in that society. As the concept of a collection suggests, the contribution is in part in Bognesi himself—a long life lived in the same direction has contributed significantly to the available theological material in Italian. Such an experience has seen close relations between Italian evangelicals and pressure groups for liberty of religion in Italy, an emphasis which emerges from time to time in the book

with regard to Bolognesi's interest in how the evangelical church lives in civil society, and in an interest in sociological issues.

The editor of the collection, Leonardo De Chirico, properly begins with Bolognesi's account of the church as a discipling community, based around the teaching of their rabboni, Jesus, who, when two are three are gathered (Mt. 18:20), teaches them the true meaning of the Scriptures: 'La chiesa non deve diventare una scuola in sé, ma deve avere chiara la necessità del discepolato e favorire questo aspetto' (p. 52). This is neither surprising nor new, but it takes little imagination to see how resonant it is with the Italian situation.

The collection throughout shows a European and reformed evangelical breadth—influences flow in from Francis Schaeffer at l'Abri, from Rookmaaker, Dooyeweerd, Tillich, and many others, writing in German, English, French, and Italian. So theology is never simply intellectual, but must imbed itself in culture: 'il popolo di Dio deve essere educato ad essere un corpo culturale con una sua specificità' (p. 53). Here is an awareness that the church can never assume culture—as many American evangelicals do—or just seek to defend it, but must seek to build it. Unfortunately, there is not enough space in this collection for Bolognesi to develop this theme, leaving his 'objectivity building' reflections to depend on assertion. There is little doubt that behind the assertion, however, is the capacity, though not the time, for development, and it is a task that he commends to future generations of young Italian evangelicals (p. 60).

It is this sort of summarizing which creates issues for the book *qua* book. Bolognesi depends on reformed critiques of such movements as Pietism, for instance, from which a later and broader

reading of the current literature on Pietism might have delivered him. Consequently, his defence of the need for a creed creeps close to denying the cultural broad view adopted earlier in the book (see e.g. pp. 64-5). Likewise, the movement from 'Word of God' as Christ earlier in the book to 'Word of God' as text is not developed in sufficient detail, but is rather asserted, an underplayed strength in Bolognesi's thought, given the centrality of the Discipeler to the disciples. Indeed, the lack of resolution of this tension creates a sense of dualism which the earlier holism does not dispel. In the end, Christianity ends up in doctrine, and non-creedal religion is empty religion: 'poiché l'uomo non può vivere la propria vita senza pensarla.' (p.86, 91-2).

This is fine when 'two or three are gathered', but as the author recognizes later in the book, it works in larger contexts only when pastors, elders and believers all stick within their roles. The assumption that they will smacks a little of enlightenment faith in education ('se retamente intesa', p.94) which allows one to overlook the power of fallen nature, the obscurity of human language, and the unfortunate record of history.

True Christians truly following the Truth will no doubt achieve a true manifestation of the church, but the lack of ready examples continues to give one pause even after this fine account of the theory. Creeds and the demands of 'order' should not become law, but be indicators of Christ—'amen' say we all. But the lack of a role provided here for creativity from the assembly itself and for the movement of the Spirit—which are the recognition that our intellectual formulas and comprehensions of Scripture are not identical with the One who is the truth—obviously tends to recreate the very passivity which Bolognesi strains to avoid. It creates the

situation in which (where the Word written is the dominating core of ecclesial liturgy) the cultural position of the interpreter is inevitably exalted, and the question becomes not (as Luther notes) 'What must a man do to be saved?' but (as Bolognesi notes) 'What is the truth?'

Having begun by championing cultural holism, Bolognesi almost overbalances in later chapters by dismissing such cultural critics as Thomas Kuhn as mere relativists (p.117). In search of objectivity, the 'thingness' of the Word almost threatens to occlude its 'person-ness' (see p. 120). Almost — but not quite, as his energetic faith bubbles to the fore in rapturous prose praising the Word come down from God. He finishes with a flourish: the Word written is the final authority of the church, but as a way of releasing all the ministries of the church 'nella speranza, e non nella paura, per la certezza del trionfo del Signore Gesù Cristo, che è il fondamento di tutte le autorità' (p. 138).

Almost all of these seeming faults are by-products of compression and selection, which is why the book is subtitled '*contributions* toward an evangelical ecclesiology'. On the whole, I found it moving and captivating, not so much for its originality as for its ability to synthesize the key issues and responses of evangelicals towards a culture and a world in which they find themselves pilgrims. This sort of 'otherness' about Italian evangelicals makes them a valuable witness to the faith in ways which speak back into the complacency of evangelicals elsewhere. They live close enough to the edge of the North Atlantic axis to see and experience a harsher and less comforting world, a world in which the value of God's gift of the church is seen more clearly. I commend this collection to evangelical thinkers interested in looking over the edge.

ERT (2004) 28:2, 186-187

## John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety

Elsie Anne McKee, ed.

New York: Paulist Press, 2001

ISBN 0809105411

Hb pp. 360

*Reviewed by Jeffrey Gros*

The greatest theologian of the Reformation era, John Calvin, is seldom celebrated for his contribution to the spiritual life. While his understanding and formulations of the Christian faith and his repertory of ecclesiastical and personal disciplines form the foundation of much of Protestant prayer, worship and ascetic life, he is remembered more for the religion of the head than the religion of the heart.

However, the Geneva reformer's contribution to western piety goes far beyond the community he shepherded and renewed. We can be grateful to the editor and translator of these important texts for both situating Calvin in the tradition of spiritual fathers in western Christianity and for providing resources for our own prayer and reflection.

The book includes an important general introduction of almost forty pages, outlining Calvin's life and ministry; a description of the texts in this volume and notes about their translation; and most importantly, situates Calvin in the spiritual tradition. The Reformed tradition has been a somewhat allergic to the language of 'spirituality' as alien to its understanding of the Reformation understanding of justification. However, Calvin is no less attentive to evangelical piety, worship or the disciplines of Christian living than Methodists or Catholics who are much more at home with the vocabulary. The

editor outlines how Reformed spirituality is integral to both Calvin's life and his contribution.

The texts are arranged in five sections which correspond to dimensions of 'spirituality' as explicated in the introduction. Autobiographical selections include letters that disclose his own internal relationship with God and with the Christian faith, and a preface to his commentary on the psalms which provide an insight into his spiritual life. The second selection of texts relates to his theological orientations on piety, faith and the church. Part three includes sections on the psalms, Sunday worship including the Lord's Supper, baptismal liturgy and weekly prayer, and on Passion Week. Part four covers prayer, with his exposition on the Lord's Prayer, family devotions, sermons on prayer, and prayers selected from his lectures. Finally, there is a section on piety, ethics, pastoral guidance and Christian discipleship.

In addition to the texts, introduction and editorial notes, there is an excellent bibliography, three indexes and a Preface by the noted Calvin scholar Brian Gerrish. These texts will enhance the personal, spiritual life of those who use them to supplement their biblical reflection, and will enrich the library of the scholar attentive to the Reformation, spirituality or the pastoral life.

We live in a time when psychology threatens to displace biblical spirituality as the source of tools for growth and development even among Christians. In some pulpits self help can even supplant the preaching of law and gospel, justification and sanctification. The rich Christocentric spirituality of John Calvin, relying on the sovereignty of God, attentive to human sinfulness provides a rich resource for Christian preaching and pastoral guidance. Our prayer life, approach to mission

and common worship can only be enriched by nourishment on the writings of this giant in the Christian tradition.

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### Changing Values: How to Find Moral Truth in Modern Times

David J. Attwood

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998

ISBN 0-8536-4806-9

Pb pp 208

### Written Upon the Heart: The 10 Commandments for Today's Christian

Anthony J. Tomasino

Kregel, Grand Rapids, 2001

ISBN 0825438470

Pb pp 208

*Reviewed by Gordon Preece*

*Ridley College Centre for Applied Christian Ethics, Melbourne, Australia*

At the time of writing, David Atwood was lecturer in Christian Ethics at Trinity College, Bristol. Anthony Tomasino is a musician, pastor and Old Testament scholar. Both are well-equipped for the task they set themselves. These two books seem to be pitched at a similar level, that of the thoughtful Christian, possibly of undergraduate level up, though Attwood's undergraduate may be a theological student. While both are Evangelical, they take different (more complementary than contradictory) approaches to the task of providing moral guidance for today's Christian.

Attwood begins with the general problem of values in an increasingly complex and relativistic world. While noting the problems of such language which can easily turn subjective, and I would add, consumerist, he uses it as a contact point

and seeks to anchor it in an objective moral order. Facing several issues of moral complexity—the meaning of moral categories, the clash of duties, moral failure, the obscurities of human motivation and new moral issues raised by technology, he still argues that a moral order can be found in God's purposes and rules. This is spelt out in terms of Christian love, further defined in terms of God's covenant faithfulness, forgiveness, God's preference for the weak and poor, and God's actions.

This biblical outline is then expanded through a short but neat historical survey of various theological treatments of love by Augustine, Aquinas, Barth and so on. Attwood steers a judicious course between antinomianism and relativism in the case study of truth-telling. He finds help from his main mentors and the best Protestant ethicists of recent times, the Methodist Paul Ramsey, on whom he did his now published PhD work *Paul Ramsey's Political Ethics*, the Evangelical Anglican Oliver O'Donovan and the Anabaptist Stanley Hauerwas.

For Attwood, God's purposes are spelt out not only in love and laws, but also in a good created order that provides continuities and regularities, built-in purposes and open-ended freedom and responsibility. He next links creation and covenant love as the two key themes of Christian ethics, borrowing from Barth. Barth is a great one to borrow from, but I wonder whether his tendency to collapse the created order into a personalist Christological ethics of covenant love is somewhat limiting for the ethics of work, technology, and ecology.

In my favourite chapter, ch. 10 'The Demand for Perfection', Attwood links creation and covenant ethics to the Sermon on the Mount's perfectionistic virtue ethic. Like Stanley Hauerwas, he links

vision with virtue with insightful comments on the role of sight in relation to lustful sexuality (Mt. 5:29) and materialism (Mt. 6:22-23). Having a vision for the kingdom and God's perfect character shapes our character even when we do not see completely clearly and when the kingdom is not yet complete. Fortunately there is forgiveness as well as moral rigour in the New Testament, as Ch. 11 shows in a well-balanced way.

Attwood surprisingly nearly concludes, rather than commences, with chapters on some of the key sources or authorities for ethics—the Bible and conscience. Each chapter is helpful in itself, but seems misplaced. The last chapter, on Christian Moral Witness in public life in relation to contentious issues like abortion, divorce, Sunday trading and ecological concern is useful, but a little short on each of those issues. This is a thoughtful, useful and accessible book, but the strange structure would not lend itself for use as a text for theological ethics courses.

Tomasino's book is not as comprehensive an ethical overview as Attwood's, being confined to the Decalogue, though it does provide something of a helpful biblical theology of the Law and each commandment. His chapter on 'What are the 10 Commandments?' is particularly helpful. He helpfully distinguishes them as decrees, rather than the judgments or 'if-then' case laws of Ex. 21-23. Without prescribed penalties, the decalogue alone would be useless as a law code. 'Rather, it's better to think of them as vows—vows defining the special relationship between God and his people. They are more like marital vows, vows of permanently committed relationship' (p. 33-34).

The rest of the book treats each commandment carefully and insightfully in the context of the whole of Scripture. The application to contemporary situations is

apt and challenging and the concluding questions after each commandment make this an ideal study book for small groups and adult Sunday School classes. The concluding chapter on 'The Invisible Ally' shows the central role of the Holy Spirit inscribing God's law on our hearts as a helpful antidote to both legalism and antinomianism. As a member of the Australian Anglican Church, which now almost never uses the Ten Commandments in the Communion service as a preface to confession, I would heartily recommend this book as an antidote to the extremes of relativism and legalism in the church today.

ERT (2004) 28:2, 189-190

**The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation**  
**Margaret M. Mitchell**  
 Louisville: Westminster Knoxvill  
 Press, 2002  
 ISBN 0664225101  
 PB pp. 600

*Reviewed by Ray Laird, Bible College of South Australia, Adelaide.*

Every reader of John Chrysostom's homilies will be aware of the deep regard he possessed for the apostle Paul. It is not long in any of his works before reference is made to some feature of the apostle, be it his attitude, his conduct, his godliness or his expertise as the teacher *par excellence*. It is evident that Chrysostom had attempted to become saturated in Paul's thought and to live in a way that reflected his apostolic hero. As such he stands as an outstanding interpreter of Pauline interpretation in the early Church. Yet there has existed a great vacuum of writing on Chrysostom as an interpreter of

Paul. Margaret Mitchell has brilliantly filled this vacuum.

My first impression was that this is a book for the Patristic specialist. It is a detailed exploration in the vast corpus of Chrysostom of passages that refer to Paul from which Mitchell builds portraits of the apostle, portraits which she claims Chrysostom himself was painting. The great bulk of the book is devoted to this portraiture, these attempts of Chrysostom to bring the dead apostle to life and have him present at the reading of his letters; an exegetical purpose was in mind. This is done with great expertise. Mitchell demonstrates that Chrysostom was employing, or more properly adapting, the encomiastic form of late antiquity's rhetorical culture in this venture.

Portraits embrace the 'miniatures' contained in sixty-five epithets applied by Chrysostom to Paul, to the extended portraiture of Paul's body, his soul and his external circumstances. This three-fold form of vivid life-size mosaics is in conformity with the rhetorical model of the day.

As suggested, Mitchell's scholarship is evident at every turn. The book is exhaustively researched, the notes are voluminous and informative. The appendices include translations of seven homilies 'In Praise of Paul' and plates of Chrysostom. The bibliography is extensive and the indices cover sources quoted from Old and New Testaments, Ancient Greek and Latin authors and Modern authors. The book opens with a note on the sources and a review of previous work on Chrysostom. All in all this is a work of genuine scholarship.

It is the last chapter, 'The Art of Pauline Interpretation,' that jolts the reader to an awareness that Mitchell's work has a wider significance. It is here that she surveys the various portraits of Paul that have been constructed in the history of

the church. The section on the Late Twentieth century is extremely perceptive and reminds the reader that all such portraits have an exegetical purpose as it was with Chrysostom. Mitchell advises us to examine them to determine the extent they reflect our culture rather than the biblical one they purport to do. There are other critical issues raised by Mitchell: the disposition of the reader for the author, Paul; the task of rhetorical presentation in order to have people listen to Paul in the face of the lure of other media and attractions; and the issue of Pauline authority itself. Finally, Mitchell raises the issue, or nest of issues, contained in the 'death of the author' debates. It is Mitchell's contention that Chrysostom amply illustrates the point that 'the separation of the author from his writings is simply impossible'. This not only a highly informative but also a provocative work.

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**Theology after Ricouer: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology**

Dan R. Stiver

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2001

ISBN 0664222439

Hb pp. 272

*Reviewed by Ray Laird, Bible College of South Australia, Adelaide.*

Stiver has gifted the world with a book that guides the reader through the main strands of the thinking of one of the premier philosophers of the twentieth century, Paul Ricouer. Given the difficulty that readers of Ricouer experience with his writings, due to their diversity on one hand and the challenge of their ideas on the other, here is a welcome guide indeed.

Stiver has attempted an integration of Ricouer's work that endeavours to rescue what he sees as the central thrust from the wealth of the philosopher's wide-ranging corpus and then to use it as an integrative tool. Stiver identifies Ricouer's philosophy as a 'hermeneutical philosophy' because of its engagement with the interpretation of texts. Whilst there may be other claimants for a central motif in Ricouer's philosophy, it appears to this reviewer that Stiver has chosen well. It is for this grappling with the interpretative principles of texts, together with Ricouer's Christian faith and his particular life experience, that Stiver sees Ricouer's work as a rich post-modern resource for theological reflection.

The Introduction of the book is enough to raise one's level of interest. Stiver starts with a brief but perceptive analysis of the philosophical and theological currents of the twentieth century. In particular he gives a view of postmodernity that focuses on the challenges to theology, viz. a non-foundationalist epistemology, pluralism and praxis. In so doing he demonstrates how helpful is Ricouer's work in these areas. Along the way he lays to rest, thankfully, the myth that postmodernism embraces relativism as a major plank of its thought. From this base Stiver goes on to explore and explain Ricouer, in particular his work on language—including his hermeneutical arc, the surplus of meanings in a text, his approach to metaphor and narrative, and the problem of the conflict of interpretations. In all these areas Stiver is clear in his presentation yet apparently faithful to Ricouer's positions. He shows how Ricouer has been at the forefront of the post-modern operation of salvaging metaphor and narrative from the deserts of suspicion and abandonment of Enlightenment's univocal discourse, and

of restoring them to their central place in cognition as rich vehicles of holistic communication.

Stiver is careful to point to Hans-Georg Gadamer as a source for some of Ricouer's ideas in regard to hermeneutics. It was not that Ricouer merely repeats Gadamer, but that he builds upon his ideas and develops them much further. There are instances where Stiver thinks that Ricouer has not taken these ideas far enough. Thus an interesting feature of this book is the way in which Stiver builds upon Ricouer as Ricouer built upon Gadamer. A prime example of this is Stiver's refiguration of Ricouer's hermeneutical arc in which he (Stiver) deals with the tensions between the hermeneutical and mimetic arcs, a problem which Ricouer does not adequately address. Thus Stiver is seen to be not merely a recorder or an interpreter of Ricouer but a perceptive thinker in his own right.

This is a stimulating book. It is a must for all theologians and exegetes. One may not agree with all that is written therein, but one cannot but emerge the richer for the reading. If it only encourages some to delve into Ricouer it is of value. It certainly is a good guide to have in one's hand as that plunge is taken.

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**Preaching with Conviction: a connecting with Postmodern listeners**

Kenton C. Anderson

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001

ISBN 0-8254-2020-2

154pp Paper

*Reviewed by Garry Harris, Adelaide, South Australia.*

More than two decades ago Fred B. Craddock penned the work *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1978) which applauded story as a non-confrontational means of communicating the Christian message. Kenton Anderson has learned well from Craddock. In this volume we 'overhear' the conversation between two brothers as Jack Newman, a preacher, confides to his brother, Tom, the struggle he experiences attempting to proclaim the absolutes of God's word in a world of postmodern relativism. The author has artfully used this novella to engage us in a mystery that unfolds in the plot. Meanwhile he uses the conversation between the brothers to elaborate his homiletical theory.

Jack's dilemma has that disturbing 'ring of truth' for those who regularly embrace the pulpit. Some of the critical questions posed in the conversations are: Does truth exist?... Can truth be known? ... Can truth be told? (p. 21).

The postmodern ethos is also aptly described in a cryptic manner typical of coffee-shop conversation. "Works for me"....If nothing can be known for sure then all people really have left is pragmatism' (p. 30). The second statement that typifies the mood of the age is 'whatever'—a non-judgemental and tentative response. 'This all-purpose response allows the postmodernist to take any



direction that strikes their fancy or none at all' (p. 30).

The third statement suggested to epitomize postmodernism is 'who cares!'. The author suggests that this may be seen both as a statement and a question. As a statement it represents a brave new world, devil may care attitude. At a deeper level, it reflects the longing: 'Is there anyone out there who cares about me?' (p. 31).

Jack is gently given assistance in his dilemma about the authority of preaching by Henry, the retired former pastor of the church where Jack now ministers. In one quiet conversation Henry, who is a staunch supporter of his successor, affirms that self-revelation is intrinsic to God's nature. He states: 'The most amazing thing I know is that our God is a self-revealing God .... God speaks! He isn't silent!' (p. 43).

The author allows further gems to fall from the lips of this retired preacher. He gives him the lines that constitute a thoroughly comprehensive theological definition of preaching: 'Preaching is when human beings, created in God's image bear witness to the incarnate Christ as described in the inspired Scriptures, under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit' (p. 45). He then goes on to summarize: 'Preachers literally help people hear from God' (p. 45).

Kenton Anderson uses the fourth chapter of his work to articulate his homiletical theory. The occasion is a discussion between Jack and Tom of an article that Jack recently read about preaching (printed in Appendix A), as well as some of Jack's private musings.

Essentially the new approach Anderson is advocating may be summarized by four questions : So What?; What's what?; Yeah but...; and Now what? (p. 94). The

author elaborates upon each of these questions which symbolize the construction formula of this new sermon method.

'So What?' Typically such a question has been posed at the end of a sermon to facilitate application of the point of the sermon. In Anderson's model the sermon begins with a biblical story or another device that locates the congregation in the text which facilitates engagement of the auditor at an emotional level (pp. 87-90).

'What's what?' The driving assumption here is that: 'Listeners who are emotionally engaged in a message will be ready to hear the propositions of the message even if they're confrontational' (p. 90).

'Yeah but...' Recognizing that everyone is challenged by the Bible, Anderson suggests that the preacher use this conflict to engage listeners at a deeper level (pp. 93-4). 'Now what?' This aspires to create the environment in which the listener willingly embraces the changes required by scripture. The focus here is upon the volitional co-operation of the auditor (p. 96).

This work shows keen sensitivity to the fact that formerly, preaching has appealed too much to the mind. The author rightly notes that cognitive and affective appeal will more readily result in behavioural change (p. 91).

Doubtless, Anderson's crafting a fascinating story in which to couch his homiletical methodology is a clever and innovative approach. The difficulty in this work is that which is frequently experienced in narrative preaching. Too often the memory of a delightful story outlives the actual point the preacher is trying to make.

Preachers, and all concerned at the widening chasm between the institutional church and society should read this work.

## ABSTRACTS/INDEXING

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 121 South College Street (P.O. Box 215), Myerstown, PA 17067, USA, and in the Christian Periodical Index, P.O. Box 4, Cedarville, OH 45314, USA.

It is also indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Flr., Chicago, Illinois 60606-5834 USA, E-mail: atla@atla.com, Web: www.atla.com/

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