

Theme:  
Theology of the Heart

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# Evangelical Review of Theology

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Theology of the Heart

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# *Evangelical Review of Theology*

**EDITOR: DAVID PARKER**

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# Editorial

Our opening thematic article this issue is an attractive (but perhaps startling) sample of a different way to do theology—as the author, Valdir Steuernagel, a leading Brazilian theologian, says, ‘It’s a pity that poetry has been removed from theology.’ He believes that theology ‘can say some things and manage some words. But there are many things it does not know and does not understand. That, however, is not a problem, because its heart has to be much bigger than its mouth. Good theology is, therefore, the theology of the great heart.’

From there we can reflect more adequately on an issue that has taken fresh importance in these tense opening years of the millennium, the nature of God in the light of evil, the classical topic of theodicy. As Tim Meadowcroft of New Zealand points out, there is a danger of ‘surrendering the doctrine of the Lord’s sovereignty’ and instead adopting some kind of ‘paranoid world-view’. His study of key biblical themes is a welcome starting point for understanding the sovereignty of God.

An equally stimulating study by Brian Edgar of Australia sets out to tackle another key issue in our frenetic lifestyle—time within the perspective of Christian stewardship. Larry J. McKinney (USA) provides in summary form some practical ideas for discipling and teaching students in the postmodern setting.

Finally, we range much more wide-

ly with two articles on Christian life and witness in the public world. Bruce J. Clemenger of Canada describes in detail the theory and practical aspects of the way the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has engaged successfully with the political process in a liberal democracy, especially in regard to questions about the sanctity of human life, care for the vulnerable, family integrity and religious freedom.

Similarly, John Langlois (Guernsey) speaks more personally out of years of active involvement in the political scene in realistic yet optimistic terms of what can be expected of the Christian legislator. He calls for a fearless witness of Christian truth on the part of the church, backed by rigorous intellectual debate in all realms of knowledge in order to win the hearts and minds of the community. Only then can there be any hope that the efforts of Christian politicians will have wide and lasting impact. This, like all the other papers, serves to emphasize the fact that theology, according to our thematic article, is done ‘in the communion of the chosen ones and in the agony of vocation experience’.

**David Parker, Editor**

# Doing Theology with an Eye on Mary

Valdir R. Steuernagel

**Keywords:** The Magnificat, church, rationality, communion, identification, grace, revelation, cross, redemptive history, discipleship

Changing with age is not very easy. It gets harder and harder, since ageing is not only a process of growing consistent, it's also a process of growing hard, hardness of thought, of behaviour and of habits. So, I am a kind of a person theologically used to a one-chord song, a theologian of few texts. Texts that I can't let go,

and texts that won't let go of me: this character, Jonah; the disciples on their way to Emmaus; the sending of the seventy disciples; Jesus' program presented at Nazareth's synagogue. These are some of the notes of my *samba*. Just an instant of distraction, and there I am, 'playing' again one of these passages...

Actually, that's what I am doing right now. The character I've invited today is one of these persons that have talked to me and challenged me a lot. Especially when it comes to being available and being simple. I set her in front of us so that we can be ministered to by her. So that she can tell us about the theological nature and process. About doing theology. About this hermeneutics of life that can't get rid of God. About this indispensable invasion of God in our life which will determine our steps forever... although not always in the direction we would choose.

In this text I bring Mary to your mind and mine. Mary, this theologian that, as a woman, opens her womb to God. Her womb, *the deepest place where life is born*. A woman

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who struggles intensively in her search to understand her son and not to experience her faith in despair. A woman who cries in rebellious confusion, but still goes to the foot of her son's cross. A woman who does theology as life goes on. A woman who can't help thinking her faith based on her vocation, and whose vocation determines her theology. A woman whose options in life form the best chapter of a vital theology.

Mary, the woman theologian, sees her life from the perspective of God's history with his people. That's why she sings, and that's why she dances. And this is the subject of her beautiful *Magnificat* (Lk. 2:46-56). Let's go back to what happened with her. Hear what she says, try to understand the frame in which her life happens. Let's simply go back to the Bible texts that speak of this woman called Mary.

### A Listening Exercise

*And so it all began... (Lk. 1:26-38)*

*In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'*

*Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will*

*be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.'*

*'How will this be', Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?'*

*The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God!'*

*'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her.*

*Elizabeth became a pregnancy partner (Lk. 1:39-45)*

*At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!'*

*And Mary did theology... (Lk. 1:46-56)*

*And Mary said:*

*'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.'*

*Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.*

*But then she got confused... (Lk. 2:41-52)*

*Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to*

*them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and nature, and in favor with God and men.*

*It wasn't always easy (Jn. 2:1-8)*

*On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.' 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from seventy-five to one hundred and fifteen litres. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so.*

*Things got worse (Mk. 3:31-35)*

*Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and*

*they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'*

At the cross Mary felt embraced (Jn. 19:25-27)

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son.' And to the disciple, 'here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.*

*Life goes on, and discipleship begins (Acts 1:14)*

*They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*

### **Theology Comes at the Second Hour**

To do theology is our business. It reflects our effort in knowing God. Our eagerness in talking about God. Theology systematizes our knowledge about God: his person in the Trinity, his creating and redeeming action, his unmeasurable love, and his insistence on being present and communicating with us through his Word. Theology tries to grasp God's action in history—past, present and future—and points out the way this very story goes on towards God's

'*eschaton*', the end of all things.

Theology is a church thing. It belongs to this people of God who, being aware of their mess and confusion, recognize as well that they are loved and involved by God all the same. It belongs to this church that has experienced the love of God in its life, throughout history, and that has the consciousness of being a privileged channel of experimentation and announcement of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

The *Magnificat* shows us what theology is all about, through its contents and the way it is articulated, through its historical characteristic and messianic dimension. But it still is a second-hour matter, for what comes at the first hour is God's revelation, God's irruption, God's visit, God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.

Theology comes at the second hour so that we don't start thinking we are too smart. So that we don't start thinking that we can discover something new about God's nature. In order for us not to deceive ourselves by wrapping ourselves with science's clothes, thinking that God is an object of our knowledge.

For theology to have the taste of God's things, and the smell of transcendency, it has to be born in the unexpected encounter that happens in the messy kitchen. Wasn't that so with Mary?

It was there, in the smoky kitchen, wearing a worn-out apron and holding a damaged handle pan, that she was visited by God. It was in the kitchen that the angel greeted her in an unforgettable fashion: 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The

Lord is with you.’ (Lk 1:28)

Theology’s seed is God’s revelation. Theology is born in the guts, twisted by the shock of God’s visit. The cradle of theology is stupefaction, when we find ourselves absolutely lost and completely thankful for God’s visit.

***‘And don’t start telling me stories about a theology objectively impartial’, Mary would complain, as she gets rid off her old apron and washes her face, in an attempt to get over this angelical shock. ‘That’s the kind of thing said by people who have never seen Gabriel, people who want to keep their wombs for their own things’, she still mumbles before tossing some cold water on her face.***

### **Do You Want to Understand Theology?**

#### **Offer your Womb!**

Asking for someone’s womb is asking a lot. Offering your womb is a great thing indeed. As this humble apron-woman Mary says: ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said’ (Lk. 1:38). And so the woman Mary gives out the most precious thing in her: her virgin womb. I can only guess the meaning of such an offer! And sighing is what Mary does. Sighing at the craziness of the gesture, the cost of this to her image, sighing as she considers confused Joseph. But she doesn’t give up her surrender, and soon the results of

this start to gradually appear in form of a pregnancy. Vocation always manifests itself in the growing pregnancy of obedience.

Theology is done in a *disposition condition*. The answer to God’s revelation is a life surrender. A womb surrender. A virginity surrender. The theological word about God’s nature, action and vocation is born as pregnancy becomes evident. Discipleship pregnancy. For theology belongs to the disciple that is waiting and obedient.

Theology cannot be impartial. The more life’s options and ways are compromised with God, the more it is theology. Impartial theology is an arrogant contradiction of people who haven’t still woken up, people who think they can understand God in a simply cognitive fashion. No Gabriel will obey a ‘god’ of neutral theology, and no Mary will offer her womb to such a god. Such theology will show only a god with a little ‘g’. A god of our vain philosophies, a god as big as our inflated egos.

The theologian Mary walks around showing off her pregnant womb to help us understand that theology becomes mature in the active expectancy of the fulfillment of God’s actions. It’s theology with the gesture of vocation, pointing towards an obedient discipleship.

Recovered from the initial shock, Mary hides in her room. Throwing herself on her bed, she weeps and laughs at the same time. The laughter of choice mixed with the cry of despair. She cries in thankfulness and nervously laughs, not knowing what to do, not wanting to do any-

thing else than whispering again to the Lord: 'May it be to me...' (Lk 1:38).

***'Only those who have never seen Gabriel could talk about "mere knowledge theology"... People that seem not to have a womb. Those temple-people, who don't even see Gabriel arrive', Mary mumbles as she goes back to the kitchen. After all, there's more to do there. 'Where did I put my apron? Looks like I am going crazy!', she still says to herself.***

### **Do You Want to Understand Theology?**

#### **Learn to Pay a Visit**

It's hard to understand why Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Was she trying to hide? Was she curious about old Elizabeth's pregnancy? Maybe this odd story of two pregnant women in such different ways was taking away her sleep? Did she go to dance at the sound of this fantastic melody of God's revelation? Or, did she go for all of these reasons, a little bit of each? What an intense and beautiful event was the encounter of these two women! It was divine. It was a 'womb mover', as the text states: 'When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.' (Lk 1:41)

Who has already been involved in a pregnancy experience knows what that means. A kind of a perception transmission. I remember: my wife

would suddenly hold my curious hand over her swollen womb so that I could feel the baby kicking (in our case, it was always a boy!). But here, in Elizabeth's womb, the kick is stronger: it's a kick of divine emotion, it's the kick of incarnation.

And so Mary and Elizabeth stayed together during three months, growing strong in each other's understanding of this strange way in which God writes his story. And speechless Zechariah was testimony to these two women, who couldn't stop talking and telling their story, making enigmatic questions. The whole situation makes you laugh and it makes you cry, it makes you dance and it makes you wonder in awe.

That's how theology is done. In the communion of the chosen ones and in the agony of vocation experience. In the sharing of stories and in the anguish of trying to understand and discern everything well. Theology is done in community, and experienced in community as well.

It's a shame that we have reduced theology to an individualistic speech, expressed in words accumulated in books and dissertations. Theology must rescue its place in the gathering of the called ones. Theology needs existential space, so that it can give advice. Space to breathe. Theology hates feeling suffocated. It kicks about in protest against every attempt to make it fit into any of those hand-over volumes.

When the last night comes, Mary packs up her bags, while Elizabeth watches in silence. A tear here, another there, serve as witnesses of how they already begin to miss each

other. The burden of a vocation is too heavy to carry alone. But the memories of the time together will help these two women carry on; and soon there will come other road companions. Remember Zechariah, who will soon start talking and singing again, and Joseph, who will return to Mary, offering her a long embrace of acceptance.

***While trying to fall asleep that night, Mary goes through the whole movie in her mind. This movie shows her how tough this time would have been without this heart-and-womb communion with Elizabeth. 'And there's still people who think we can understand God's matters alone!', Mary reflects, half asleep. 'As if theology were an office occupation! Theology is done with wombs in communion,' she still mumbles before falling asleep. The troubled sleep of good-bye.***

### **Surrounding God's Action with Poetry**

Mary's song—the so-called *Magnificat*—has fascinated many people throughout history. How much of this song was Mary's invention and how much was part of the faith family oral tradition, doesn't really matter. What matters is the way the *Magnificat* puts past, present and future together. How it speaks of God's memory that becomes reality throughout history, how it describes the geography of God's action, and

how Mary feels included in this story. And so she sees herself highly blessed. Notice the smile in her face, and the conclusion is obvious:

My soul glorifies the Lord  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has been mindful of the humble  
state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me  
blessed (Lk 1:46-48)

Theology is done by people who feel and know that they are pulled into God's history. True theology is born with commitment. With the disposition of laying oneself on the altar of God's action.

That is how Mary does theology. With a historical sense. With the perception of God's fidelity. Laying all her life in this project of God, and discerning the saving construction of his plan. And Mary does theology with gratitude and in the rhythm of dance. Inviting us to join her with grace and rhythm. With a desire of rhyming.

It's a pity that poetry has been removed from theology. It's a pity we have turned theology into a semi-object owned discursively. A cerebral verb of white men. And so it ended up heavy and tiresome, expressed in long sentences and articulated in a lofty philosophical language. Let's confess: we have imprisoned theology in the academy and in the library. Even Mary was left out, because she couldn't write in German, and she lacked that intellectual look, with thin frame glasses. After all, she was always the apron-woman, the well-woman, who never had any problem using an apron...

This is no apology, neither for the apron or for intellectual laziness. No

invitation to being poor readers. No honours are being granted to ignorance. It is, rather, an invitation for us to throw ourselves into God's hands. To read our life story from the perspective of God's vocational visit. To notice God's fidelity throughout history, and to sing it in verses and prose.

Many years have gone by. Miles and miles away, Mary decides to do some research about herself. She gets a friend's computer and, confused, surfs through the Internet. Trying to overcome her mouse, she gets scared with so many 'Marys'! Endless information about this Mary, that Mary, so many guesses and interpretations about her! She never thought of saying all of that! Actually, she didn't like what people have done to her. Unable to move, she finds herself raised in a pedestal. Analysed by theology academics, with their arrogant scalpels in hand, she feels like a corpse in advanced dissection!

***Not standing it all anymore, she stomped her foot and left in protest. And there flew the apron, once again thrown to the corner: 'Don't these people understand anything?!', she rages. 'Mary is just a woman, a woman in an apron. Besides, these people have to understand that theology is done with poetry. It has to be something born from the tight beating heart and from the womb, pregnant of God's things. Theology is a soul issue. It has the smell of***

***compromise and the taste of obedience.' And Mary knew what she was talking about. I can tell you that.***

### **Doing Theology in a State of Embarrassment**

There were some lessons that Mary had already learned. One of them was never closing the doors too early. Not to give up too easily. To prepare space for possibility. And this is what she does once more, once she sees herself involved in this lack-of-wine story in that Cana, Galilee, marriage. The details of this marriage are unknown. But the feast must have lasted several days, as was the tradition at the time. It must have been some party. Not just Mary was there, but also Jesus, and his whole group of disciples (Jn. 2:1-12).

We do not know if it was some relative's marriage, or a daughter of one of Mary's friends, but the fact is that she was close to what was going on. Near the kitchen and near the hosts' hearts. So, when she saw they were running out of wine, she quickly went to Jesus, to try to find a way out. You know, she had lived enough with him to know that there would be something he could do about the situation, and that something new could happen. Living with Jesus, she had learned to leave the doors of possibilities open. She knew there could be wine on the table again.

That is how theology is done. In living together, and with open doors. In living, because theology is done by following Jesus, knowing him and learning with him. Hearing what he

has to say, trying to understand his parables, trying to understand his geographic, social and cultural misplacements, and watching how he reacts when faced with different situations in life; be it the controverted Pharisees, the lonesome Zacchaeus, or astonished Jairus. Comprehension and observation, establishing priorities and building relationships. Relationships that need to be dealt with and included in the theological process. And that's not something easy to do. It is, actually, a life-long agenda.

We must recognize that we are children of a tradition that gave priority to the 'academic knowledge', and despised being together; that searched for content, and didn't prioritize emotion; that thought theology was a mind issue, giving no importance to the feet, with their ways and options in life. The heart, with its thousand and one feelings, and relations, with their thousand and two bifurcations, were not just overlooked, but solemnly put aside.

The issue is that it is much easier to transform theology into a brain issue. For when we do that the library and the computer will be enough. But this 'ivory tower' theology does not understand nor does it reflect what is in God's heart, and it is unable to come near to the questions, problems and agonies of people yesterday and today. Theology needs to know, and wants to see, the empty jars, and take them to Jesus' heart, along with all that it means, in terms of embarrassment, partying, and the building of solid human relationships. Here Mary also teaches us

the way. She saw the situation and came to Jesus: 'They have no more wine' (Jn. 2:3). Theology does not just give answers. It also asks questions. It brings life's needs close to God's heart.

But being aware of the situation does not mean controlling it. Did Mary want to do that? Would she be one of those bossy women who want to control everyone and everything? One of those 'definitive women', trying to take care of everything around her?

It's not hard to imagine Mary as a strong woman. But Jesus also knows who he is and what he wants. He doesn't go for the 'bossy' game, and the answer he gives her leaves us quite embarrassed: 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Interestingly, why does he call her 'woman' and not 'mother'? So, you'd better not be around when this conversation happens! It could have been a quick whispering between Mary and Jesus. Maybe the tone he uses and the way he looks into her eyes kept her from blushing and feeling embarrassed. The fact is that Mary has to learn she can't control Jesus. In the same way, theology can't control God.

Many have been, and many are, the times and occasions in which people tried to do theology from the perspective of power and control. That could be dogmatic or charismatic theology. It's theology that tries to sound final, and to be unconditionally accepted. The strict doctrine theology, in which one is not allowed to talk about God or see Jesus in any other way. The theology in which people are not allowed

to know God and meet Jesus in such an unexpected and uncontrolled fashion: in a wedding, and through an empty jar of wine.

However, theology in charismatic hands, expressed in eager speeches, can also be really dangerous. Who, after all, would go against the inspired leader? Who would risk contradicting a beautiful and lively preaching that is supposed to give direction to paths and interpretations? Theology needs to learn to say that the wine is over, and then be silent. Theology must learn to say 'I don't know'. It must learn to hear God saying that he owns the time.

Mary's slight smile is clear. By the way, her path is intriguing as well. Embarrassed and reduced, she could hide in any dark corner. Head high, however, she walks back into the house where the wine is missing. She will prepare everything. As if the party was hers, she talks to the servants: 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn. 2:5).

What an impossible woman this Mary is! She surprises us by not giving up. The issue is, she knows Jesus. In her heart, she knows he will also go that way, and will talk with the servants. Besides, she knows his word will be quite different. While her word only prepared the way, his would be a new word. Her word can just put jars in order and servers waiting. But Jesus's words will fill the jars, will get the servants busy, and the *maitre* astonished while the wine slides down his throat. As to the hosts, it's even harder to say. Their face changed from water to wine. The bride couldn't hold so much emotion and just kissed Jesus.

Theology serves. It prepares. Only that, and all of that. It can't avoid it, but it always tries to. Every time theology tries to frame God, it becomes poor. Every time theology tries to be final, it leaves the party without wine. Theology needs to learn with Mary, learn to prepare the jars, because God's time always comes.

It is important to state, thus, what theology cannot do. It cannot try to get rid of the jars just because it does not know what to do with them. It cannot look for any cheap explanation for the wine-full jars, in a definitive demonstration that it is the child of an Enlightenment party. As well as it cannot try to schedule the time for the jars, transforming their being filled into a public event, in order to awaken to faith or win followers. What it can do is prepare Jesus' coming. What it can do is testify, stupefied, the jars being filled with water that becomes wine. What it can do is to open wide eyes together with the *maitre*, who had never drunk such an excellent wine. What it can do is to line-up after the bride and kiss Jesus. What it can do is, timidly, smile with Mary and bring the wine-full jars to its heart.

***And there goes Mary with her enigmatic smile once again. 'I knew it, but I didn't know it', she mumbles again, 'The more I spend time with him and learn to wait for the unexpected, the more he still surprises me. But there was no need for him to talk to me the way he did... Are those manners? But this wine is good!' That***

***is how theology is done, on the way from the empty jar to the full one. In a state of embarrassed expectancy.***

### **The Upside-down Kingdom**

It's time to go back a bit, and recognize that things were never easy for Mary. One doesn't even need to enumerate the challenges and recall the difficulties to reach this conclusion. The boy was born and grew. The initial years' problems had passed, and Mary was glad the normal Nazareth routine was back. Even her apron could be used with some quietness. Then came that temple experience, where the boy said some things that were hard to understand; but when they came back to Nazareth, family routine was back to normal. I mean, if one can talk about routine when it comes to this boy.

Many years later, he left home and hit the road. Sometimes it seemed as if he wanted to win the world. He became a preacher, a miracle man, and a healer. There was that experience in Cana, in Galilee, that was a mixture of embarrassment and joy. But there were times and moments in which things got a bit more confused. The Gospels themselves register some of these stories and their places.

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him (...)

'Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked (Mk. 3:31,33).

In fact, Mary lived in a confusion of feelings, perceptions, and opinions. She never forgot how it all began. But understanding Jesus' steps

seemed just too much for her. Even tougher than accepting the angel's visit. After all, she knew who Jesus was, but she didn't always understand what he said or did. That is, she had a tough time understanding and accepting his way of fulfilling his divine vocation. The things he said, the people he lived with and the actions he allowed himself were hard to accept. And so she lived out her vocation in ambiguity. But she never stopped following her son's steps. More than that, she was always treasuring all things in her heart.

Theology is lived in ambiguity. In fact, the theologian is the one who says, 'I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!' (Mk. 9:24). He never understands everything, but is always willing to accept the essential. He lives from the memory of his vocation, and runs after the comprehension of God's actions. Until, at the end of his ambiguity journey, he finds himself besides Mary, at the foot of the cross.

***Sometimes Mary had crisis over her doubts. She would blame herself for not understanding some of Jesus' steps. But then there was that day when Jesus laid his hand on her head, gave her a hug, thanked her for the way she had answered God, and he told her he understood her troubles. Then he looked deep into her eyes and told her never to give up following him, and that was very important. Fundamental. It was important because his search was not***

***for the wrong certainties of the Pharisees. That was the certainty of rejection. What he wanted was following, and consecration of the womb. And so Mary slept a peaceful sleep.***

### **The Path that Leads to the Foot of the Cross**

And that is what Mary did. Challenging everyone and everything, and overcoming herself, she walked the path to the foot of the cross. Crying and stumbling, it was there that she found her true place. Tough place. Unacceptable and strange place. An absurd place of peace. There, at the foot of the cross she, unexpectedly, felt at home.

The cross is the place in which all good theology begins and ends. That's why all our theology has to be *theologia crucis*. Theology that can walk towards the foot of the cross and, confused, whisper the need of forgiveness, spell its inadequacy and celebrate the encounter with God's grace.

The cross is the best place to be. It's the most necessary place to be. But it is also the toughest place to be. Also for theology. For it is there that one can notice that salvation is not self-salvation—one of the toughest things to realize in life. Salvation is through grace, that's all theology needs, and that's all theology should, in the first place, be busy with. To inflect the verb of grace is theology's main occupation. To call to regret and to proclaim the possibility of forgiveness is the job that gives theolo-

gy meaning and dignity. To be a messenger of reconciliation in its deeply transcendent sense, and in the inclusively human dimension, is a beautiful task to be performed in a context of loss and loneliness. It's a good thing to serve the good news. So, it is good to do theology. The cross is, thus, a place of grace. A place to meet with God's unconditional love. It is, in essence, a place of life. It is the place of death that creates life, in the greatest expression of God's redeeming craziness.

Theology also needs to decide, to make an choice—it follows Mary to the foot of the cross, or it follows the disciples that, at first, took the runaway road. Theology done in the runaway road is only whispers thrown to the wind. It's a religious masturbation proposal. It's no good to make us pregnant of life's meaning and the clear perception of our historical call. It's good for nothing. The disciples knew that, that's why they went to meet Mary at the foot of the cross.

We will meet Mary again in the community of the Risen One. There she is, as a disciple among those who await the Holy Spirit's coming, as Jesus had ordered them to do. And so, she is among those who are waiting, and who are available to follow Jesus: 'They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers' (Acts 1:14). So she teaches us, with her life, that doing theology happens in discipleship. In prayer and in communion. In the expectancy of God's anointment and in the disposition to

serve him.

There is a last scene I want to bring to our memory. It's probable that Mary's life was surrounded with great certainties and great doubts. But it's the same with us, and things happen in the same way, and they happen in the same way with our theology. There are scenes Mary does not understand, but in her wisdom she respects. There are moments in which she doesn't have words, but she always has a heart.

Jesus' birth scene is marked with characters and words that Mary doesn't know how to face and how

to understand. But Mary treasured up all these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19). The boy is still a boy but, in the temple, he behaves as an adult, and the things he says aren't easy to understand, but she treasured all these things in her heart (Lk. 2:51). And that is how a good theology is. It can say some things and manage some words. But there are many things it does not know and does not understand. That, however, is not a problem, because its heart has to be much bigger than its mouth. Good theology is, therefore, the theology of the great heart.

## NEW FROM PATERNOSTER

### Fundamentalisms

Editor: Christopher H. Partridge

The most conspicuous form of religion to emerge during the 20th century is 'fundamentalism'. Any account of the modern world that ignores the impact of the forces of fundamentalism will be significantly deficient. Whether one considers debates within faith communities concerning the correct interpretation of sacred writings, or religiously inspired political activism, or indeed some forms of international terrorism, fundamentalism seems to be a perennial religious tendency. Written from sociological, ethnographical, anthropological, missiological, and theological perspectives, together these essays provide a source of reliable information and thoughtful reflection on contemporary manifestations of fundamentalism and fundamentalist-like trends.

Contributors include David Burnett, Colin Chapman, Harriet Harris, David Lyon, Chris Partridge, Peter Riddell and Peter Smith.

Dr Chris Partridge is senior lecturer in Theology and Contemporary Religion at Chester College, and has published a number of works in theology and religious studies.

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# Sovereign God or Paranoid Universe? The Lord of Hosts is His Name

Tim Meadowcroft

**Keywords:** Heavenly beings, sons of the gods, heavenly council, Satan, morning star, adversary, blessings and curses, theodicy, spiritual warfare, third wave theology, power encounter theology

The more I read the Old Testament Scriptures the more I am struck by the absolute confidence they express in the sovereignty of Yahweh, creator of all that is. What I find most astonishing about this confidence is that it is supremely uninterested in protecting Yahweh from the malign influences that surround him. At the same time I am struck by our modern lack of conviction that this is in fact the case. We seem to believe in a God who is struggling to beat off the rivals that surround him, and live in fear of the power of those rivals to harm us. What follows represents an attempt to assemble some biblical

material around the theme of the Lord of hosts, and so begin to address this disjunction between the way things are in the Scriptures and the way things appear to be to us.<sup>1</sup>

I propose to first outline some Old Testament material apposite to the Lord of hosts, and to explore the presence of that theme in the New Testament. Then follows a consideration of the link between a theology of the covenant and the sovereignty of the Lord of hosts. Some tensions in my thinking become clear at that point. The final two sections constitute a brief summary of the applicability of the material to today, and pointers towards a more comprehensive outworking of this topic.

But before any of that, a note on terminology is necessary. The key

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of this article was presented as a paper to the Bible College of New Zealand Postgraduate Seminar, for whose discussion of it I am grateful.

distinction I am exploring is that between the Lord of hosts, Yahweh, and all other non-physical beings. Whether they are called demons or angels or gods, they are those who occupy the sphere over which the Lord of hosts exercises his sovereignty. Sometimes they are also referred to as heavenly beings. When that phrase appears, heavenly is intended as the opposite of earthly, not as the opposite of evil. The reason for this will become clear.

### Old Testament Material

There is a substantial strand in the Hebrew Bible that evades the question of monotheism, of whether or not God is the only god, and hence it is not interested in a declaration as to the existence of other gods or heavenly powers. This strand is content simply to say that God is supreme amongst the powers.<sup>2</sup> One feature of this is the institution we sense lurking in the background from time to time, and which is often referred to as the 'heavenly council'.<sup>3</sup> There are a

number of manifestations of the heavenly council. One is in the call of the prophet in Isaiah chapter 6, where the visionary prophet appears to be drawn into a conversation with a larger group to whom the question is addressed: who will go (Is. 6:8)? There are other call narratives where the council context is also hinted at, but more obliquely than in Isaiah 6 (Is. 40:1-11 for example).

A more explicit instance is the appearance in Psalm 82 of what appears to be an assembly of gods who are called to account by God for their stewardship of justice in the nations. The conclusion of the Psalm is that in the light of their failure there is only one who is truly Lord of all the nations (Ps. 82:8). There is no interest in the fate of these gods other than a hint of their coming fall (v. 7). More important is the concluding assertion that God is the final inheritor of the nations.

Then there is the famous encounter between God and Satan at the beginning of Job, which captures our attention for two reasons. First, the encounter takes place in the context of a meeting between Yahweh and *benei 'elohim* ('the sons of the gods', Job 1:6; NRSV 'heavenly beings'), which again depicts the heavenly assembly.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, although the narrative does not make clear whether or not Satan is a legitimate part of that assembly, it is clear that his influence is constrained by Yahweh. The end result is not the defeat of Satan, but rather

<sup>2</sup> This element of the tradition has been explained and analyzed in various ways. For M. Barker, *The Older Testament* (London: SPCK, 1987) and *The Great Angel* (London: SPCK, 1992), as the title of her 1987 monograph implies, this is an older tradition which later reformers sought to purge, a process evident in the Old Testament itself. In contrast A.P. Hayman, 'Monotheism — A Misused Word in Jewish Studies', *JJS* 42 (1991), pp. 1-15, handles the biblical material in the light of developments in post-biblical Judaism and concludes that 'The pattern of Jewish beliefs about God remains monarchist throughout. God is king of a heavenly court consisting of many other powerful beings, not always under his control' (p. 15). While I concur with the general picture painted by Hayman, my view on the control of God is more assured than his.

<sup>3</sup> See E.T. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), especially pp. 209-44.

<sup>4</sup> All quotes are from NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

the recognition by Job, and hence by his readers, that ‘no purpose of yours (Yahweh’s) can be thwarted’ (Job 42:2). Satan simply disappears from consideration.

It is my view that this understanding of Yahweh as supreme in the heavenly council lies behind a common Old Testament name for the God of Israel; *yhw h tsew’aoth*, the Lord of hosts.<sup>5</sup> Most of the hundreds of uses of the name are simply that, a name. But there are a number of occasions when the use of the noun *tsav’a* (‘host’), normally but not invariably in the singular, offers some clues as to the content of that name.<sup>6</sup> At a human level it often means an ‘army’ or ‘band’ or ‘division’ of warriors (See 2 Sam. 10:7,16 and 18, out of myriad examples, and Num. 10:14 where the word occurs in both singular and plural form). Sometimes the hosts are earthly beings who are led by the Lord, as in Exodus 12:41. At other times the host consists of heavenly beings marshalled by Yahweh. Such is the terminology used in Genesis 2:1, and echoed in the book of Isaiah (13:4-5 and 40:26 for example).<sup>7</sup>

There are other times when the distinction between the heavenly and earthly expression of the host becomes blurred, particularly evidenced in the book of Isaiah. See for

instance Isaiah 13:5 previously noted, where the host are mustered by Yahweh both ‘from a distant land’ and ‘from the end of the heavens’. And in Isaiah 34:3-4 the mustered army completes its mission of judgement and the stench of death on earth is equated with the fall of the heavenly host: the ‘host of heaven’ will be dissolved and the ‘heavens’ (NRSV ‘skies’) rolled up like a scroll. The judgement on the nations has something to do with the judgement on the host of heaven. A more specific expression of the concept is found at Isaiah 24:21 where ‘the host of heaven’ and the ‘kings of the earth’ alike are punished. This blurring of the distinction between earth and heaven is perhaps nowhere better typified than at the stream of Jabbok (Gen. 32:22-32), where Jacob wrestled all night with — whom? Was it a man or God (v. 28)? Although it is true that ‘our struggle is not against... flesh and blood’ (Eph. 6:12), we do also struggle against flesh and blood—and the two may not be as distinct as we sometimes think.

But as well as paralleling the heavenly and the earthly, the prophet Isaiah also occasionally identifies the heavenly bodies with the heavenly host. Such is the case in Isaiah 34:3-4. In that context we may understand the reference in Isaiah 14:12-15 to one member of the heavenly host as the morning star. As a member of the host his crime was to try and raise himself above Yahweh, and so he is fallen. The likelihood is that there is also a host that is fallen with him. The picture we are left with,

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately this is obscured somewhat for us by English translations that render the phrase as ‘the Lord Almighty’. NIV is one such.

<sup>6</sup> See the article on ‘*tsew’aoth*’ in R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer and B.K. Waltke (eds), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), vol. 2, pp. 750-51.

<sup>7</sup> This is another instance of the strong linguistic links between Deutero-Isaiah and the early chapters of Genesis.

particularly in the Isaiah material, is that the Lord is in control of the armies of the earth as he is of the armies in the heavenlies. Both are subject to his judgement, both are potentially instruments of his, and there is some interconnectedness between the two.<sup>8</sup>

But the interest in the host is not confined to the prophecies of Isaiah. A somewhat later expression of the rebellious member of the host appears in Daniel 8:10-12. A comparison of this passage with 2 Chronicles 33:3 bears out the implication that the hosts can be either instruments of the Lord's judgement or objects of his judgement. According to the Chronicler, one of the crimes of Manasseh was to worship the 'host of heaven', whereas in Daniel 8 one of the crimes of the small horn was to cast down some of the host. There the host seem to have positive connotations which reach their culmination in Daniel 12:3. This makes explicit that the word 'heavenly' is a spatial rather than an ethical concept.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to more dualistic categories of thought, the Hebrew material takes 'heavenly' to mean other-worldly rather than evil.

To return to the book of Isaiah, the existence of the heavenly bodies is in some way a reminder of the sovereignty of the Lord in the heavenly

sphere of influence. This expression of the sovereignty of the Lord on the part of Isaiah is peculiarly appropriate to the astrological interests of the Babylonian setting.<sup>10</sup> Isaiah's response to the Babylonian view of the starry host is partly expressed in the idol parody. The trust placed by Babylonian diviners in the power of the sun, moon, and stars is ritually brought to life in the institution of the New Year's festival idol procession, where devotees of the cultus would bear the image of Marduk into the ceremonial house.<sup>11</sup> With biting sarcasm the prophet mocks, not the handcrafted gods, but those who put their trust in something that has to be carried around on their shoulders and will fall over if not propped up (Is. 46:3-7). Yahweh longs to carry the people who seem to think they have to do the carrying. It seems clear that the prophet does not think that the idols themselves can be more powerful than their creators. The complaint behind his mocking tone is over the confidence placed in the forces (or host) they represent. It is important to note that he does not deny their existence, only their efficacy for those who trust in them. The issue is one of allegiance. They cannot harm unless God lets them, but they will enslave those who trust in them (Is. 46:2).

<sup>8</sup> But compare M. Barker, *The Older Testament*, p. 92, whose depiction of the second Isaiah as a reformer seems at odds with the evidence.

<sup>9</sup> For further on this, see J.G. Gammie, 'Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature', *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 356-85.

<sup>10</sup> W. von Soden, *The Ancient Orient* (tr. G. Schley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 180-82, outlines the identification of Babylonian deities with celestial bodies. Marduk, the best known by the period in question, is linked with Jupiter. Nabonidus famously incurred the wrath of the Babylonian religious establishment for trying to promote the cult of the moon god Sin.

<sup>11</sup> von Soden, *The Ancient Orient*, p. 191.

A further expression of this sovereignty over the powers is in the depiction of the role of the gods in the Israelite worldview. This has been noted already in connection with Psalm 82 and Job 1:6, where the gods exercise influence under the presidency of Yahweh. In that connection, the famous narrative of 1 Kings 20:23-34 is instructive. The Arameans perceived that Yahweh was a god of the hills while their own national god belonged to the valleys or plains. The obvious battle plan then was to engage the Israelites on the plains where the Aramean god could prevail. This they did and were thoroughly beaten. The narrative is specific that their defeat was to demonstrate that the god of the hills is in fact Lord over the national gods (v. 28). Once again the folly of misplaced trust is proven.

In summary, the Lord of hosts as a name for Yahweh expresses an understanding of the Lord's sovereignty over the forces of earth and heaven, both benevolent and malevolent. In either case they remain under the hand of God. Malevolent forces are not to be feared unless they are trusted. There is also a rebel figure, the morning star or Satan, who seeks dominion over the host and perhaps leads a fallen portion of the host, but who remains answerable in some way to Yahweh.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> My comment avoids the debate over whether or not Satan and the morning star are to be identified with one another. See the summary of S.H.T. Page, *Powers of Evil, A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Baker Books/Apollos, 1995), pp. 38-39, who concludes that they are not. I think he and others of that persuasion take insufficient account of the concept of the host in the Babylonian context.

Such an understanding of the Lord of hosts helps to explain some quite ambiguous (at least to our western mindset) events in the Old Testament. One of the best known is the visit in 1 Samuel 28 by Saul to the witch of Endor, whom the beleaguered king asks to call up the dead prophet Samuel for a word from the Lord. The words of the prophet through the medium come true and Saul and his sons are killed in the ensuing battle with the Philistines. There is no hint in the narrative that the word so received is other than the genuine word of the Lord. In fact Beuken demonstrates in some detail how the construction of the oracle in verses 16-19 bears the hallmarks of a genuine oracle of the prophet.<sup>13</sup> This ought not to be taken as a licence to disregard the prohibition of Deuteronomy 18:9-14 against dealing in such matters. Saul's guilty conscience at doing so is expressed in his disguise (1 Sam. 28:8).<sup>14</sup> But the episode does show us that God is sovereign everywhere, amongst both kings and hosts. As with the veneration of idols, the key issue over consulting diviners is that of allegiance: 'You must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God' (Deut. 18:13).

Saul also experienced those frightening episodes when an 'evil spirit from God' came upon him and departed only under the influence of David's harp playing (1 Sam. 18:10). In their retelling of the story, first century Jewish writers Josephus and

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<sup>13</sup> W.A.M. Beuken, 'The Prophet as "Hammer of Witches"', *JSTOT* 6 (1978), pp. 4-6.

<sup>14</sup> Note also the judgement of 1 Chr. 10:13.

Pseudo-Philo both omit 'from God'. They were the first of many whose Hellenised mindset made it difficult for them to cope with these ambiguities.<sup>15</sup>

A similar instance is evident in the vision of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:18-28, where the Lord is holding court with the heavenly host discussing how to get Ahab to attack Ramoth-Gilead so that he would be killed. The suggestion that a lying spirit be placed in the mouths of the prophets was taken up. In this way the evil lying behind the defeat and death of Ahab is perceived to be from the Lord himself.

The outlook implicit in the name the Lord of hosts, that God is supreme in earth and heaven, is seen also in the difficult statement that the Lord brings prosperity and 'creates woe' (Is. 45:7). It is noteworthy that the verb for 'create' is *bar'a*, famously used to describe the creative work of God in the early chapters of Genesis, and seldom used elsewhere except in Deutero-Isaiah with reference to the re-creative work of Yahweh in the new covenant. And the word for disaster, *ra'ah*, is sometimes here rendered 'evil', a translation that is unavoidable in other contexts, and is the same word used in the earlier quoted 1 Samuel 18:10. Even evil seems to be under the creative sovereignty of creator Yahweh.

By now it ought not to surprise us that in the Old Testament the author

of both blessing and curse is almost always God himself.<sup>16</sup> This is most clearly illustrated in the blessings and curses of the covenant in Deuteronomy 27-29, which culminate in the reference to 'the blessings and the curses that I have set before you...' (Deut. 30:1). In the context of the covenant, both blessing and curse are to be understood as from God. If we read further in Deuteronomy 30, we come to the declaration by God to the people: 'I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction' (Deut. 30:15). The implication is that the manifestations of blessings and curses — life and death, prosperity and destruction — arise out of the manner in which people live within the covenant. In that context, curses are to be feared not because they subject the people to some malign influence, but because they represent the judgement of God (note Mal. 2:2). Even when a human utters a curse or a blessing on the people of the covenant it is normally as an agent expressing a reality that comes from God. The prescription of the test for an unfaithful wife in Numbers 5:11-31, whatever other issues it may raise, is explicit on this point.

Numbers 22, the story of Balaam, provides a further illustration of the Lord of hosts' sovereignty in the field of the curse. Balaam was asked to curse the Israelites but he found that he could not curse something that was blessed by Yahweh (Num.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in G. Twelftree, *Christ Triumphant* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), p. 24. Many centuries after Pseudo-Philo and Josephus, Twelftree exhibits the same tendency when he cites the incident as an early example of exorcism.

<sup>16</sup> On the topic of blessing and curse see the excellent article by M.J. Evans, "'A Plague on Both Your Houses': Cursing and Blessing Reviewed", *Vox Evangelica* 24 (1994), pp. 77-89.

22:12). He dared not 'go, as at other times, to look for omens' (Num. 24:1). We can take this a step further and note that the God of the covenant even transforms the curses of others into blessing (Deut. 23:5). While blessing and cursing is a common feature of Ancient Near Eastern Treaties, the reversal of the curse is unique to the covenant between the God of Israel and his people.<sup>17</sup> The Lord of hosts is sovereign in the area of blessing and cursing.

There are less spectacular examples of God's self-revelation through avenues that we would not have thought possible. The sailors in Jonah 1 are cases in point. They get halfway to an acknowledgement of the creator of the universe by the pagan art of lot-casting. The Masoretic Text has no difficulty with Daniel being the 'chief of the magicians' in the Babylonian empire (Dan. 4:9), implying that the difference between him and the other wise men is not necessarily one of genus. The Septuagint is careful to translate such texts in a way that portrays Daniel as a dispenser of Israelite wisdom and explicitly distinguishes him from his Babylonian rivals. In LXX Daniel 4:18, for instance, he is 'leader of the wise men'. This is another example of the tendency of later interpreters, noted above in

connection with Saul's evil spirit, to rescue God from any complicity in evil or pagan influence. Incidentally, it has always impressed me that the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus were led to that position through the arts of the Magi. These ambiguities pose no problem to a people secure in the sovereignty of Yahweh over the host.

### New Testament Material

There is little argument about the Old Testament perspective on evil and evil spirits as outlined above.<sup>18</sup> There may be more discussion on the matter of linking that perspective to the concept of Yahweh's sovereignty over the host, and on issues of theodicy so entailed. And there would be considerable dissension over how to relate all of this to the New Testament. The Christian tendency generally is to approach the Old Testament in the light of the New, or even in the light of the Greek worldview current at the time of the New Testament's formation and still influential in our scientific age. But such a process has failed to take sufficiently seriously the Old Testament witness to the Lord of hosts.

When we bring the understanding of the Lord of hosts just outlined to our reading of the New Testament, it becomes evident that a conversation between Yahweh and his host continues in the Scriptures of the new covenant. The puzzling comment in

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<sup>17</sup> H.M. Wolf, 'The Transcendent Nature of Covenant Curse Reversals', in A. Gileadi (ed.), *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), p. 320. See also J.M. Ford, 'Cursing and Blessing as Vehicles of Violence and Peace in Scripture', in C.J. Reid (ed.), *Peace in a Nuclear Age* (Washington DC: Catholic UP of America, 1986), p. 23, on the neutralising of curses in Scripture. Note the soteriological implications of this in Gal. 3:13-14.

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<sup>18</sup> For a recent survey, see A. McEwen, 'Demonology and the Occult in the Old Testament', *Vox Reformata* 59 (1994), pp. 3-15.

Luke 22:31 ('Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat...') is one such instance, which recalls the heavenly council of Yahweh and Satan and the 'sons of the gods' at the beginning of Job.<sup>19</sup> As in the times of Job, Satan still requires permission to act. The encounter between Satan and Jesus early in the ministry of Jesus, recounted in each of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 4.1-11; Lk. 4.1-13; and a summary in Mk 1.12-13), can also be considered in the same light. In Matthew's account the Job encounter is further recalled with the reference to attendant angels (Mt. 4:11 and Mk. 1:13).<sup>20</sup> At this point the Gospels, like Job, appear to presuppose the authority of Jesus over Satan. There was a reality in the temptations to which Jesus was subject but Satan himself was powerless to act against him.<sup>21</sup> We might see the same sort of dynamic in Jesus' perception of Satan in the tempting words of Peter (Mt. 16:23; Mk. 8:33). The temptation was real but the result of the struggle against Satan himself was a foregone conclusion.

This sort of understanding also helps to make sense of the difficult statements of 1 Timothy 1:20 and 1 Corinthians 5:5, where Satan is deployed to effect some salutary or redemptive purpose in the lives of

individuals in the early church. Such is only possible if the final authority of God is presumed.

Satan therefore seems to function in the terms that his name implies, as the Adversary.<sup>22</sup> The word in Hebrew is *satan*, which simply means 'oppose'. At times, the angel of the Lord himself could express this opposition, as in Numbers 22:32, where the verbal form is used. Satan appears to be one figure in this heavenly assembly committed to the opposition position, and the leader of all others committed to that position (Compare Mk. 3:22). We might almost think of him as embodying the institution of defence lawyer. Since he has given himself over to opposition, then he becomes associated wholly with evil.<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 14:13-14 suggests that the nature of his rebellion was his desire to take sovereignty 'above the stars of God', to usurp the God of hosts. That he was not able to do so relegates him to an inferior position.

Guelich elaborates this point by noting in detail that whenever Jesus encounters Satan or his demons, his authority is not in question.<sup>24</sup>

We find no hint of a struggle in these encounters. Jesus does not have to subdue the demons. Their behaviour from the outset shows them to recognize the hopelessness of their situation before him. They come as supplicants rather than

<sup>19</sup> 'Demand' is slightly too strong a translation of *exaiteo* in Lk. 22:31. NIV uses 'ask', which probably does not quite capture the intensifying prefix.

<sup>20</sup> In Job 1:6, the words *benei 'elohim* ('sons of the gods') are translated as 'angels' by the Septuagint. Many English versions follow suit.

<sup>21</sup> R.A. Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti', *Pneuma* 13 (1991), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> I use the personal pronoun for Satan, but appreciate Scott Peck's habit of always referring to the devil as 'it', on the grounds that only beings reflecting the image of God can properly be understood as personal. See M.S. Peck, *People of the Lie* (London: Rider, 1983), especially pp. 182-207.

<sup>24</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', pp. 40-42.

negotiators...Jesus simply orders the demons to leave the victim. This picture stands in stark contrast to the exorcisms of the world of antiquity which often reflected a power struggle between the demon and the exorcist.<sup>25</sup>

Exorcisms in the Gospels, then, take place as demonstrations of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, not as part of a spiritual battle on the outcome of which the Kingdom is somehow dependent.<sup>26</sup>

Speaking of the Kingdom, Beasley-Murray has argued in detail that the concept of the Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels is inherent in the Old Testament.<sup>27</sup> I suggest that Jesus' demonstration of the Kingdom of God is partly a demonstration of the sovereignty of Yahweh over the host, and it is in those terms that his encounters with demonic forces should be understood.<sup>28</sup> It is no accident that Isaiah was so formative in Jesus' understanding of himself and of the agenda of the Kingdom (Lk. 4:18-19). For it is in Isaiah, set as it is against the Babylonian backdrop, that the interaction between Yahweh and the

host is most evident. So it is there that the dynamics of the Kingdom have already begun to be worked out.<sup>29</sup>

When it comes to Paul, the same reality of the host and the same absolute confidence in the sovereignty of the Lord over the host is evident. As we have noted, Paul is even able to speak of handing believers over to Satan as a disciplinary measure. Whereas the Synoptics use the terminology of angels and demons to describe this sphere of Christ's lordship, Paul speaks of principalities and powers and occasionally *stoicheia*, however that word may best be translated.<sup>30</sup> These heavenly powers are expressed in different ways (compare 1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 2:10 and 2:20), yet in each instance the rule of Christ over them is assured.<sup>31</sup> The final verses of Romans 8 illustrate in a wonderful way that 'neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things at hand nor things about to be nor heights nor depths nor anything else in cre-

<sup>25</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 40. He footnotes Mk. 1:23-18; 5:1-20.

<sup>26</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 39. Note also G.H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), p. 173: 'Jesus stands out in his era as one who not only relied on his own resources for success in exorcism, but at the same time claimed that in them God himself was in action and that that action was the coming of God's eschatological kingdom.'

<sup>27</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1986), pp. 3-70. Note also G.E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), as cited in Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 35.

<sup>28</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 36, hints at this possibility in his exposition but does not develop it.

<sup>29</sup> For more on this point, see Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 36. Not entirely incidentally, it is also in Deutero-Isaiah's expressions of hope that we confront in acute ways the 'already but not yet' of the sovereignty of God, which is a feature of the Kingdom in the Gospels.

<sup>30</sup> See the extensive exposition on the subject of *stoicheia* by W. Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 67-96.

<sup>31</sup> Wink, *Naming the Powers*, p. 11. This volume is the first of Wink's trilogy on the subject, all of which are germane to a much fuller discussion of the present topic. See also *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) and *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Note also the comments of T.D. Pratt, 'The Need to Dialogue: A Review of the Debate on the Controversy of Signs, Wonders, Miracles and Spiritual Warfare Raised in the Literature of the Third Wave Movement', *Pneuma* 13 (1991), pp. 27-29.

ation is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38-39, my translation). Whether loyal or rebellious, all things are under Christ's lordship and subject to the purposes of the Lord of hosts. And Christ delivers the kingdom to God by virtue of his ascendancy over all of these things (1 Cor. 15:24).<sup>32</sup> This is the overarching reality.

### **Allegiance and the Covenant**

To round out these comments on the biblical material, I return to the question of the covenant, which was briefly discussed with respect to the nature of cursing. There it was suggested that, because of the supremacy of Yahweh over the host, those who were part of the covenant could not be forcibly subject to the effects of curses. In a similar vein, we have noted that the idols exercised their malign influence only when they were the object of misplaced trust. We also saw Isaiah employ a genre that has been identified as the idol parody, likewise evident in such places as Psalm 115 and Jeremiah 10:2-5.<sup>33</sup>

These parodies were part of a wider strategy designed to prevent God's people placing trust in the gods of other nations they encountered, a strategy evident in various

forms. The incident at Ai is one of a number of cases in point. The fear of the Israelites on their defeat was that it was a harbinger of the defeat of the Lord's name (Josh. 7:9), with the implication that another national god had proved to be as powerful. In fact it was the sin of Achan, not the weakness of God as feared, that had brought defeat (Josh. 7:20). Later Jeremiah perceived the same principle of allegiance when he urged his people not to fear the things that the nations fear (Jer. 10:5).

It has to be acknowledged that the Old Testament Scriptures reflect a tension over whether other gods ought not to be feared because they are non-existent or because they are powerless before Yahweh. Note, for instance, the complexities involved in interpreting Deut. 32:7-9 and 15-17. The Greek tradition of verse 8 reads 'according to the number of the gods' (so NRSV), whereas the Masoretic Text reads 'according to the number of the sons of Israel' (so NIV).<sup>34</sup> Verse 17 on the one hand contrasts God with demons and on the other parallels demons with gods.<sup>35</sup> The tension, writ particularly large in these verses, lies partly in an interweaving of different traditions and partly in the irrelevance of the distinction to the Hebrew writers. The point of this paper is that the powerlessness of other gods ought not to be devalued, especially in the face of the absolute sovereignty of

<sup>32</sup> Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> See W.M.W. Roth, 'For Life He Appeals to Death (Wis. 13:18), A Study of Old Testament Idol Parodies', *CBQ* 37 (1975), pp. 21-47. See also D. Greenlee, 'Territorial Spirits Reconsidered', *Missiology* 22 (1994), p. 509. Greenlee's collection of texts forms the basis of my discussion at this point.

<sup>34</sup> Hayman, 'Monotheism', p. 6, reads the Greek as 'original'.

<sup>35</sup> McEwen, 'Demonology', p. 5, says these verses 'bear witness to the reality of spiritual beings to whom the Israelites gave false worship'.

God for those who are within the covenant.

This is not at all the same thing as saying that other gods or heavenly beings cease to exist if we cease to believe in them. However, they do lose their power when they lose their relevance. Using a number of modern case studies Greenlee makes a similar point from a missiological perspective.

...spirits claiming a territorial domain have lost their control through military conquest, political changes, immigration, the building of a canal, the imposition of colonial government structures, and land reform, *all with the clear link to cessation of veneration of the spirit.*<sup>36</sup>

Greenlee begins his article with a call to avoid 'the confusion of ontological reality — what the Bible declares as "really real" — with phenomenological reality — that which is *perceived* by people to be real'.<sup>37</sup> At this point he is less helpful than his subsequent marshalling of the material in illustration of the point. For in much of the biblical material it is not the ontological reality of the host that is in question, but rather the scope of its influence. Hence again the importance of remaining within the provisions of the covenant, where the sovereignty of the Lord of hosts may be experienced.

This becomes more evident when we move into the New Testament. It is clear that the existence of the host

is not in question for the New Testament writers. But, notwithstanding the perception of Guelich that Jesus never had to struggle with demonic powers, there were times when his disciples did (Mt. 17:14-21; Mk. 9:14-32; Lk. 9:37-43). The call also goes out in Ephesians 6:11 and James 4:7 to take a stand against the devil, with the implications of struggle entailed in such a stand (Note also 2 Cor. 10:4).

To employ again the principle that Old Testament understanding can help in New Testament interpretation, it is useful to ask if the concept of the covenant and the related issue of allegiance can be of assistance in interpreting the New Testament perspective on encounters with the demonic. I suggest that the answer is 'yes'. Jesus' response to his disciples' struggle with the epileptic boy was a sense of despair at the level of their belief (Mk. 9:19). Romans 8, which culminates in the hymn to the Lord of hosts already mentioned, begins with the assertion of freedom from judgement to those who are 'in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1). In connection with the handing over of individuals to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5 and 1 Tim. 1:19b-20) Marshall makes the point that,

To belong to the community of faith, and thus be incorporated into Christ, is to enjoy protection from the ravages of Satan. To be expelled from the community is to forfeit that protection and be "handed over" (...cf. Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) to the realm controlled by Satan...(This "handing over" is a matter of the withdrawing of God's protective hand...so that unrepentant malefactors experience the full consequences of the choice they have already made to "hand themselves

<sup>36</sup> Greenlee, 'Territorial Spirits', p. 512. The context of Greenlee's remarks is his concern that 'recent discussion of "territorial spirits" has given them more "territory" than they deserve...' (p. 507).

<sup>37</sup> Greenlee, 'Territorial Spirits', p. 507.

over” to sin (...Eph. 4:19).<sup>38</sup>

Similarly the writer to the Colossian Christians, in declaring among other things their freedom from the ‘worship of angels’ (Col. 2:18), reminds the Colossians that Christ ‘disarmed the rulers and authorities’ (Col. 2.15) and that they ‘have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority’ (Col. 2.10).

Even Ephesians 6:10-20, the manifesto of modern proponents of spiritual warfare, must be read in the light of the first two chapters of the epistle, which affirm the dominion of Christ in ‘the heavenlies’ (*ouranioi*, Eph. 1:20. See also 1:10).<sup>39</sup> Believers also occupy that position of authority with Christ (Eph. 2:6), as a result of which they are ‘members of the household of God’ (Eph. 2:19). Here the Old Testament language of covenant, implicit in the references above, reverberates loudly. Such struggles as there are with principalities and powers must be understood in the light of Christian membership of the covenant.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> C.D. Marshall, *Classed with Criminals* (unpublished MA (Peace Studies) thesis: Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, 1995), pp. 127-28.

<sup>39</sup> See C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), p. 103. I note with Arnold that Eph. 6:10-20 ‘is the only place in the Pauline corpus where believers are explicitly called upon to struggle against the “principalities and powers”’. Part of Arnold’s thesis is that the emphasis in Ephesians arises from the fact that Paul is applying the gospel to Ephesus as a centre for magical practices (pp. 14-28, 103-22).

<sup>40</sup> D. Prince, *Blessing or Curse, You Can Choose!* (Old Tapper, NJ: Chosen Books, 1990), p. 125, rightly comments that ‘included in the covenant is the right to invoke God’s protection against curses that proceed from any external source’.

At this point some tension may be felt between the theory I am expounding and empirical experience. Evil and Satan continue to exert considerable influence on people who are seeking to dwell within the covenant. I do not want to understate that power or underestimate the cost of engaging it. But the context within which that engagement takes place is of God’s sovereignty on earth and in heaven and in the inexplicable shadowland where earth and heaven meet.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, by referring to the covenant I do not wish to imply that God has somehow abandoned the rest of his world. The discovery and application of his sovereignty ‘in earth as it is in heaven’ is a task that the church has to be about. Again, the presupposition of that task is the sovereignty of God.

### So What?

But does any of this matter, or am I simply splitting hairs to no particular purpose? I believe it does matter. My concern with the topic is that the church in New Zealand, particularly in its more charismatic and evangelical expressions, is in danger of surrendering the doctrine of the Lord’s sovereignty in favour of what has been well described as ‘a paranoid world-view which militates against

<sup>41</sup> Events of Daniel 10 suggest that Yahweh’s supremacy is assured but it has not been without a struggle, something of which can be experienced by those on earth. But this is not the same thing as a dualistic tug of war between good and evil. See T. Longman and D.G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 82, and J.E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Waco: Word, 1989), pp. 312-14.

rational and common-sense interpretations of reality'.<sup>42</sup> There is a real need for a detailed application of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in today's theological landscape. The concern of this article has been to propose a biblical starting point for such an application, and there is space now only to point to several key areas of applicability. Each one instances thinking which, when applied in inappropriate contexts or beyond the bounds envisaged by its advocates, demonstrates a tendency towards paranoia and needs to heed the corrective brought by an appreciation of the Lord of hosts.

The first is in the call for a revamped worldview by what has been called Third Wave Theology. The most well known architect of this theology has been Peter Wagner with important contributions from Charles Kraft, Don Williams and John White. The ideas have principally been mediated to this country through John Wimber and Kevin

Springer.<sup>43</sup> The 'power encounter theology' they espouse can give rise to a naivety about the nature of principalities and powers, and I believe is not well suited to forming a theology of evil.

A second concern is the prevalence of spiritual warfare imagery, which has been spawned by power encounter theology. There is no doubt that warfare is a rich metaphor in our understanding of the nature of the world and God's involvement in it. But there is danger when this metaphor is adopted as a movement that informs everything that we do<sup>44</sup>; distortions inevitably follow. One such is a loss of confidence in the covenant faithfulness of God. Too often we try to rescue people from evil influences through some form of spiritual warfare, when the prior need is for them to exercise faith in the risen Lord who has all things under his feet (Eph. 1:22).

A third concern is with some views on blessing and cursing.<sup>45</sup> Often what are diagnosed as curses are psychological factors which need to be addressed at a psychological level. Sometimes they are expressions of the self-fulfilling power of words at

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42 A. Walker, 'The Devil You Think You Know: Demonology and the Charismatic Movement', in T. Small, A. Walker and N. Wright, *Charismatic Renewal* (London: SPCK, 1995), p. 89. Walker's essay was a major stimulus to my thinking on this topic, as he encapsulates so many ideas that I have long felt but been unable to articulate. Note, incidentally, Walker's perspective that this paranoia owes little to classical pentecostalism, which 'kept (demons) firmly under the bed and firmly under control. There has been little interest or fascination in the habits, habitat or *haute couture* of evil spirits.' A glance through S.H. Frodsham, *Smith Wigglesworth, Apostle of Faith* (Springfield MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1948) confirms this. Wigglesworth evinces a lively sense of the activity of the devil, of conversion as being 'set free from bondage', occasional explicit release from evil spirits, and above all an unbounded optimism in the sovereignty of Jesus.

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43 A number of Wagner books could be footnoted. For our present purposes we note only C.P. Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1988). See also J. Wimber and K. Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), and *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). For details of other authors and an excellent summary of the issues, see the article cited above by T.D. Pratt, pp. 7-32.

44 A point well made by Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', p. 34.

45 Note for example Prince, *Blessing or Curse*.

critical stages in the formation of a person's psychological make-up. Too often the early diagnosis of a curse circumvents a more full-orbed analysis of some evil situation. Perhaps most important of all, much curse theology fails to appreciate the role of the covenant with respect to curses.

A fourth concern is closely linked, namely the development of elaborate demonologies to explain the power of evil in people's lives. Where demons are diagnosed, these are cast out and the problem ought to be fixed. Sometimes that is the case. At other times it is not the case, although demonic terminology is effectual in that it allows people to recognize and confront things in themselves. But on occasions an incorrect diagnosis leads to a prescribed cure which is inappropriate if not harmful.<sup>46</sup> Often elaborately ordered demonologies are presented, despite the fact that neither the Old nor the New Testament is interested in such naming and ordering of spirits. It is enough for the scriptural authors that the Lord is sovereign

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<sup>46</sup> G. Collins, 'Psychological Observations on Demonism', in J.W. Montgomery (ed.), *Demon Possession* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), p. 246, writes, 'There is abundant evidence from studies in perceptual psychology that people see and act in accordance with the expectation of those around them. If someone convinces me I am demon possessed, unconsciously I might begin to experience the symptoms and show the behaviours which fit the diagnosis. In like manner, if I assume someone else is possessed, I may begin looking for symptoms to prove my hypothesis. It is easy to develop a demonology mind-set in which almost everything we see or do is attributed to the devil.' Cited and quoted in M. Brimblecombe, 'Demons & Deliverance' (unpublished paper, 1989?), p. 5.

over the host.<sup>47</sup> Again, an inadequate appreciation of the nature of evil is another outcome of too much credit being given to demons.<sup>48</sup> The world and the flesh do not enter into the equation, with the result that personal responsibility can be evaded.

My final question in the light of the sovereignty of the Lord of hosts is with the understanding of territorial spirits. This has been touched on lightly in our earlier discussion of Greenlee's article. Too often the biblical bases presented in support of the idea are inadequately exegeted.<sup>49</sup> The results are not dissimilar to those arising out of misunderstanding curses and mobilising elab-

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<sup>47</sup> Beuken, 'The Prophet as "Hammer of Witches"', pp. 6-11, in a careful analysis of 1 Sam. 28:8-14, reinforces this point by demonstrating that the medium loses the initiative to Samuel in the encounter with Saul, and that the narrative in fact never sees an apparition.

<sup>48</sup> See N. Wright, *The Fair Face of Evil* (London: Marshall & Pickering, 1989), pp. 42 and 67. If God and the world he created are ordered and quantifiable and describable, then the world of evil is none of those things. Orderly ranks of demons is an unlikely scenario in such a world. Note also the extraordinary list of demons in the Hammonds' *Pigs in the Parlour*, as cited in Guelich, 'Spiritual Warfare', pp. 28-29. Guelich observes that 'Many of these terms fall within the Pauline category of "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-21). This list would be humorous if the authors were not serious. A list as complex as this shows the absurdity of some demonological schemes. This one leaves no room for personal responsibility. It reduces everything to dualism.'

<sup>49</sup> Warner's treatment of the story in 1 Kgs. 20:23-34 is a case in point. T.M. Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), pp. 34-36, reduces the question to power encounter terms in saying 'the real issue was between God and the gods, not just between the people in the nation of Israel and the people in the other nations. This is why battles were always won or lost on the basis of spiritual power, not military power.' The issue was as much one of allegiance to the God of hill and plain.

orate demonologies.

### Prospects

I do not wish to deny the validity or effectiveness of any of the above approaches. We are in debt to their main proponents for a needed rebellion against the western rationalistic dualism that enslaves us. But their cumulative effect can blind us to other truths if we are not prepared to critique them, and this article is offered as a start in that process. There are several issues raised but not addressed herein which would need to be part of such an on-going critique:

1. Further work on issues of theodicy with respect to the understanding of the sovereignty of God presented herein. The biblical understanding of the covenant and the call for allegiance may point the way here.

2. More analysis of the nature of the host or principalities and powers in our own day. In this connection Hiebert's concept of 'the excluded middle' could provide a way ahead.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> P.G. Hiebert, 'The Flaw of the Excluded Middle', *Missiology* 10 (1982), pp. 35-47, reprinted in P.G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

He is concerned to bridge the gap created by western dualism between this-worldly and other-worldly spheres. An application of Hiebert's study to the Maori understanding of the spirit realm could also well be worthwhile.

3. Further wrestling with the concept of evil in the light of the biblical material on the Lord of hosts. Something that is by its nature chaotic and anarchic cannot ultimately be explained, but it would be useful to bring this perspective to bear on the problem.

### Conclusion

In the meantime, on the grounds that 'neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things at hand nor things about to be nor heights nor depths nor anything else in creation is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38-39), I prefer sovereign God to paranoid universe.

1994), pp. 189-201. For an application of the concept in the Western context see R.J. Mouw, *Consulting the Faithful* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

# Time for God: Christian Stewardship and the Gift of Time

Brian Edgar

**Keywords:** Social context, culture, creator, ex nihilo, experience, relativism, commodity, holistic, redeemer, leisure, Sabbath, stewardship, management, history

We tend to take space and time for granted, as basic categories of human existence. They exist as the framework of the world in which we

live, but observing the detail, the form, the structure and the significance of such basic elements is not easy. Usually they are the means by which we analyse objects which exist in space and events which occur in time, rather than being themselves entities and events to be investigated and examined. It is easier to comprehend the objects which exist in space than the space in which the objects exist. It is a more straightforward process to analyse the movement or the change which occurs to entities than to examine the time or duration through which that change occurs. Yet it is, obviously, of the utmost significance that to be human is to exist in time and space and to be conditioned by those realities. The aim of this paper is to investigate the nature of time and the implications for an understanding of the stewardship of time.

The first observation is that our perceptions and experiences of time vary according to individual experi-

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ences, psychological types and age. Attitudes to time vary according to whether one is sixteen years old, or whether one is middle aged and reflecting on time passed or whether one has cancer and is facing death within three months. They also vary significantly, according to culture.

It is obvious that in western cultures and in cultures influenced by western thought and behaviour there is a tremendous consciousness of time as a commodity to be used. Time is measured with an ever-increasing precision and attention. The digital watch exists as a symbol of the ordering and measuring of personal time in hours, minutes and seconds. What is the time? It is not 'rainy season', it is not even 'Tuesday' (measured by days and nights), or 'late morning' (measured by the position of the sun) or 'about a quarter to eleven' (measured by the sweep of hands on an analogue clock), it is 10:43:07 (measured by the numerical display of a digital watch and accurate to a second or two in a month). It is a precise and commonly shared time and it has ceased to be a purely western conception as it spreads with the shrinking world. Attitudes to time change simultaneously with changes to attitudes to space. The shrinking of space through travel has led to the refinement of time measurement.

- The arrival of the train in Europe heralded the beginning of a new experience of time. Previously each village or town had been concerned only with keeping time for itself and in a fairly generalised fashion. With the train there was a need for timeta-

bles, for precise time keeping and for more accurately agreed times. The advent of air travel has extended the need for and the influence of, schedules, timetables and common agreement about time.

- The Melanesian Christian may think nothing of arriving for a meeting several hours, or even days, after the nominated time and then interprets the impatience of the waiting westerner missionary as sinful. The western person, from his or her point of view is only concerned about the 'waste' of precious time. In Egypt timekeeping shows social position: those of lower rank must come on time while those of equal rank arrive for an appointment an hour 'late' to show their independence.

- Western time is linear, but in much of Africa it is episodic and discontinuous with many different sorts of time: ritual time, agricultural time, seasonal time and lunar time which relate in complex ways. In the Australian aboriginal 'dream-time' time does not exist as a horizontal line extending through a series of pasts but is in a vertical relationship to the present. The past underlies and is within the present, 'events do not happen now, as a result of a chain of events extending back to a long past period—a "Dreamtime"—a beginning. They exist and they happen because that Dreamtime is also here and now. It is The Dreaming, the condition or ground of existence.'<sup>1</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> W.E.H. Stanner in his discussion of the interpretation of A.P. Elkin in 'Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion' in M. Charlesworth (ed), *Religious Business: Essays on Australian Aboriginal Spirituality* (Cambridge University press, 1998), p. 20.

is sacred-past-in-the-present

- In some cultures land is more important than time. It ties people to their ancestors, heroes and gods in a way that time cannot. It is not possible to go back in time to live with the great ones but it is possible to go to the places where these events took place. It is possible to go to the place where Rama rested, where Mahatma passed by, where the enemy was defeated. In this way the past mingles with the present and those of the present come into contact with their gods, their heroes and their forebears.<sup>2</sup> In this context the saving of space is more important than the saving of time which might be achieved if, for example, a road was put through the space.

In the eleventh book of his *Confessions* Augustine expressed his desire 'to discover the fundamental nature of time and what power it has'. Uncovering the nature of time means discovering much about our understanding of culture, God and ourselves.

*Different senses of time can lead to conflicts*

Christian faith transforms many aspects of life but does not replace every dimension of life and culture. Indeed the expression of faith is itself influenced by cultural forms and understandings. We therefore have to face the question of how culturally based attitudes to time and space affect our attitudes to God, the spiritual life and stewardship.

In the college where I am involved in training people for Christian ministry it is possible to see different attitudes to the stewardship of time in different generations. In this context one has to ask whether one generation's understanding of time, and therefore of the stewardship of time, which is worked out in an essentially modern culture is the best approach for ministry in an increasingly post-modern generation.

Questions such as this immediately bring one's own presuppositions into view. It is essential to understand something of our presuppositions and to acknowledge that it is not possible to write or speak on the stewardship of time without a prior commitment, a particular perspective on time. While we may hold some elements of this view lightly and in such a way as to minimize distortions, other aspects may be more difficult to identify. I write as a middle aged, western academic, with a rhythm of life which is marked by lectures and lecture preparation, conversations with students, regular meetings, chapel services and occasional conferences. I also have particular theological perspectives on the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of the Lord Jesus Christ, events, which provide a framework for my understanding of time. Out of these and other elements of my life and faith emerges a view of time that may be only partly recognizable and only imperfectly applicable to others. Throughout this essay there are references to the world of time which I inhabit and it is not only difficult to write for those

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), p. 133.

who belong to other cultural worlds with different conceptions of time, it may in fact be impossible to have a single biblical view of the nature and stewardship of time.

### God the Father as the Creator of Time

Christianity is a religion, which takes time seriously. Firstly, it is God who *creates* time and secondly, time is the context in which God *reveals* himself and *participates* in time, especially in the incarnation. Consequently, events happen in specific times time with salvific significance. Whereas from a Buddhist point of view there are countless worlds, and innumerable aeons passing through vast cycles of expansion and contraction, life and death,<sup>3</sup> in Judeo-Christian thought there is one world whose history begins at one point and which moves towards an end, and God's purposes are worked out in time, leading to a final eternity with God.

#### *God as the creator of time*

The first words in the Old Testament, 'in the beginning...' are the starting point for an understanding of time because, with Augustine, it is best to take this as the beginning of time

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<sup>3</sup>Suppose there was a great mountain of rocks, seven miles across and seven miles high, a solid mass without any cracks. At the end of every hundred years a man might brush it just once with a fine Benares cloth. That great mountain of rock would decay and come to an end sooner than ever the aeon. So long is an aeon. And of aeons of this length not just one has passed, not just a hundred, not just a thousand, not just a hundred thousand.' Sammyutta Nikaya ii. 1801, cited in Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, (Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 113.

itself, rooted in the creative activity of God rather than as a description of a creation which takes place in time. Time commences and there is nothing at all in creation 'before' this time. Aquinas did not think that the idea of creation necessarily ruled out the possibility of an eternal world with no beginning to time. He argued that as Gods' nature is to be eternally creative it is possible for creation to be without a beginning even though it is contingent and dependent. Nonetheless, as Genesis asserts a beginning, he rejected the idea of an eternal creation.<sup>4</sup> Much but by no means all contemporary cosmology is consistent with this, including the expansion of the universe, the presence of cosmic microwave background and the ratio of hydrogen-helium (the results of the big bang).<sup>5</sup>

Time is not a pre-existing framework or an attribute of God's nature, it is God's time, created with a beginning, and it is flowing and linear. But time is not an artificial abstraction, an independent entity; it is filled with a sequence of events with purpose, meaning, and destiny.<sup>6</sup> God works in time with unfathomable patience. Not only is a thousand years as a day to God (Psalm 90:4) but he has taken 15 billion years to get to the point where we are now. Clearly God is in

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<sup>4</sup> *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Qn 46, Art 2

<sup>5</sup> L. Fagg, *The Becoming of Time: Integrating Physical and Religious Time* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> The linear concept of time was only robbed of its Christian character of expectation and anticipation when it become an independent, formal category of thought in Kant—an *a-priori* form of perception along with an *a-priori* view of space.

no hurry. There is no rush. He is YHWH 'I am who I am' (Ex. 3:14) or, equally, 'I will be who I will be', the one who is transcendent and beyond simple, temporal determination by time. God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27).

*The nature of God's work in the world: through time or into time?*

The way in which God is interpreted as being at work in the world will influence the way that the stewardship of time is perceived. Firstly, our understanding of God is affected because the way the eternal God works in time can be interpreted in terms of whether the focus of attention falls upon the miraculous, initial creation *ex nihilo* of the world or on the amazing continuous process *creatio continua*.

- If God is primarily understood as the God who is seen at work in the first miraculous act of divine creation then it is likely that one's understanding of God's present action in the world will be that of a God who intervenes directly in events in order to bring about his purposes.

- On the other hand if someone understands God's relationship to the world primarily in terms of God's continuing creative purposes then they are more likely to understand God's action in the present in a less interventionist, more 'natural' way.

This difference in attitude can be illustrated by reference to one specific example, that of attitudes to God's work in Bible translation. Those who agree that this important work must be led and guided by God can still express their understanding in different ways. If God is primarily con-

ceived of in terms of *creatio ex nihilo*—as creatively innovative and as an interventionist God—then the focus is more likely to be on the miraculous and interventionist way God is at work in the lives of individuals, often directly and dramatically inspiring people to undertake the work of Bible translation in a manner not consistent with any natural process. The focus of attention on God's work falls on the present and on the immediacy of the situation. 'Now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6:2) expresses this attitude.

On the other hand a view which is more derived from an understanding of *creatio continua*—in which God is continuously and progressively operative in inexorable processes—is more consistent with the fact that God has not yet miraculously, instantaneously, brought into being a single, fully translated New Testament, nor even a part of it. Translations come as the result of a long and painstaking process of work and research. This view is more focused on the whole breadth of God's historic activity in the world with a perspective which looks to the future with a certainty that, whatever the present situation, God will ultimately work out his purposes in his own good time. 'My times are in your hands' (Ps. 31:15) is a representative text for this view.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> And this is a hymn representative of this way of thinking:

God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year:

God is working His purpose out, and the time is drawing near –

Nearer and nearer draws the time—the time that

Obviously, these perspectives are in no way contradictory but are complementary, and an understanding of the stewardship of time needs to take both into account. It is possible for an individual's understanding of the stewardship of time to be influenced by their understanding of the way God acts in the world. Clearly, then, our examination of time leads to an uncovering of our understanding of ourselves and our understanding of God as much as it leads to an understanding of time itself.

### *The dual nature of time*

The fact that different personalities and different cultures view time so differently points to a fundamental duality in which the objective measurement of time does not explain or account for subjective experiences and interpretations. A Christian stewardship of time needs to recognize and deal with both subjective and objective aspects of time. At the most basic level we can measure time by the careful precision of a digital watch, counting seconds and observing hours, while subjectively we experience time not in discrete blocks but as an ever moving stream, unmarked, unbroken and sometimes special, almost revelatory and cer-

tainly intensified. In critical circumstances, such as an accident, time can appear to be dilated and an individual can experience a sequence of events in a way that seems to stretch time. In religious experience a person can feel as though they have known a quality of time which is almost transcendent. We need to interpret these experiences of time—both the normal flow of events and the apparently transcendent experiences—in a way which is integrated with our fundamental beliefs.

The philosophical division of time into objective and subjective aspects extends back, in western thought, to the speculations of the Greeks such as Heraclitus and Parmenides and, in particular to Plato's division of the cosmos, separating the temporal, natural world from the non-temporal, eternal world of ideals.

In the present day the universal and objective structure of time is described by the conception of time derived from the work of Isaac Newton. In his thinking the various objects in space and events in time are to be found as the contents of a fixed, transcendent space-time that is ontologically prior to the contents of the universe. Newton identified space and time with the omnipresence and eternity of God, which together constitute the infinite container of all creaturely existence.<sup>8</sup> Space and time are considered absolutely in themselves without

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shall surely be,

When the earth shall be filled with the glory of  
God as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth, unless God blesses  
the deed;

Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide, till God gives  
life to the seed;

Yet nearer and nearer draws the time—the time  
that shall surely be,

When the earth shall be filled with the glory of  
God as the waters cover the sea.

[Arthur Campbell Ainger (1841-1919)]

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<sup>8</sup> His discussion of absolute time and space is to be found in his *Principia* preceding the formulation of the three laws of motion.

relation to anything external. They are absolute and unchanging and they embrace all things within the universe and as such they are the ultimate reference system. This gives expression to Newton's belief in the rationality and intelligibility of the universe as created by God.

While modern western culture has focused on the *objective* structure of time, other cultures have paid more attention to the second side of time, the *experiential* dimension in which time is examined from the perspective of the experience of the individual. Postmodern western interpretations of time have also been more interested in the subjective experience. However, this is not new for Augustine's interest in time involved relating the experiential dimension to the objective. Time, for Augustine, is not an absolute.<sup>9</sup> Time is real and present, but it is by no means absolute, nor even objective: 'It is in my own mind, then, that I measure time. I must not allow my mind to insist that time is something objective.'<sup>10</sup>

What is time? Augustine finds the most satisfying answer in terms of relationships— not the external relations of bodies, but instead the internal relations of the soul. Time is essentially a process of mental comparison. It is with the mind that we measure time.<sup>11</sup> We are able to know time precisely because it is a capacity of the person, a function of the soul. 'It is an extension of the mind

itself.'<sup>12</sup> His interpretation of time as a measure of the soul prepared the way for the relational view of time of Plotinus in such a way as to be, ultimately, consistent with Einstein's relativistic view of time. The theory of relativity has reminded us that there is no absolute time. Just as there is no space without an object, so too there is no moment without an action and no person without a relation. Time is the form and shape of our actions and we must talk of time *for whom*.

The fundamental implication of these reflections on the dual nature of time is to remind us that time is not to be understood solely in an objective, objectified and, ultimately commodified manner. Scientifically, the Newtonian *receptacle* concept of time and space has been replaced by the *relational* theory of time and space of Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg and others. The result is that instead of understanding time as a line it is understood as a succession of states of personal activity.

The same sort of transformation is needed theologically, as Augustine understood. A Christian stewardship of time must understand time as a subjective-objective entity which needs to be seen in terms of quality and relationship as much as in terms of quantity and functionality. Unfortunately, much of western thought, including Christian theology is still permeated with a purely objectified and functionalised view of time, as exemplified in time management

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<sup>9</sup> This is a consequence of the created status of time (*Confessions* 11:14-16).

<sup>10</sup> *Confessions* 11:27

<sup>11</sup> *Confessions* 11:24.

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<sup>12</sup> *Confessions* 11:26.

theory, some of which is utilized by Christians as though it summed up an appropriate view of Christian stewardship of time.

Western thinking has taken the legitimate duality of subjective and objective and has tended to turn an entity with dual aspects into a dichotomy of time which is related to other modernist dichotomies: subject-object; secular-sacred; fact-value and so forth. This has led to a ready acceptance of a biblical justification for this which is based on a distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*. But the distinction is not biblically viable and it contributes to a theological dualism.<sup>13</sup>

Our first task is to think *holistically* rather than just *sequentially*. The conceptual distinction between *kairos* and *chronos* is based on a dualism that needs to be overcome. It is a notion that some times are special and that God sometimes acts in a *kairos* manner while other times are simply *chronos*—chronological time, ordinary time. This view of God seeks to affirm miraculous and special divine intervention in the world but it does so at the expense of divine involvement in processes at other times. It is a view which is reflected in, and which finds justification in the Old Testament distinction between the Sabbath and the other six days of the week and in the dis-

inction between festival days—those special times in which God's redemptive activities are recalled—and other days. It is a view which, in our day, can be referred to as the split between secular and sacred and at its most extreme it is associated with a puritanical attitude that other times are evil.

### God the Son as the Redeemer of Time

God created space and time; just as space was filled with creatures, time was filled with days, six days of work and one Sabbath day. Compared with the six days of creative work, the Sabbath was a time *to be* rather than *to do*, and this time was always of greater significance. It was the special day of God's creation. He surely did not rest because he was tired from his six days of work. The Sabbath was not a day to recover strength, but it was a day in which God rested in and appreciated his creation.

It is right to see God's work in creation as justification for a high value for human work but we must also see that God is not an eternal fidget who continually and obsessively creates and who cannot stop and rest, and enjoy, and appreciate the creation and his children. God is not a model for workaholics! This time of resting in, and appreciating the world and its creator was to be equally important for the children of Israel. Even in busy times the Sabbath was to be observed (Ex. 34:21). It was a provision from God (Ex. 20:8), incorporating the principle of rest and the appreciation of God, humanity and

<sup>13</sup> While this has become a well-known expression it is not entirely justifiable in biblical terms and it also contains within it the seeds of an inappropriate dichotomy which was shown in James Barr's *Biblical Words for Time*, (London: SCM, 1962). These two words show oppositions in certain contexts and none in others. Compare, for example, Mark 1:15 (*kairos*) with Gal 4:4 (*chronos*).

creation. The Sabbath does not have just a recharging function as though it is just a break to enable us to return to work. It is the supreme day of the week and a delight for us (Isaiah 58:13). Breaking this commandment leads to stress in our lives, disorder in the world and alienation from God.

However, the significance and the role of the Sabbath were transformed in the ministry of Jesus (Mark 2:27). It meant a transformation of the understanding of time. Jesus' attitude to, and stewardship of time, expressed in his reinterpretation of the Sabbath can be compared to his transformation of the Old Testament attitude to money which is found in his reinterpretation of the notion of the tithe. Just as the tithe represents the Old Testament attitude to the use of material things, the Sabbath represents the Old Testament attitude to the use of time. One marks out a certain proportion of material possessions as being dedicated to God and the other marks out a certain part of the week as especially dedicated to God.

However, not only does Jesus not say anything positive about the tithe, the only time it is mentioned is when he condemns those who practise it while ignoring weightier matters of justice (Luke 11:42). Jesus could not affirm a theology of the tithe, as it was practised then, because it implied a misunderstanding of the call of God on the *entire* resources of the disciples. Jesus could not suggest in any way that it was enough to offer ten percent to God while retaining ninety percent for oneself. His claim

was on everything. It is the same with the Sabbath—there cannot be the merest suggestion that only one part of the week belongs to God. The reality is that *all times* are God's times and the Sabbath is to permeate every part of life. Every day is an opportunity to acknowledge God.

One of the consequences of this is that we need patterns of timekeeping which liberate us, rather than confine us. This is not to say we necessarily turn away from an actual pattern of six days of work and one Sabbath day but, depending on the context and the person and the need, there may be other ways of expressing our faith. As Paul says, in the context of a debate presumably between Gentile and Hebrew Christians concerning the significance of special days such as the Sabbath,

one man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it in honour of the Lord. He who also eats, eats in honour of the Lord (Rom. 14:5).

A Christian view of the stewardship of time need not fall back into attitudes and forms of observance which perpetuate the present cultural dualism of secular and sacred. We have freedom from the Old Testament view of the Sabbath and festivals and there is the opportunity for every moment to be Christ filled. The transition from Jewish Sabbath to Christian Sunday should lead to a continual and profound celebration of the fact that Jesus is risen and an eternal Sabbath has now begun (Heb. 4:3,10,11). Other festivals are also transformed: the Passover is fulfilled

in Christ and now celebrated continually (1 Cor. 5:78). In worship we become one with Christians across space and time. We need less divided and less linear time: eternity is in the present time (John 6:54, 68).

It is our responsibility in our stewardship of time to continue the work of the Reformation and to eliminate the split of secular from sacred that the Reformers began to do with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. If we allow the division to remain, then secular work is only good to provide for the spiritual and God's activity is really found only in occasional acts and at certain times. In this context Christian stewardship becomes the preservation and efficient use of time for what seem to be the particularly sacred, separate and special acts of evangelism, worship and fellowship rather than the transformation of all times, including the most ordinary and the most 'secular', into times for God. We must avoid any concept of the stewardship of time which perpetuates, or even accentuates by its efficiency, the present dualism which pervades much western and other modern Christianity in which 'gathered church' is separated from, and given priority over, 'scattered church' and in which the sacred is still separate from the secular.

Western culture now celebrates 'the weekend' which is a direct descendant of the concept of the Sabbath rest and Sunday celebration. However, in many respects it has become a time of indulgence and excess as well as a time of recreation and renewal. It is a descendant of the

Sabbath but, just as children can sometimes lose the faith of their parents while retaining the form of religion, the weekend has lost faith and has become a wayward and very secularised child of the Sabbath.

Leisure, as commonly understood, is not the same as the appreciative and relational rest of the Sabbath. The frustrations of work and the pursuit of pleasure lead to an obsession with leisure activities. If the split of secular and sacred times ended and if there was more Sabbath in every workday then it might mean that there would be less of a need for self-indulgent leisure.

A proper stewardship of time means seeing the divine possibilities in every moment and living each and every day in the presence of God. It also means helping our societies understand the spiritual dimension of work, relationships and leisure in every day and time. When we seek God's kingdom (Matt. 6:33) what we seek is not the efficient use of time but the presence of God's grace in time which transforms and redeems it. Christian stewardship is not just a matter of how individuals preserve and use their time. It is matter of how the church influences society in its attitudes towards time and every dimension of life.

#### *The compression of time*

Two aspects of time which need to be redeemed and which cannot be transformed by individuals alone relate to the apparent *compression* of time and an attendant loss of hope, and the *commodification* of time and an associated attempt to control the future.

In modern society mechanisation, computerisation and technology have increased the speed at which things are done. Communication, manufacture, distribution, travel, and the rate of consumption have all increased dramatically. Fashions, trends, ideas and values are increasingly ephemeral. Indeed, we may be facing a crisis in the interpretation of time. Pre-modern societies focused on the past and found meaning in the maintenance of traditions which validated communal values and social mores.

Modern society is different precisely because the focus has shifted from past to future. In modern society meaning and purpose is found in the attempt to control the future. The postmodernist has lost confidence, however, in any sort of meta-narrative and thus cannot see the future under control in the way that the modernist can. What meaning there is, is found purely in the present instant. It has been argued that the postmodern shift has come about precisely because of a crisis in our experience of space and time.<sup>14</sup>

For the postmodern history has effectively ended—in the sense that there is an end to the integrative effect of meta-narrative. In the post-modern framework there is no escape from the problems which modernism and the decline of optimism in secular hope have produced. Meaning can, at best, be found only in the present. Nietzsche—a postmodern thinker in the

heyday of modernism—proclaimed the death of God and the end of truth and morality as objective and universal values. The modern, secular vision was, for Nietzsche, merely an atheist continuation of Christian values that had failed to see that the death of God meant the death of meaning and progress in history. He offered an anti-meta-narrative of eternal recurrence: if there really is no meaning then all that is left is a repeat of the present. [‘Is that all there is?’ Yes]. To live without meta-narrative, liberated from Christian and modern dreams, means to live and affirm the totality of life just as it is. But Nietzsche knew that it would take a Superman to do this.<sup>15</sup>

This does not mean that we need a return to modern or even pre-modern forms, although there may be much wisdom in an examination of pre-modern Christianity. There is though a need for a biblical meta-narrative and a return to the hope it proclaims. What is needed is a future destiny that can give meaning to the present time. The Christian stewardship of time in postmodern context will not look very much like the stewardship of time in a modern context. This is not to say that either a modern or a postmodern perspective is to be judged theologically preferable. They are simply different and Christian faith must relate differently to each of them. Modernism, for instance, shares with authentic biblical faith a definite and positive view of the future, albeit a secularized and

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<sup>14</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1990), p. 201.

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999).

therefore deceptive vision in which the future emerges out of the present actions of human effort, rather than from the in-breaking action of God. Christian stewardship in the post-modern context will therefore need to be very different as it must deal with both a scepticism towards any sort of future and a focus on the present moment. In every situation, though, Christian faith must transform past, present and future and show Christ in every moment.

### *Commodification of time*

At the same time there is an increase in the commercialization and commodification of time. It is well known that 'time is money' and time is bought and sold through employment and industrialization. It is controlled through management and carefully preserved as a precious possession. Those of us in wealthy societies give things as presents rather than giving time, unless we wish to give a gift of utmost value to those whom we treasure most. Generally, we give what we have most of, which is material things, while keeping back what is most scarce, most limited and most valued. In this context the question arises as to how much time we really have for others (Matt. 25:34-36).

The commodification of time and the resultant questions about how this precious commodity should be used have produced the time management industry. Time management is an ever changing philosophy. There are generations of time management theories that have developed over the past forty years from a few significant books into a

huge industry with consultants, management training and time gurus. There are a number of different approaches with different underlying philosophies. Some focus on lack of personal order, others find the problem in other people, while still others emphasize the need to focus to achieve what you want. For some Christians this is what the stewardship of time is all about: control, efficiency, order and the ultimate preservation of time without any waste.

The underlying ethos of the various time management theories, especially the first generation theories, includes the belief that life is about maximised efficiency and frequently that technology can be the answer: the right computer, the right software, the right planner. Christian time management consultants and authors can too easily assume the same perspective, even if the ultimate uses of time differ. There can be in Christian thought as much as in secular time management:

- a lack of critical analysis of the place of values in determining what to do,
- the evacuation of life of relationships,
- and even an attitude which treats other people as the enemy.

One author, writing on behalf of a major mission agency suggested that

life is a contest... what does it take to live a fuller life? Determination, skill, effort and the right environment ... [y]ou have two main opponents in your fight for a more effective life. The first opponent is yourself; the second is everyone else! You

use your time and other people use your time.<sup>16</sup>

This author wants to place the individual in control of their life and future. It is of primary importance that individuals live their lives as they plan it. If the one's schedule or the plan is not followed then one's life is a failure.

Jesus told a story about those who seek to control the future (Luke 12:13-21). The parable of the rich fool is a denial of the rich man's belief that he could secure his future. It is a declaration of the fact that all time is God's. The same message is found in James (4:13-17); we cannot treat this as though it is a message only for those who are ungodly. However, there is a message for a Christian stewardship of time—that we cannot force the kingdom to come any more than a rich man can guarantee the enjoyment of future prosperity.

The disciples too were planning and wanting to know the future (Matt. 24:3 and Acts 1:67) and were told, 'it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority'. Like the disciples we too can want to know God's plans for the establishment of his kingdom. And we can want this from the best of motives, so that we can, as stewards, use our time and work effectively for the coming kingdom. But all stewardship is in God's hands. Time is a gift of God rather than just a commodity. A commodity is something which can be pre-

served and stored and used at our discretion but time is transient, a daily, hourly gift of God.

Later forms of time management have gone beyond efficiency analysis and past purely technological solutions to focus on the inner self. Some are psychological and aim to deal with significant flaws in the psyche which may be the result of environment or heredity and which produce a personal scripting which leads to dysfunctional time management. There are eastern as well as western forms of this approach which can emphasize a 'go with the flow' emphasis on natural harmony, getting in touch with natural rhythms and seeking a congruity of inner self and life flow. The precise form of analysis however, makes little difference if it goes no further than the interior self, and

where time management experts [do] look beyond the individual, they look at the institutional structures and not at the broader social and cultural dimensions. There is little awareness that time pressure is an all-pervading problem. While individuals and sometimes organisations are recognised as having problems, time pressure is not seen as endemic to our whole Western way of life ... while the time management approach urges people to define their goals, it does not encourage them to think whether these goals ultimately lie outside the purely secular understandings of life.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible to note, in passing, that the culturally specific dimension of the stewardship of time emerges strongly here. The most basic message in this is that there need to be a number of patterns of the Christian

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<sup>16</sup> David Cormack, *Seconds Away! Fifteen Rounds in the fight for the Effective Use of Time* (MARC, 1986), pp. 12, 27 and 32.

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Banks, *The Tyranny of Time* (Richmond: Lancer, 1983), p. 163

stewardship of time which relate to different cultural forms and actions.

As far as time management is concerned, the situation has changed to some extent. Traditional time management is based on control and efficiency and aims to accomplish what you want; other people are essentially seen as resources that can contribute to the fulfilment of your goals. But the more recent, fourth generation time management theories take a broader view<sup>18</sup> and seek to include values as well efficiency, leadership as well as management, relationships as much as results, the spiritual as well as the physical and the social as well as the institutional. The approach is summed up in the following story.

I attended a seminar once where the instructor was lecturing on time. At one point he said, 'Okay, time for a quiz.' Then he reached under the table and pulled out a wide-mouthed gallon jar. He set it on the table next to a platter with some fist-sized rocks on it. 'How many of these rocks do you think we can get in the jar?' he asked. After we made our guess, he said, 'Okay. Let's find out.' He set one rock in the jar ... then another ... then another. I don't remember how many he got in, but he got the jar full. Then he asked, 'Is the jar full?' Everybody looked at the rocks and said, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'Ahhh.' He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar and the gravel went in all the little spaces left by the big rocks. Then he grinned and said once more, 'Is the jar full?' By this time we were on to him. 'Probably not,' we said. 'Good!' he replied. And he reached under the table and

brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all of the spaces left by the rocks and the gravel. Once more he looked at us and said, 'Is the jar full?' 'No!' we all roared. He said, 'Good,' and grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in. He got something like a quart of water in that jar. Then he said, 'Well, what's the point?' Somebody said, 'Well, there gaps, and if you really work hard at it, you can always fit more into your life.' 'No,' he said, 'that's not the point. The point is this: if you hadn't put the big rocks in first, would you ever have gotten them in?'<sup>19</sup>

The 'big rocks' are interpreted as important values such as family, faith, education—whatever the individual conceives them to be. This illustration cleverly uses pre-existing assumptions about time management techniques to make a deeper point about values, and at the same time it indicates the shift in time-management thinking. Nonetheless, it tends to treat time as a *commodity* rather than a *gift* and even though values are now included, time management remains essentially focused on the self. The aim is to gain time to achieve values for oneself. Finally and perhaps most significantly it also suffers from the assumption that the problems of time are individual ones, to be resolved by personal management but there are also a cultural, systemic issues in which the problems of overwork, stress and insufficient time cannot be solved unilaterally. We have structured them into western society and, perhaps especially, into western Christian atti-

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<sup>18</sup> Typified by Stephen Covey and A. Roger Merrill *First Things First* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994) and Stephen Covey *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (NY Simon and Schuster, 1989)

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Covey and A. Roger Merrill *First Things First* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1994) p. 88.

tudes towards ministry.

### *Christ in time*

Although God is beyond time, yet Christ entered time. He came in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:2) and promises to be with us till the end of time (Matt. 28:20). In short, Christian time is centred on the person of Christ. Spiritual fulfilment is found in Christ, in looking back at his life and death (1 Cor. 11:25), in the awareness of his presence (Eph. 3:17) and in hope and expectation of his future return (1 Thess. 4:15). We live in a short stretch of time that moves *from Christ to Christ* (Col. 1:15-20).

Kosuke Koyama suggests that God works at the speed at which a person walks: three mile an hour God. 'God walks slowly because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed ... and it is a different speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed.'<sup>20</sup> Christ's coming 'in the fullness of time' is the finest example of his patience.

The basis for a Christian understanding of time is a theology of the cross. In the cross all times, and eternity meet. In the cross is salvation for all, and for all times. In the cross we find the eternal purposes of God revealed. Christians share in eternity because Christ shared our temporality. We are now able to share in the life of God through union with Christ in the power of the Spirit. Christian stewardship of time therefore means using this time rightly and correctly, which means sharing, in this time

and in all times, in the life of God. It means understanding the time and getting our priorities right. And this does not mean accumulating more time—God has plenty of that—it means doing whatever we do 'in Christ'.

For some people detailed time management can be a support to their spiritual life. There is no doubt that, for the disorganized, the advice must be to plan times with the Lord very carefully. In this way the schedule can be *supportive* of the spiritual life. However, we must recognise the danger of a schedule that perpetuates a division of life into secular and sacred. If we only think in terms of a compartmentalisation of prayer time, worship time and church time on the one hand and mealtime, leisure time and work time on the other, then we diminish the role of God in our lives. We must recognize the potential for the schedule to be *subversive* of the spiritual life when it restricts God to certain compartments of our life and, equally worryingly, leads to an over-emphasis on the need to continually work for the Lord without re-creation or Sabbath rest. In saying this there is no intention to decry hard work for the kingdom, but we must avoid any suggestion that we live by a doctrine of justification by works, as though we alone are the essential means by which the kingdom comes.

If we recommend careful planning for the disorganized it is also necessary to recommend masterful inaction for the unhealthily busy. Michael Leunig is an Australian cartoonist-philosopher with a wistful, gentle

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<sup>20</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *The Three Mile an Hour God* (London: SCM, 1979) 7.

approach to life. In a series of thoughtful and penetrating cartoons he writes ‘the Curly-Pyjama Letters’ from Mr Curly to Vasco Pyjama in which he dwells on the meaning of various aspects of modern life. Vasco Pyjama asks the question, ‘What is worth doing and what is worth having?’ Mr Curly responds by saying, ‘I would like to say simply this. It is worth doing nothing and having a rest; in spite of all the difficulty it may cause, you must rest Vasco—otherwise you will become restless!’

Leunig has put his cartoonist’s finger on an important dimension of modern life. The essential ‘rest’ which is needed can be interpreted, from a Christian perspective, as a rest that includes the Sabbath rest of resting in, and appreciating God and creation. But it also has immediate application for those who are not Christian but who recognize in what Leunig says, firstly a most damaging part of our society—tiredness, and secondly a most neglected dimension of life—that of rest. Leunig continues,

I believe the world is sick with exhaustion and dying of restlessness. While it is true that periods of weariness help the spirit to grow, the prolonged, ongoing state of fatigue to which our world seems to be rapidly adapting, is ultimately soul destroying as well as earth destroying. The ecology of evil flourishes and love cannot take root in this sad situation.

Of course, Leunig is speaking into a particular cultural situation, that of the modern city and modern patterns of work in which it is possible to discern, amongst many other contradictory as well as confirmatory trends, a shift towards greater levels

of spiritual, emotional and physical tiredness.<sup>21</sup>

Mr Curly continues his cultural analysis with the observation that

tiredness is one of our strongest, most noble and instructive feelings. It is an important aspect of our conscience and must be heeded or else we will not survive. When you are tired you must have that feeling and you must act upon it sensibly—you *must* rest like the trees and animals do. Yet tiredness has become a matter of shame! This is a dangerous development. Tiredness has become the most suppressed feeling in the world. Everywhere we see people overcoming their exhaustion and pushing on with intensity—cultivating the great mass mania which all around is making life so hard and ugly—so cruel and meaningless—so utterly graceless—and being congratulated for overcoming it and pushing it deep down inside themselves as if it were a virtue to do this.

What a Christian view of stewardship must not do is contribute to tiredness and exhaustion. We must not encourage a culture of exhaustion. An addiction to work is potentially a denial of the doctrine of justification by grace in favour of justification by works done to please God. There can be no hint of any presumption that we are indispensable to God. There is real truth in the belief that God achieves what he does *despite* us as much as he does through us. We need to keep time in balance, with appropriate time for sleep, work, recreation and relationships. If we do not do this, Leunig warns us, then ‘when such strong

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<sup>21</sup> The interpretation of trends in modern society is not easy, most industrial societies have exhibited a complicated trend towards increased free time, while at the same time believing themselves to be subject to greater time pressure.

and natural feelings are denied—they turn into the most powerful and bitter poisons with dreadful consequences. We live in a world of those consequences.’

What is the solution to this? In Leunig’s cartoon the answer is, very appropriately, rest. At the very least this means a physical and mental rest from the work that we do. For Christians it will include resting in God. Mr Curly urges Vasco ‘to learn to curl up and rest—feel your noble tiredness—learn about it and make a generous place for it in your life and enjoyment will surely follow. I repeat: it’s worth doing nothing and having a rest.’

Our rest should include a genuine retreat and removal from our work and it will also involve us in worship and prayer. This worship and prayer that is separate and set-apart in time should be fully integrated with the whole of our daily life. Worship, prayer and Christian ministry should permeate every moment of every day in every activity in which we are involved. As we do that the tiredness we feel (and which will still require us to rest) will not be so stressful. It will produce in us a sense of satisfaction and peace as we recognize the presence of Christ in all times and in all things that we do.

A Christian stewardship of time will work towards creating a Christian environment in which believers can understand clearly how they can live a life of faith in every moment of the time which has been given by God. It must help believers to learn how to avoid the stress and tiredness

which modern life can produce.<sup>22</sup> In more general terms, in a way that relates this principle to other cultural systems of time-keeping, Christian stewardship should not be so personalised that it does not challenge social systems and cultural norms which are contrary to, or destructive of, the exercise of full humanity.

### *Indefinite life-span*

One very significant change to the human experience of time may come in a few years. It is a serious possibility that a new form of genetic science will be able to provide telomere therapy that would be available for extending the human life span indefinitely. Some suggest that this could occur between 2005 and 2015.<sup>23</sup> The technology involved goes beyond attempting to establish optimum standards of good health in order to achieve greater longevity, and well beyond attempts to eliminate individual diseases. Telomere therapy is aimed at investigating and manipulating the most fundamental aging mechanisms of the human body so that there can be an almost unlimited extension of human life. This is not to say that even the greatest success with telomere therapy would eliminate death. Even if this scenario turns out to be right people

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<sup>22</sup> This may speak to some and not to others, again the cultural issue is important. This is from one perspective—a modern cultural situation where there is material prosperity and spiritual poverty. What is the response from those who come from cultural situations where, for example, modernization has not taken hold where the most extreme forms of material poverty exist?

<sup>23</sup> M. Fossel, *Reversing Human Aging*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1996), p. 222.

will still be able to wear out and die and no one will be immune from other diseases and accidents. It is, however, potentially a form of indefinite lifespan.<sup>24</sup>

The implications of this for career and work patterns, global population, marriage and family structures and social relationships are significant enough to guarantee a large-scale social transformation. There is nothing which makes a scientific search for this relative 'immortality' theologically wrong. For God a thousand years is as a day (Ps. 90: 4) and a life lived for two thousand years is one which can be lived in honour of God as much as one lived for three score and ten years or a life lived only for twenty minutes. A life lived for seventy years is a life lived 25,000 times longer than a life lived only for a day. Yet both can have their own completeness in God.

If people were to be able to live a hundred or more years longer than at present would that detract from the immortality of grace which is an eternity with Christ? I think not. Given the huge amount of time involved in God's work of creation prior to the presence of any human being it is hard to imagine him being concerned about a few thousand years! Extended life span is not a fundamental threat to God's control of life but it may well be a threat to significant aspects of human life and social

relationships but these will have to be dealt with elsewhere.

### God the Spirit and the Present Time

We must consider the time in which we now live from a theological point of view. Jesus berated his hearers who did not know or understand the times in which they lived (Luke 12:54-56). Salvation history has come to the point where Christ has ascended to be with the Father and the Spirit has come to be with God's people. This is the time of the church and the gospel, or, even more accurately, the time of the Spirit. What are the implications of this for a stewardship of time?

It is natural to ask how long this age will last. Despite Paul's assertion to the Corinthians that their appointed time had grown very short (1 Cor. 7:29) we do not know how long this age will be (Acts 1:6) and in any case that is almost certainly not the right question to ask. We would do better to ask about the character of the age and what kind of time this is. The answer to that is given to us in the 'signs of the times'. It is a mistake to think of 'the signs of the time' (Matt. 16:13) as referring only to that short period before the end. These signs are not there to provide chronological data concerning the final coming of the kingdom (Mark 13:32).<sup>25</sup> Instead, they are a revelation of the present state of the world and the

<sup>24</sup> This is, obviously, a hugely significant topic that cannot really be expanded on here. See my article 'A New Immortality?' *Evangelical Review of Theology: Journal of the World Evangelical Fellowship* Vol. 23 No 4, (1999), pp. 363-382 for a discussion of this.

<sup>25</sup> They are sometimes taken as signs of the end of time, but, in fact, they are more accurately referred to as 'signs of not-the-end' as indicated in Luke 21:9.

present antithesis between the kingdom of God and evil. Thus, to those who can understand them, they reveal the present opposition to God<sup>26</sup> as well as God's actions in judgement<sup>27</sup> and grace.<sup>28</sup>

The signs also serve to point towards the end of history (Matt. 24: 14) as well as the work of God in the present (Matt. 16: 3). The ever-present instruction is for disciples to be watchful (Matt. 24:42) and to understand the times. In our lives and ministry we are called on to *reveal* the time as much as to *use* it. We are to live this time as God's time. To *redeem* the time (Eph. 5:16 KJV 'making the most of the time' NRSV) does not mean to save it in the sense of conserving or even just using it efficiently; rather it means to save it in the sense of *transforming* it ('giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything' Eph. 5:20).

Obviously this will mean using the time for service and witness. It is a

time for caring for the poor, proclaiming the gospel, worshipping God and serving one another. But stewardship is not related to only some time and some activities. It must be something which has relevance for every moment and that means the transformation of every time: eating, working, conversing, playing, studying and even sleeping—all to the glory of God.

In doing this we must pay attention to the cultures in which we live and work. A Christian stewardship of time will be alert to the differences in regard to the understanding of time. It is necessary to avoid an over-simplified concept of stewardship which is culturally insensitive, trite or mono-cultural. In all contexts, though, we are to seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33) and as we do, perhaps the over-arching calling of God with respect to time is *to be* rather than *to do*, or even more precisely, *to become* the holy people of God. We do this as we express in our lives the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) and as we worship God in our living, becoming one with God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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<sup>26</sup> Matt. 24.9—tribulation; Matt. 24:10—apostasy; 2 Thess. 2:1-3—the man of lawlessness.

<sup>27</sup> See Matt. 24:6-8: wars, earthquakes and famine.

<sup>28</sup> See Matt. 24:14—the proclamation of the gospel and Rom. 11:25-26—the sign of Israel.

# Postmodernism: Ministry Implications For Church And Educational Leaders

Larry J. McKinney

**Keywords:** Modernism, truth, connectedness, spirituality, pessimism, centred, sensual, emotions, community, servanthood, media, role model,

Suppose a 1977 college graduate were to enter a time capsule, shut the door, and press the button. The capsule disappears.

Twenty-five years later the capsule reappears, the door opens, and the graduate steps out, and returns to the campus to visit the class of 2002. The physical surroundings may be familiar, but otherwise the differences would be overwhelming. Without an understanding of the significant cultural changes that have taken place during the past quarter of a century, a time traveller would prob-

ably find the behaviour of students and the problems they encounter quite difficult to comprehend. The dramatic shifts in their attitudes, values, educational achievements, and life goals would be astounding.

We, as theological educators, have not been in a time capsule over the past twenty-five years as our culture has changed. Rather, we have become products of it, having been influenced by its patterns and values far more than we actually realize. Culture is reality in our lives; its influences cannot be denied. Instead of attempting to mitigate the impact of culture on students, we must recognize its effect in order to minister to students at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have to understand the environment from which they come. We must realize there are differences with every generation of students.

What does Scripture teach us about generational changes? In Acts 13:36, the apostle Paul preached that David 'served the purpose of God in his own generation'. An

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implication of this is that God works, not only according to his purposes, but also according to the generational context of his people. Although the truths of Scripture do not change, educational methodology and forms of student ministry may need to be modified from one generation to another.

### A Description of the Contemporary Student Culture

In North America, today's young adults are known by many names: Generation X, baby busters, post-boomers, slackers, or twentysomethings. Perhaps 'Generation X' (taken from the title of Douglas Copland's 1991 novel) is the best label since it signifies an unknown variable, a generation that is still in search of its identity. Whatever we choose to call these young men and women, we cannot assume they are simply clones of their parents. What makes them unique is that they are the first generation to grow up in a post-Christian era.

The distinctive nature of this generation results not only from massive changes that have taken place within the North American society, but also from a paradigm shift in western culture—the transition from modernism (the Enlightenment's legacy) to post-modernism (a radical reaction against the Enlightenment understanding of truth).

This generation is the first one to grow up under the strong influence of this postmodern world view. Andres Tapia, Research Editor for Pacific News Service, argues for the importance of understanding these

two competing paradigms—modernism exemplified by the apologetic style of Josh McDowell's book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*; postmodernism exemplified by MTV and contemporary media.<sup>1</sup>

**Modernism:** 'They key assumption of modernism is that knowledge is certain, objective, good, and obtainable', asserts Stanley Grenz, formerly professor of theology at Carey and Regent Colleges in Vancouver. In this school of thought, the modern knower can profess to stand apart from the world and be an unbiased observer. Information processing is linear; one's outlook is optimistic, progress is inevitable; and the focus is on the individual.<sup>2</sup>

University of Notre Dame historian George Marsden observes that today's evangelicalism, with its focus on scientific thinking and common sense theology, is a child of early modernity. It is from these assumptions that evangelical presentations such as McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* have derived their persuasive powers and popularity for so many years.<sup>3</sup>

**Postmodernism:** 'In postmodernism, the primary assumption is that truth is not rational or objective', continues Grenz. 'In other words, the human intellect is not the only arbiter of truth. There are other ways of knowing, including one's emo-

<sup>1</sup> Andres Tapia, 'Reaching the First Post-Christian Generation', *Christianity Today*, 12 September 1994, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Tapia, 'Reaching', p. 20.

tions and intuition.’ In this relativistic environment, truth is defined by individuals and the communities with whom they identify. Therefore, as is the case with this generation, information processing is nonlinear and fragmented; the idea of progress is illusory, and the focus is on community. It is from these assumptions that MTV derives its power.<sup>4</sup>

Although postmodernism has been around for many years, it has become increasingly global in its influence. Core values of this particular cultural paradigm include:

**1. A denial of objective truth**—Postmodernism is relativistic in every way. It does not believe in any type of unifying centre or that there is any common body of truth. Instead, postmodernism says that the interpretation is what determines truth. This leads to a cultural relativity that says there is no legitimate eternal authority. One cannot appeal to a text such as the Bible for answers. Any claim to knowledge can be seen as an act of power and dismissed as being intolerant.

**2. A celebration of connectedness**—In reaction to the isolation of autonomous individualism in modernism, there is a strong desire to be connected in some existential way with not only other humans but with the earth and all its living creatures. There is a hunger to replace conquest with cooperation and to delight in process rather than solutions. Communities are important and diversity is accepted as part of the human mosaic.

**3. A pursuit of spirituality**—There is a fascination with defining what it means to be spiritual. In contrast to the traditional religious life of obedience based on revelation, this new spirituality of openness is based on a sacred awareness of life’s experiences. The postmodern academic world no longer pretends to be atheistic but is groping to find significance.

**4. An embracing of pessimism**—Postmodernism prides itself on realism and pragmatism. It is not idealistic. It believes the future is unknowable. Because the problems of the world seem unsolvable, the emphasis is placed on making the most of the present. Postmodernism seems to realize that if you cannot have the joy in the past or hope in the future, you have to survive the present. Stanley Grenz calls it a ‘gnawing pessimism’ that eats away at the structures of society.

While this paradigm shift might be interpreted as a cause for alarm, Grenz cautions that we avoid the trap of longing for a return to modernity that gave birth to evangelicalism. ‘We cannot turn back the clock’, he says. ‘But we can claim the postmodern context for Christ.’<sup>5</sup>

Reaching this generation is more than addressing the needs of a new generation. It means coming to terms with a major cultural shift that, for better or worse, is going to change the landscape for future generations.

It is always dangerous to make broad sweeping statements about

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<sup>4</sup> Grenz, *Primer*, pp. 5-15.

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<sup>5</sup> Grenz, *Primer*, p. 174.

groups of people, let alone a whole generation of young adults from all over the world. Many students will not fit the following generalizations, yet there does seem to be a sufficiently large number of students in very different cultures that fit these categories.

### Student Characteristics

1. **Uncentred**—Perhaps the most defining characteristic of students today is that they do not have stable reference points in their lives. They are not interested in the great philosophical questions on a conceptual level. Instead, they are pragmatic. They have seen too many failures of institutions, leaders, and ideologies to put much trust in systems or programs.

Furthermore, they are uncentred morally with no defining standard of right or wrong. Weak family structures create great moral vacuums. Some students have a self-described 'high tech lifestyle but a jungle morality'. One student describes life like a computer—'it just beeps when you mess up'. Such assumptions include an avoidance of believing in personal sin but nevertheless leave deep feelings of shame. Students are more likely to feel bad for who they are than for what they have or have not done. They are missing a moral centre in their lives.

2. **Sensual**—As students have lost some of their intellectual sensitivities they have gained more sensual awareness and interest. They are tremendously visual as they live in a world of constantly changing but increasingly appealing images. MTV

is a vivid reminder that even music has to be seen and not just heard.

Students are also into their physical world. They care about the environment and their bodies. They are sexually aware and active despite the danger of AIDS. They take pills at an alarming rate to build up either their bodies or their psychological state. They want to feel good in the midst of a world that is physically falling apart.

3. **Emotive**—A third characteristic is the visibly meaningful role which emotions play in this generation. The classical ideal of truth becoming passionate has been replaced by the experience of passion becoming truth. Students are not readily persuaded by dispassionate facts but are easily moved by open displays of emotion. In their self-chosen lifestyle they are playful, and irreverent, and like to party as hard as they can.

But they are also cynical and deeply fearful about life. In some parts of the world, students have no dreams for the future. They wonder if they can get a job after they graduate and if there is any future for them in their profession. They are disillusioned and are resentful that they have to grow up in a world that is such a mess. They have an innate sense of aloneness and an inability to trust anyone. They may have experienced abuse and divorce in their families and feel abandoned by previous generations. They fill their lives with things and activities to suppress the painful memories of the past and the dashed hopes of the future. They frequently have deep hostilities toward

the world and the people around them.

4. **Communal**—Although students continually feel alone, they avoid loneliness through very important circles of friendship. They want to be part of a group and do not like to stand out as individuals. This is what has weakened previously practised models of student leadership. Many students are not as willing or do not have the time to provide broad organizational leadership needed for large student movements on campus. Instead, they do things in small groups and in teams that provide more meaningful relationships and connectedness.

Students are often more accepting of racial and ethnic groups than their forbears. They are global and international citizens. Christian students, however, are confused about gender issues, especially regarding gay rights and human rights. There is often dramatic tension between their church's teachings and what they experience in the larger society. They struggle with how to handle such cultural relativity within their Christian framework.

This communal instinct, however, is a wonderfully Christian value for both evangelism and Christian discipleship. It places meaning on relationships that provide rich opportunities for sharing and demonstrating the gospel.

5. **Spiritual**—Just as the post-modern culture in general is intrigued by the spiritual world so are students. However, this response reaches beyond traditional Christian faith to the New Age and other mys-

tical religions. Islam and the cults are gaining more adherents world wide due to their discipline and aggressive recruiting.

Furthermore, because most religious options offer little hope, students have a strong preoccupation with sadness and death. They experience darkness in their souls and express it in their music, in their clothes, and in their attitude toward life.

### Ministry Responses

Theological educators and church leaders must have a thorough understanding of today's college students and the nuances of their culture. We may not always condone the values and life styles they represent, but we cannot ignore them. Instead of assuming a defensive posture or pretending that problems and differences do not exist, we must respond by building bridges of friendship and concern that create a climate for Christian maturity. We need to be committed to the personal and professional development of students as they are growing to maturity in Christ. Listed below are some of the specific means by which we can contribute to this growth process:

1. **We must serve a changing Student population.** Those of us specifically involved in the theological education need to take a look at the students who attend our institutions. Their needs and the support systems they require may be different from those of students in the past. More and more students may need educational programs and services to help them overcome linguistic, socioeco-

nomic, and cultural barriers to academic success. We must recognize that our student population goes beyond those in the 18 to 22 age category. It also includes older students and those from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. We must identify the types of student services and academic programs that need to be in place to serve a changing student population.

2. **We must maintain an educational community with reasonable standards.** Institutions of higher learning need standards in both academic and non-academic areas. Such standards clarify the expectations of the institution and make rules understandable. More importantly, they help to define the character of a learning community.

Standards regarding simple courtesy and the rights of others are good examples. Private space should be respected and honoured by peers. Loud noise should be prohibited. Sexism, racism, and bigotry are offences to the dignity of human beings. They violate everything a Christian institution should represent. Proper conduct also means caring for one's health and being concerned about the well-being of others.

In his book *Learning to be Human*, Lloyd Averill states a permanent truth about human nature:

A community is not just a collection of individuals. Rather it is, more fundamentally, a group of people acquiring their significance by conformity with standards and rules from which they derive their dignity. Within such a community, there is a recurrent need in men to reaffirm the rightness of the moral rules by

which they live.<sup>6</sup>

3. **We must develop within students a biblical world and life view.** The outcomes of a college or seminary education are traditionally measured by the student's performance in the classroom as they become proficient in the use of knowledge, acquire a basic education, and become competent in specific fields. Furthermore, the impact of the education is measured by the performance of the graduates in places of work or service. However, in the end, students must be grounded in the truths of God's Word as they are learning, growing, forming values, and impacting their world.

We must encourage students to develop the capacity to make sound judgements in matters of life and conduct. We must teach them to think, act, and even react biblically. The goal is not to indoctrinate students, but to set them free in a world of ideas and provide a climate in which ethical and moral choices can be examined and convictions formed.

This imperative does not replace the need for rigorous study in the various disciplines, but neither must specialization become an excuse to forget judgement or to weaken the search for conviction and solid biblical values.

4. **We must teach students to value service.** Service introduces students to new people and new ideas. It establishes connections between academic life and the larger

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<sup>6</sup> Lloyd J. Averill, *Learning to be Human* (Port Washington, New York: Associated Faculty Press, 1983), p. 131.

society. Furthermore, it should be an outgrowth of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. It is endemic to the Christian life. The servanthood of Jesus Christ is the model for 'servant-leaders' who will not only become sensitive to the needs of their community and their world, but also respond in both an altruistic and an evangelistic manner.

In the end, the goal of theological education is not only to prepare students for careers, but also to enable them to live lives of purpose—not only to give knowledge to students, but to channel knowledge into service. The Christian college or theological seminary provides an ideal opportunity for this type of Christian service.

5. **We must provide a support system for the emotional and physical needs of today's students.** Our current group of students brings many mental and physical health concerns with them to the campus. Some of them come from deplorable home situations. Others are victims of child molestation or incest. Some have had firsthand knowledge of eating disorders, suicide, or a sexually transmitted disease, while others have had experience with alcohol or other habit-forming drugs. With all the complications in the lives of today's students, we have no choice but to mobilize health and counselling staff, student life professionals, faculty, and clergy in providing a strong support system. We have a responsibility for the development of complete students—the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual

aspects of their lives.

6. **We must recognize the place that Art and Media play in ministry.** The centrality of music and TV in the lives of today's students cannot be overestimated. VCR's, MTV, CD players, cable table, and personal computers are all part of their lives. Because these forms of art and media are so much a part of the culture of today's young adults, they must be used effectively to reach them. We must ask ourselves, how can we use these cultural norms to reach this generation? For example, young adults see art as a primary vehicle for worship. This generation likes to worship through music and drama. It is through these times of creative worship that students give spiritual meaning to their lives

7. **We must create a strong sense of Christian community.** A caring climate needs to be developed where various students and groups are welcome. To accomplish this, we must appreciate the differences that make each group unique. Then we must recognize the community or common bond we share in Jesus Christ. Diversity and unity are compatible. In fact, they are both equally necessary. Our challenge is not the development of rugged individualism. That happens with little effort. Our major challenge is to create a community in which students see their responsibility to the Lord and to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

8. **We must serve as healthy role models.** In a day and age when biblical values appear to be

given little attention, we need to communicate them loudly and clearly. Students long for people they can trust, who are not using or abusing them. They are not interested in religious pronouncements or sterile arguments. They want to see people whose walk matches their talk. When we say that particular individuals are persons of integrity, we no doubt mean that they radiate that quality through their behaviour and total being. Whatever that particular value or character quality may be, it must be modelled. Beyond what we write or what we say, we must ask God to help us to be godly role models after whom today's students can pattern their lives.

9. **We must demonstrate obedient love.** Students are desperately in need of love—a love that is far deeper and broader than superficial romantic expressions. Jesus emphasized the primacy of the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36-40). As disciples, we are to love God and our neighbour. We are to do this with all of our being—heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is a truly comprehensive love that incorporates all that we are. If we are to reach today's generation of students with the life-

changing message of Christ, we must do so from a foundation of love for them and their God.

10. **We must allow Christ to be preeminent in every area of our ministry.** Like all other people to whom we minister, students need to know Christ as their Saviour and their Lord. He is the only true prophet, priest, and king. As Paul wrote to the believers in Colosse, Christ is to be 'preeminent in all things' (Col. 1:18).

It is easy to live our Christian lives with a preeminence on doctrine or spiritual experiences or social concerns. It is all too easy to lose our first love for Christ and become married to what is culturally, methodologically, or organizationally most comfortable. Such groups do not reflect deep affection for the Lord and fail to attract others to enjoy a deeper relationship with Christ.

The challenge and opportunity for us is to model Christ by talking about him, studying his life, and living our lives in adoration and obedience to him. Our worship, our lifestyle, and our allegiance must be a transparent commitment to the one 'who loved us and gave himself for us.' It is that Jesus who makes himself available to students today as Saviour and Lord.

# Faith, The Church and Public Policy: Towards A Model of Evangelical Engagement

Bruce J. Clemenger

**Keywords:** Liberalism, liberal democracy, equality, freedom, state, limited government, self-determination, secularism, political engagement, Theonomy, sanctity of life

## Introduction

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama, announced in an article in the journal *National Interest*, that we had arrived at the end of history.<sup>1</sup> The ideological war was over. A 'remarkable consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government had emerged ... as it conquered rival ideologies like hereditary monarchy, fascism and most recently communism'.<sup>2</sup>

Though there were still battles to be fought in some countries, the ascendancy of a liberal vision of life and society was assured and history, the drama of the clash between competing ideological and philosophical ways of life, was over. Twin forces within liberalism, scientific rationalism and the struggle for recognition, would lead to the collapse of tyrannies and drive us relentlessly toward establishing liberal democracies as the 'end state of the historical process.' The realization of the core liberal principles of liberty and equality—both political and economic—would result in a form of society that Fukuyama associates with German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, a socie-

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History' *National Interest* no.16 (Summer), pp. 3-18.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. xi.

ty which satisfies humankind's 'deepest and most fundamental longings'. While many would question whether liberalism can claim victory over all other philosophies of life, others continue to grapple with the implications of this liberal vision of life for religion and non-liberal ways of life—consider books such as *Jihad vs. McWorld* and more recently, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*.<sup>3</sup>

When we consider themes of globalization, secularization, capitalism, universal civil, political and human rights, and consider modes of influence such as the multinational corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, UN agencies, international tribunals, we must reflect on the spirit, the worldview, the philosophy, or the vision of life that guides these. In what follows, I want to examine liberalism as a philosophy, or in the language of American political philosopher John Rawls, a comprehensive doctrine. Liberalism is the predominant comprehensive doctrine in the West and is the driving force behind globalization, political reform, economic growth and social change — the focus of our next few days together. I will then explore the nature and purpose of the state and the political role of the church in a differentiated society, and end with a model for Christian engagement in a liberal democracy, drawing on our experiences in Canada.

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Barber *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995); Thomas L. Friedman *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999).

## Liberalism

I will begin with some comments on liberalism. I will briefly examine its core principles and how these principles have evolved. I will also look at its spirit or ethos, which I will describe as being religious in nature. Due to the predominance of liberalism in the West and its influence around the world, it increasingly shapes the context within which we seek to engage politically.

Liberalism considers the fulfilment of individual desire to be the highest good.<sup>4</sup> Two characteristic principles of liberalism are freedom and equality.<sup>5</sup> Freedom, usually framed in terms of individual freedom, is understood as the absence of coercion in all areas of human life—social, economic, political and religious. The second principle is that we are all to be regarded as equal and to be treated equally in law and public policy. These principles, however, are not static, and how freedom and equality are understood continues to evolve. Freedom is no longer framed merely in terms of freedom from coercion (negative freedom), but is understood in terms of our capacity to pursue our chosen good. If you have no choices, can you be considered free? Likewise, the equality of all persons before the law has shifted to equality of opportunity which car-

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see George Grant *English Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> The following description of liberalism is a typical understanding. Much of this section follows the presentation of liberalism in Mark Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan's *An Introduction of Government and Politics* 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Scarborough, ON: Nelson, 1994).

ries with it a claim to positive action by others (including the state) to ensure all are equal. This is a demand not only that one's dignity as a person be respected, but also that one's choices be respected. I am not accepted as equal unless I, and the choices I have made, are respected and even celebrated.

Politically, this shift from negative freedom to positive freedom means that the role of the state moves from a minimalist one, which leaves the individual alone unless others' rights are violated,<sup>6</sup> to a more participatory state; here the concern is not only the absence of coercion but the presence of means or capacity necessary for the expression of freedom.<sup>7</sup> The shift from legal equality of personhood to equal respect for choices (affirmation and even celebration) likewise requires a more interventionist state through the development and enforcement of human rights codes and programs and policies that ameliorate inequities.<sup>8</sup> Thus the primary role of government has changed from enforcing basic rules

and preventing people from harming each other through force or fraud (a 'night watchman' state) to promoting freedom in the sense of capacity, and ensuring social welfare (leisure, knowledge, security) and reducing differences in order to ensure that no one is prevented by others from having a chance to achieve success. The dilemma for liberalism is that the pursuit of freedom and equality are often in conflict. This conflict, both between the earlier and later definitions of freedom and equality respectively, or between the two principles themselves, is expressed through the formation of political parties which differ in their interpretation of these principles and the relative priority they assign to each.

There are two other principles characteristic of liberal democracy: limited government and the consent of the governed. The former means that there is a recognition of spheres or areas of life into which government should not intrude. One example of such a sphere is religion which is usually understood within liberalism to be a private matter. Limited government is also expressed in a commitment to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Consent of the governed reflects an understanding that public authority resides in the people who delegate it to the

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<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill said, 'The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.'

<sup>7</sup> As expressed by T.H. Green: 'When we speak of freedom, we should consider carefully what we mean by it. We do not mean merely freedom from restraint or compulsion... we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others.'

<sup>8</sup> In terms of economics, there is a shift from the enforcement of rules of property and trade within a free market to a modification of the market system to ensure the welfare of all. J.M. Keynes said; 'The world is not so governed from above that private and social interests always coin-

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cide. It is not so managed here below that in practice they coincide. It is not a correct deduction from the principles of economics that enlightened self-interest always operates in the public interest. Nor is it true that self-interest generally is enlightened: more often individuals acting separately to promote their own ends are too ignorant or too weak to attain these.'

sovereign. Taken together, the government is understood to be bound by law which is shaped by agreement among citizens.<sup>9</sup>

The four principles of freedom, equality, limited government and consent of the governed are not problematic for Christians. Certainly we affirm freedom and equality, and we recognize the value of democratic processes and of limits on government power. However, the liberalism described by political theorists such as John Rawls and Jurgen Habermas, is more than a set of principles. Variouslly described as an ideology or philosophy, I prefer to refer to it as, in the words of John Rawls, a comprehensive doctrine.<sup>10</sup>

Liberalism's prime commitment is to individual autonomy understood as individual self-determination. It seeks to remove any and all barriers that hinder autonomy. It is atomistic in that it understands the individual to be the locus of authority and meaning. Only individuals have ontic or moral status, and social institutions are but ideas in our minds, names and concepts given to associations that are nothing more than an

aggregate of self-determining individuals who co-operate because they share a common interest or purpose. All social institutions have only a derived, and therefore tentative, contractual existence. Their authority and power over the individual is carefully delimited. Forms such as the family and the state are deemed necessary but are considered man-made and artificial entities. They are considered potential threats to the autonomy of the individual. Thus the family is merely an interacting framework for developing the rights and abilities of each family member, marriage is merely a contract which is binding as long as the participants agree, a business is an artificial entity in which economic transactions take place among freely competing individuals, and a church is something akin to an ethnic association and is formed for the private benefit of its members.

Within liberalism, society is seen as an aggregate of self-determining individuals tending autonomously and automatically toward a state of natural autonomy and the state is an instrument through which rational self-determining individuals can be assured of having their basic liberties protected. Political order exists solely to safeguard the purposes of autonomous individuals. Justice is understood to be rooted in intuitive ideas and can be identified apart from any appeal to the good. The rational person, in establishing what justice is, can distance themselves from their religious and cultural context and function as an unencumbered self who is autonomous (able

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<sup>9</sup> As former Canadian Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson stated, 'Liberalism includes the negative requirement of removing anything that stands in the way of individual and collective progress. The negative requirement is important. It involves removal and reform; clearing away and opening up so that man can move forward and societies expand. The removal of restrictions that block the access to achievement: this is the very essence of Liberalism. The Liberal Party must also promote the positive purpose of ensuring that all citizens, without any discrimination, will be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities opened up, of the freedom that have been won.'

<sup>10</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia, 1994).

to choose ends) and is an individual (identifiable apart from their religious and cultural rootedness). Hence within a liberal understanding of life, while we function privately (or non-publicly) as members of families, of cultures, of religions etc., publicly we gather as citizens, leaving these other attachments behind and affirming our ability to choose our own path—described by Nietzsche in terms of ‘lifestyle’ and ‘values’. At our core it is believed we are separable from these other attachments. It is to this core self that liberalism appeals.

As indicated above, liberalism has a spiritual or religious thrust. Eric Voegelin describes it as having a revolutionary impulse that is expressed in four areas: the political, economic, religious and scientific.<sup>11</sup> Politically, it is defined by its opposition to certain abuses and opposes any order based on privileged position. Voegelin says the problem is that while this attack was originally led by the liberal ‘bourgeoisie’ itself, the attack on privilege turns on the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary movement cannot end until society has become egalitarian. Economically, it seeks to repeal legal restrictions that set limits on free economic activity and believes there should be no principle or no motive of economic activity other than enlightened self-interest and that all barriers (including national ones) to trade and economic progress should be eradicated.

Religiously, liberalism rejects revelation and dogma as sources of truth;

it discards spiritual substance and becomes secularistic and ideological. Finally, scientifically it assumes that the autonomy of immanent human reason is the source of all knowledge. Science is free research liberated from authorities, not only from revelation and dogmatism, but from classical philosophy as well. As a revolutionary movement it continues to press for reform and, according to Voegelin, it will not result in a stable condition until its goal is achieved. It continues to press towards an ‘eschatological final state’, characterized by true freedom and equality. Voegelin says;

One can't get away from the revolution. Whoever participates in it for a time with the intention of retiring peacefully with a pension which calls itself liberalism will discover sooner or later that the revolutionary convulsion to destroy socially harmful, obsolete institutions is not a good investment for a pensioner.<sup>12</sup>

This prioritization of individual autonomy as self-determination and the accompanying rights is presumed by many liberals to be enlightened, reasonable and without bias towards most comprehensive doctrines to which citizens may adhere. It is considered uniquely public in that it is applicable to all and benefits all, and is not the product of any one comprehensive doctrine. It forms the basis for what John Rawls calls a public conception of justice that guides public life. As this view of the person and conception of justice are seen by liberals such as Rawls to be independent of any given comprehensive doctrine, they are seen as

<sup>11</sup> ‘Liberalism and its History’, *The Review of Politics* 36 (1974/75), pp. 504-520

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 512.

secular (non-sectarian) and political, not philosophical. They are principles to which all reasonable citizens can agree. As such, they provide a political framework able to accommodate a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

However, this ‘overlapping consensus’ presumes that these liberal conceptions will guide public life and that public dialogue will be guided by public reason, that is, reasoning that is non-sectarian and accessible to all citizens. Thus while comprehensive doctrines inform non-public life, the expectation is that all citizens are expected to function publicly as liberals.<sup>13</sup> Religiously rooted arguments are perceived as being suspect and an indication of an attempt to impose one vision of life on all citizens. Law and public policy must be defended in terms of public reason.

Liberalism is more than a commitment to certain principles. Following James Skillen, if we define religion as human convictions, presuppositions, and commitments that give fundamental direction to human actions and moral arguments, liberalism would qualify. Skillen writes, ‘The deepest presuppositions of so-called secular philosophies function in the same way as do the deepest presuppositions of traditional religions.’<sup>14</sup> The Enlightenment and Communism, he says, ‘by this inter-

pretation are as religiously profound and comprehensive as any outlook fostered by a historical religion.... No argument about bad law or good law can proceed without reference to normative ideas of authority and freedom, of human dignity and responsibility.’

By this analysis, political liberalism, like all political/legal systems around the world, has its historical origins in a particular ‘religious’ vision of life. Even so-called secular approaches to political life, says Skillen, are themselves thoroughly religious in nature. The guiding spirit of liberalism is the pursuit of freedom (and equality) and entails a specific understanding of human nature, or normativity, and of knowledge. As a comprehensive doctrine, it shapes people’s perceptions of themselves and societal institutions, conforming both to its understanding of truth.

### **Politics, the State and Religion**

Religion or faith<sup>15</sup> is a dimension of all of life, including government and the state. As persons we are creatures of God and our lives are lived in response to the Word of God—that by which the world was created and by which the world is sustained. (Culture is an expression of this response.) As faith is an aspect of all of life, all that we do has a faith

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<sup>13</sup> A helpful resource on the themes of liberalism and pluralism is the EFC discussion paper entitled *Being Christian in a Pluralistic Society*. Available at [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca).

<sup>14</sup> James Skillen *Recharging the American Experiment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), p. 31.

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<sup>15</sup> In public discourse, I often use the language of faith or spirituality rather than religion as I find it is more readily acceptable in general discussions than religion, which is often interpreted to connote worship and ritual and hence understood to be more narrow in application than faith or spirituality.

dimension—whether we eat or sleep, in our role as parents or in our politics. All that we do has a religious dimension. This understanding rejects the notion that part of our life is lived in the secular realm—a realm of activities that are a-religious or neutral with regard to religious belief.

Likewise all that we do has a political dimension—office politics, negotiating with a spouse and children and so on. Politics involves power, authority, coercion, influence, and conflict resolution. It involves gathering and maintaining support for common projects; it concerns disagreement and conflict as well as the distribution of good things such as wealth, safety, prestige, recognition, influence and power. These concerns are not limited to the state. All institutions or societal structures involve these political issues—family, schools, business, voluntary associations, religious institutions. The elements of politics are the exercise of power (influence, coercion, authority) and justice, and these apply to all human relations and social structures. However, it is the government and the state for which politics is the core dynamic (Romans 13). Governing is a specialized activity of individuals and institutions that make and enforce public decisions that are binding on the whole community and it has the ‘power of the sword’ (Rom. 13:4). While other institutions in society exercise forms of coercive power—family/parents (punishment), churches (excommunication), schools (withhold degree), business/unions (firing, strikes)—the government retains power of life and

death. Governments cannot depend solely on coercive power, however, or their legitimacy will be eroded.

Stated another way, the state is a creature, an entity instituted by God and, like others such as the family or the institutional church (as distinguished from the Body of Christ), it is created and designed by God to serve God in the fulfillment of its given task. We are told that the governing authorities are God’s servant to do good. It has a unique structure, different from that of the family, the church, a school or a business, and, like all of these structures, we can speak of it having a spiritual direction. A family can be a Muslim family or a Hindu family or a Christian. While the structures may be similar, the faith commitment and the spiritual orientation of the families will differ. Likewise with ecclesiastical institutions, and, I argue, with the state. All states will have executive, legislative and judicial functions. Similarly, all states will be directed by something variously described as an ethos, a vision of life, a worldview, a philosophy, or a faith perspective.

When I speak of the state as being religious or faith-directed, I am not advocating the fusion of the church and state. The church and state are distinct institutions, both of which have a spiritual direction. As institutions with different purposes and roles, they should remain separate and respect the calling of the other. The direction of the state is identified through its political creed, often found in constitutional preambles or in its various charters.

This understanding of the state

also suggests that the state cannot be 'neutral' with respect to religion and culture. For example, the official language(s) or national holidays will reflect the predominance of certain cultural or religious influences. Most modern states seek to be accommodating of cultural and religious (directional) plurality and to the degree that they can do so, they are considered secular. While describing a state as secular is usually understood to mean that the state remains neutral with respect to the various religious beliefs adhered to by its citizens, its faith perspective means it will not be without bias.

States vary in their ability to accommodate deep religious diversity. To the extent that the state is not confused with the institutional church and does not see its role as enforcing that which is properly the responsibility of the church (doctrine for example), then it will be properly secular (non-sectarian) in that it retains its separation from any one church. However, this is different from a secularist view that maintains that the state should be a-religious and denies that the state has a religious dimension. This secularist approach results in attempts to restrict religion and the religious beliefs of citizens to private life, and is often characteristic of liberal states.

### **Christian Approaches to the State**

How then do we engage politically as Christians? There is no shared evangelical understanding of, or approach to, politics and the role of

the state. In his book *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr presents five typologies that describe the different orientations of Christians to culture.<sup>16</sup> Applied to politics, the first orientation, which he labels 'Christ against Culture', entails a general rejection of culture—usually associated with the Anabaptist tradition. The church is set over and against the world and we, as Christians, are to 'come out from among them and be separate'. The church is an alternative community and the state, through its role of restraining evil, provides order and fairness. While its task is God-given, nothing about it is distinctively Christian. The gospel is about love and personal redemption, while politics is about worldly issues that are necessary but not of prime concern to Christians as Christians. The state is neutral with respect to the gospel, and sometimes in tension with the commands of Christ, but it is still a realm of possible Christian involvement.

The second orientation, 'Christ and Culture in Paradox', characteristic of many evangelicals identifies with the tension of being in the world but not of it. Politics and government deal with earthly pursuits that are part of the human condition. We try to keep our minds on 'spiritual things'. In this view the things of Caesar are different from the things of God. Yet the spiritual can influence the natural or material, and Christians can offer moral guidance to the government. However, the

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<sup>16</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

things of this world are not of prime concern. Being a missionary or pastor is a higher calling than that of a lawyer or politician. We engage politically out of concern for 'moral issues', implying that matters of the economy and budgets, for example, are not 'moral issues'.

The third, 'Christ above Culture', is a characteristic Catholic synthesis where Christ adds a moral or spiritual dimension to life—grace added to nature. We are by nature social beings and 'society is impossible on the human level without direction in accordance with law. Beyond the state is the church, which not only directs men to their supernatural end and provides sacramental assistance, but also as the custodian of the divine law it assists in the ordering of the temporal life; since reason sometimes falls short of its possible performance and requires the gracious assistance of revelation, and since it cannot reach to the inner springs and motives of action'<sup>17</sup> The state is essentially a good one if it provides an orderly society that is compatible with the free practice of the Christian faith and the protection and enhancement of family and church life.

The fourth, 'Christ of Culture', often associated with a Lutheran/Anglican perspective, is characterized by accommodation. Culture is understood to be basically Christian. Politics and government are in need of redirection and redemption and this need guides Christians in their dealings with gov-

ernment. (Consider a situation where the head of state is also the head of the church.)

The fifth and last, 'Christ transformer of Culture', is a characteristically reformed approach where the goal is the reconciling of all things to Christ, including the political. The Christian task is to bear witness to Christ in all areas of life, as Christ is Lord of all.

There are several problems raised by this analysis. First, while these typologies are helpful and do capture some of the orientations different Christian traditions have held, the problem is that they are characterizations. It is difficult to fit anyone neatly into one category. Second, most prefer to see themselves as transformers of culture and cast others into other categories. A key question is, what are the means of transformation: individual action, church action, and/or advocacy through Christian organizations? The characteristic Reformed approach, for example, can involve the formation of Christian schools, unions, and political parties. While these are ways of participating in education, business and politics in a distinctively Christian way, setting up alternative Christian institutions can also be interpreted as a retreat from the world. Is this the case, or is it simply a matter of a different way of being 'salt'? Third, the opposition of Christ and culture is a false and misleading one. We were commanded in the Garden of Eden to be fruitful and to subdue the earth. Is our culture not our answer to that command? Culture is itself a religious expression, an

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

ordering or basic pattern of living shaped by our basic beliefs.

I have found elements of these five orientations to be present in the way evangelicals engage politically. Depending on the issues, Canadian evangelicals sometimes get frustrated with the progress of secularization and say we should give up on politics—we have lost the war and we should retreat and focus on evangelism. Some may consider our legal system to be fair and principled and thank God for our Christian heritage, while others seem to think a Christian witness hinges on whether the Lord's prayer is recited at the opening of public meetings. In general, while many evangelicals experience the tension of the Christ and Culture in Paradox orientation, when seeking to participate in public debates they reflect elements of the Christ against Culture, Christ above Culture or the Christ Transformer of Culture orientation. In the next part of this paper, I will focus on these three, the Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed approaches, using representative authors to explore each position and then compare them.

### *Anabaptist*

John Howard Yoder, in *Christian Witness to the State*,<sup>18</sup> begins with the presumption that the state's main purpose is to sustain the social order by restraining evil through exercising its power of the sword. While this is the state's God given mandate, Yoder's pacifist position

means that a Christian cannot threaten or take away the life and liberty of another; thus a Christian will find it difficult to participate in governance. He describes two ages that coexist but differ in terms of direction. The present age is characterized in terms of sin and the coming age is the redemptive reality where God's will is done. The task of the church is to point forward as the social manifestation of the ultimate triumph of God's redemptive work.

States are used by God to maintain order and to punish one another. The state maintains peace so that the church can fulfil its task of evangelism. The basis of the church's witness to the state is its understanding of the state function within the redemptive plan. The witness is indirect through the example of the church, an alternative society which demonstrates what love means in social relations. The direct witness of the church involves voicing concerns to the statesman. In speaking, Christians are mindful that most rulers are not committed Christians and that there is an incompatibility between non-resistance on the one hand and responsibility for normal government process on the other.

There are two ethics at play—the ethic of discipleship relevant for believers, and the ethic of justice which is concerned with self-preservation and maintaining a stable social order. This second ethic is all one can ask of the broader society. Christian witness is expressed in terms of specific criticisms concerning specific problems and these, if followed, would lead to another set

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<sup>18</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Christian Witness to the State*, Institute of Mennonite Studies No. 3. (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life, 1964).

of more demanding criticisms. For example, Christians do not call for the establishment of the perfect society but rather for the elimination of visible abuses. Christians ask that the least violent and the most just action be taken. However, of all the alternatives presented to the statesman by the Christian, none will be good in the Christian sense—they will only be less evil. The Christian works towards a minimum level of wrong. All communication is addressed to individuals and is in the form of a call for an individual response. The prior concern is for the welfare of the statesman as a person. All communication is in a sense pastoral. What the Christian addresses is the gospel in relation to the present situation of the statesman. The task is to call the statesman to an act of obedience that may cause him to re-evaluate his position and choose to make a step of faith.

### *Catholic*

Jacques Maritain is a Catholic thinker who participated in the drafting of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his book, *Integral Humanism*<sup>19</sup>, he describes Christian engagement in terms of three planes of activity. The first is the spiritual where we act as members of the mystical body of Christ. This plane concerns the things of God and includes liturgical and sacramental life, work of virtues, and contemplative action. It is the plane of redemption, the plane of

the church itself. On the second plane, we act as members of the terrestrial city and are engaged in affairs of terrestrial life. This is the realm of the things of Caesar, that of the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, social, and political. These two planes are distinct but not separate as all things submit to the power of Christ. There are, however, two common goods—spiritual and temporal.

On one level we act as Christians as such, on the second we act as Christians engaging in the world. The third plane is intermediary—the spiritual considered in connection to the temporal. In this zone, truths applicable to the temporal are connected to the revealed truths that the church has as a deposit (custodian). This is the plane that joins the spiritual and the temporal. On this plane the Christian appears before men as a Christian as such. This is the plane of Catholic action in collaboration with the apostolic teachings of the church. To defend religious interests in the temporal, Catholic civil action intervenes in political things. It would, however, be contrary to the nature of things to demand in the second plane a union of Catholics or a Catholic political party. In the political realm they do not function as Catholic politicians, but as politicians who are Catholic.

In both the Anabaptist and the Catholic views, there is a presumption of dualism. Both identify two realms in which the role of the church and the individual differ depending on which realm they are engaging. Here distinctions are maintained between the sacred and

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*, [1936, translated by Geoffrey Bles in 1939 as *True Humanism*].

the secular, between the spiritual and the temporal. Politics concerns the latter, the mundane. There is no distinctive Christian vision for politics. Politics is at best a neutral area of Christian participation, like that of business, and at worst it is a worldly affair, one in which it is difficult to maintain an effective Christian witness. Being a Christian politician means you bring an ethic to your work, just as being a Christian student or a Christian business person means you are honest and trustworthy. The political is not something that you understand differently from other politicians (or citizens for that matter).

### *Reformed*

Within the reformed approach, the believer is fully participative and fully engaged in redemptive work in all areas of life. There is no one realm or one set of activities that are more spiritual or more holy. The book *God and Politics*, edited by Gary Smith, brings together essays of supporters defending four approaches to reformed politics operative in the United States: Christian America, National Confessionalism, Theonomy and Principled Pluralism.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the two that have most influence in Canada, the first and the last.

In the *Christian America* (Canada)

perspective, the Christian heritage of the country is emphasized and the task of Christians is to revitalize it. Christian principles and values are understood to have shaped the laws and practices of the country. A Christian consensus shaped the structure of society and Christianity was granted special status under law. Secularization and humanism have eroded this heritage and actions should be taken to restore the explicitly Christian convictions in the government. The model for this position is Rome under Constantine. Laws need not conform to the laws of the Old Testament (the Theonomist position), but instead biblical principles and the Ten Commandments should inform and serve as the basis for law. This view entails a notion of a Christian commonwealth: a society structured to provide for the general welfare, taking Christian standards for what constitutes welfare and as the guide for attaining welfare. It is the role of a civil government to establish and promote biblical standards in legislation and law enforcement. Through democracy legislation is not imposed, rather Christians seek to persuade. Other religions would be tolerated and permitted to worship freely but public blasphemy would be illegal. In sum, Christians persuade society as a whole to adopt laws that are consistent with basic biblical principles.<sup>21</sup>

*Principled Pluralism* rejects isola-

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<sup>20</sup> Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government*. (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989. The main representatives of the four positions are Harold O. J. Brown, William Edgar, Greg Bahnsen and Gordon Spykman respectively.

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<sup>21</sup> *National Confessionalism* is somewhat similar. It argues that all nations should declare allegiance to Jesus Christ in public documents and devise political structures that honour God.

tionist, accommodationist, dualist and dialectical positions in favour of one that is transformative. We live in a network of divinely ordained life-relationships and we fulfil our callings within a plurality of communal associations. Scripture presents universal norms that are applicable to all aspects and activities of life. These norms guide how we structure culture and our institutions such as the state, the family and the church. As Christians we seek to reform the state in accordance with biblical norms. The task of the state is to promote public justice in society. Justice is defined in terms of office: the state should safeguard the freedom, rights and responsibilities of citizens in the exercise of their offices. Every human has the right to a just and equitable share in the rich resources of God's creation: to life, liberty and a responsible exercise of their office. The state must also avoid partiality, and serves as the public defender of the poor and the powerless, and it safeguards religious freedom for all citizens. Principled pluralists reject the view that the origin of the state lay only in the redemptive purpose of God or that it lay in the order of preservation in which the task of the state is essentially negative. Rather, the state is located in the normative order of creation. The state is limited in its scope and its responsibility.

The four reformed approaches agree that a Christian view must not be imposed. They also agree that there is an integral relation between Christianity and politics and that God requires civil officials to conduct their affairs as his servants. Christians

should promote biblical principles in political life through persuasion and all agree on the toleration of all faiths and on the positive role of the state. However, they disagree on the biblical view of justice –is it the Mosaic code (Theonomy), rights and responsibilities to exercise office, or enforcing the Ten Commandments? These reformed positions provide four models: Israel, Constantine, the Puritan and the pluralist.

The Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed approaches differ in the understanding of the role of the state and the nature of Christian engagement in the political realm. They do, however, agree that the task of the church is to call the state to adhere to biblical principles. Their goal is to persuade government officials of the benefit of policy that is consistent with biblical norms.

## **Christian Political Engagement**

### *Understanding the Context*

When engaging politically, it is important to identify and understand the philosophy that has shaped and currently directs the political/legal foundation of your country. Canada is a very tolerant and peaceful society, yet it is one of the most ethno-culturally diverse countries in the world with its multicultural character enshrined in the Canadian constitution. While Canada, like European countries, was deeply influenced by the Christian tradition, it is becoming increasingly secularized and, particularly with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* enacted in the early 1980s, directed by a decidedly liber-

al ethos. The religious nature of liberalism drives individual autonomy (self-determination) and equality through what Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor calls the 'politics of recognition', or what I characterize as a third impulse of liberalism, the move from freedom through equality to fraternity. Individual autonomy, the equality of all persons and the recognition (and affirmation) of difference guide the interpretation of the guarantees of life, liberty and the security of the person found in the Canadian *Charter*.

For example, in 1988, former Justice Wilson of Canada's Supreme Court wrote in a case about abortion, 'The theory underlying the *Charter* (Canada's *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*) is that the state will respect choices made by individuals and to the greatest extent possible, will avoid subordinating these choices to one conception of the good life.' Thus the goal of the *Charter* is to maximize a person's autonomy. Note that this argument implies that this view of self-determination is not itself tied to any one conception of the good. It is presumed to be neutral with respect to competing visions of the good life. Ten years later, the majority of the Supreme Court, in a case about the inclusion of sexual orientation into a provincial human rights code, wrote;

The concept and principle of equality is almost intuitively understood and cherished by all. It is easy to praise these concepts as providing the foundation for a just society which permits every individual to live in dignity and in harmony with all. The difficulty lies in giving real effect to equality. Difficult as the goal of equality

may be it is worth the arduous struggle to attain. It is only when equality is a reality that fraternity and harmony will be achieved. It is then that all individuals will truly live in dignity.

The Court not only wants to maximize autonomy, but it also affirms that true equality demands the acceptance of the dignity of others, not just in their personhood but also in the choices they make. This affirmation of all choices is what toleration is now understood to entail.

Interpreting freedom and equality in terms of individual autonomy as self-determination results in a privileging of critical choice, the ability of the individual to choose between visions of life, an over-expressive freedom, and the ability to fully express one's religious beliefs.<sup>22</sup> This emphasis is not only on the ability to choose, but also the capacity to move one's adherence from one comprehensive doctrine to another—with the attendant implications for the integrity of religious communities and the task of public education. As well, policies that are shaped or influenced by religious arguments are rejected. Thus in Canada, provincial legislation titled 'the Lord's Day Act' was struck down by the courts while similar legislation titled 'One Days Rest In Seven' was deemed acceptable. And when Canada's Supreme Court upheld the sanctity of human life, the Court noted that it meant this in a 'secular' sense. Public arguments must be sec-

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<sup>22</sup> See William Galston 'Expressive Liberty. Moral Pluralism, Political Liberalism: Three Sources of Liberal Theory', *William and Mary Law Review* 40 (1999), pp. 869-907.

ularized to be considered and religion is relegated to the private sphere.

### *The Role of the Church*

Christian political engagement can be expressed individually, through the participation of the institutional church, through advocacy organizations and Christian political organizations and movements, or through political parties. For the purposes of this discussion, I will focus on the engagement of the church. Here I am speaking of the church as an institution, not the church as the body of Christ.<sup>23</sup> As an institution, the church has a specific calling. While this calling will have a public and specifically a political dimension, the church is not primarily a political organization when understood in terms of government and public policy. In terms of the institutional church's political task, the church has several roles—such as the prophetic, the teaching and the reconciling roles. I will focus on its prophetic role.

The church, motivated by its understanding of scripture, calls the state to its task of public justice and encourages the state to govern in a way consistent with biblical principles. In this role, the church can remain non-partisan in that it does not lend public support to a specific

political party nor to specific candidates for office. Similarly, when the church supports or opposes legislation, it targets the principles of the legislation, not the government or public officials that sponsor the initiative. And when commenting on court decisions, the focus is on the decision and not the judges.

While there may be situations when the church may need to become partisan, a non-partisan approach keeps the church's participation focused on principles. This focus on principles is an approach consistent with the Anabaptist, Catholic and Reformed view of the role of the church in politics. The church is not attempting to mobilize votes for or against parties or candidates, but rather to persuade elected officials, judges, civil servants and citizens in general of the merits of public policy being rooted and shaped by biblical principles. This approach is fitting for political participation in a religiously pluralistic society. While the principles articulated by the church are biblical, many of these principles are shared by other faiths and often undergird law and public policy. A difficult question is in determining the extent to which the church in its articulation of principles can seek to recommend specific policies such as, for example, proposing penalties for crimes or appropriate levels of funding for social programs.

### *EFC's Approach to Public Policy*

Political engagement of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada can generally be clustered under four themes: the sanctity of human life, care for the vulnerable, family integrity and

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<sup>23</sup> In my view, as the body, followers of Christ have a variety of gifts and callings and are involved in all areas of life. The church is not a community separate from society, but the body of Christ expressed ecclesiastically. The members of the body worship in churches and participate in all aspects of societal life, seeking to bear witness and call everyone to a commitment to Christ, and to reform all institutions into conformity with Christ.

religious freedom. Under the sanctity of human life we address issues such as abortion, reproductive and genetic technologies and euthanasia. Under care for the vulnerable we address poverty and homelessness, refugee issues, as well as child pornography and prostitution. Family integrity involves definitional issues (marriage, family) as well as questions concerning the role of the state in supporting the institution of the family. Religious freedom focuses on the religious freedom of individuals and the freedom of religious organizations, in particular, their ability to self-define. Many of the issues we address under these last two themes involve protecting these areas of life from encroachment from the state. As indicated above, the principled approach seeks to identify the biblical principle, show how it has been recognized in law, and explain the implications if violated. I will illustrate this with an example in the area of euthanasia.

The pro-euthanasia and assisted suicide movement is growing quickly in Canada. Recent polls indicate that the majority of Canadians now favor legalizing assisted suicide when the patient is terminally ill. The arguments for changing the law invoke the freedom of the individual to control their own life (self-determination). In the case of assisted suicide, some disabled or terminally ill persons have argued that since suicide is not a criminal offence, and since disabled persons do not have the ability to kill themselves the way able bodied persons do, the law against assisted suicide prevents them from doing

what able-bodied persons can do. Religious arguments advanced to oppose euthanasia are rejected as an imposition of one's beliefs on another and as unsuitable for sustaining law and public policy.

When appearing before a Parliamentary committee on these issues, we began by arguing that Canada was founded on and shaped by a vision of life which is characterized by specific values and rooted in certain moral principles. We argued that our legal system is not morally neutral, that it reflects a vision of life and an understanding of right and wrong, and how it is we should live together as a nation. We substantiated this with quotes from various non-religious bodies such as the Law Reform Commission which wrote:

In truth the criminal law is a moral system. It may be crude, it may have faults, it may be rough and ready, but basically it is a system of applied morality and justice. It serves to underline those values necessary and important to society. When acts occur that seriously transgress essential values, like the sanctity of life, society must speak out and reaffirm those values. This is the true role of criminal law.

Having argued that there are certain principles that undergird our legal system, we said that it is vital that we as a nation continually examine and affirm those principles and values that give shape to, and provide grounding for, our society. We argued that the identification and interpretation of these principles is a task in which all Canadians can participate. Acknowledging that various communities in our society will bring their own perspective to bear in this discussion, we said religious communities have a unique contribution to make.

We then identified four relevant principles: the sanctity of life, the stewardship of life, the compassion for life, and communal responsibility. In each case we explained our biblical understanding of the principle and then attempted to show how this principle has been reflected in Canadian law and public policy. Thus for the principle compassion for life we quoted from scripture (Love your neighbour as yourself—Leviticus 19:18, Luke 10:27) and said the following:

As we believe human life is created in the image of God and the object of God's love and grace, life is something that we should cherish and care for. We should love others as we love ourselves. In both the Old and New Testaments, the people of Israel and the followers of Jesus were commanded to care for the alien, the widow, the orphan, and the poor.

It is this principle which is also reflected in our society's concern for the poor and the vulnerable, for those who are unable to care for themselves. It is reflected in our refugee programs and in our private and our governmental relief and development programs overseas. It is also reflected in the myriad of voluntary associations and programs that care for a variety of human needs here in Canada.

We went on to discuss the life-affirming ethos that has shaped Canadian policy in health care and after reviewing the current law, explained how the legalization of assisted suicide or euthanasia would undermine this ethos and place vulnerable persons at risk. We also explained the implications for health care providers and the health care system. We concluded as follows:

Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide are essentially killing those who are terminally ill or elderly. These are the very people most deserving of respect and protection in our society. We would

strongly urge you to resist those who are calling for legalization of these forms of killing. We turn instead to an affirmation of the 'death with dignity' afforded by palliative care professionals.

Our concern is that the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia will undermine the life-affirming ethos which currently shapes our legal system. We will legitimize suicide by implying that in some situations it is acceptable. We will be saying that murder is permissible even when the victim poses no threat to anyone else. It will imply that sometimes a choice for death is legitimate and that it is sometimes permissible in our society for one person to compassionately murder another. It will suggest that life is at times optional and that our society at times sanctions the choice for death.

When we subsequently appeared before Canada's Supreme Court, our argument followed the same lines. We intervened jointly with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) as the argument focused on the sanctity of human life, a principle to which both EFC and the CCCB subscribe. We were the only parties in the case to promote the sanctity of human life and in a split decision, the majority grounded its decision to uphold the law on the importance of recognizing the sanctity of human life in Canadian law. Even though the law against assisted suicide was found to violate the section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* that guarantee life, liberty and the security of the person, the court ruled that this infringement was justified due to the state's interest in preserving the sanctity of human life.

## Conclusion

There are several outstanding issues

that still need to be addressed. One is finding agreement on the proper role of the state. In Canada, the voting patterns of evangelicals display support for parties across the political spectrum, in numbers quite proportionate to that of the general population. While there may be consensus on the need to alleviate poverty, there is significant difference on what the role of the state should be in addressing poverty. Should the state redistribute wealth through taxation and spending on social welfare programs, or should it reduce taxes, enabling the business and private sectors to redirect their spending and provide incentives for addressing social needs through individual or corporate charitable efforts? These differences manifest themselves in support for various political approaches to the issue. As James Skillen argues in his book *The Scattered Voice*<sup>24</sup>, identifying the proper role of the state is a critical issue for Christian engagement.

Other issues that Christians grap-

ple with are the appropriate place and influence of a dominant religion in a pluralist society, identifying appropriate limits, if any, to religious freedom and religious expression and, as mentioned earlier, the degree of specificity that is appropriate for churches to make in recommending policy alternatives.

The good news is that I rarely hear Christians say we should not be involved politically. If it is expressed, it is more a result of frustration or exasperation than a manifestation of a view of engagement. Whereas ten years ago there was some resistance to EFC intervening before Canada's Supreme Court, it is now expected that we will intervene in the important cases. Through developing consensus on a variety of issues and articulating our perspective in a way that is acceptable to the community we represent, we are able to place new issues on the table for discussion, issues for which there is no as yet obvious point of consensus. It is a hard process yet it forces us to confront our ideological preferences with the teaching of Scripture, which is what the renewing of our minds is all about.

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<sup>24</sup> James Skillen, *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

# The Christian Legislator: Seeking to Pursue Social Justice in a Globalized World

John Langlois

**Keywords:** Jurisprudence, law, tolerance, legal positivism, state, natural law, holocaust, democracy, evangelisation

Most Christians who stand for public office as legislators want to make a difference in today's confused world. They offer themselves to the public as people who are able to make a difference. They do so motivated by the ideals of Christianity stated in Scripture. They stand for elected office knowing that Christ will be with them as they throw themselves into the fray of politics in an ungodly world.

Most enter politics with little appreciation of the constraints and frustrations that will confront them as they pursue their ideals. They are often naïve, wanting to change the world overnight and wanting to be leaders without serving an apprenticeship. The most needed qualifications for Christian legislators are experience in politics, solid moral foundations, and conscious obedience to the will of God.

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It is stated in our conference documentation that Christians in the past several decades cannot claim that they have transformed their societies as a result of their efforts. In fact, the opposite is true. In spite of all our efforts in the so-called Christian countries, we have gone backwards as far as Christian ideals and ethics are concerned. Our laws are less Christian than they were fifty years ago.

If we are going to make a real dif-

ference in the world as Christians we have to get into the real world and see things from the viewpoint of the world. That may seem a worldly and compromising thing to say, yet unless we do so, we cannot make a difference because we will not really see what our own distinctives are.

The apostle Paul knew the problem. It was in Athens that he saw it most clearly. The Athenians, for all their lofty ideals and for all their pursuit of truth and love of knowledge, did not have a clue as to what he was talking about. He was merely a strange babbler with a new set of ideas to solve the perennial problems of the world. Today it is a little different; we Christians are viewed as strange babblers with an old set of ideas to solve the problems of the modern secular world, the sort of people who would try to repair a modern motor car with the tools to re-shoe horses.

God has not sent us into the world as people who will be welcomed as saviours of humanity. The unredeemed mind will always regard the Christian message as irrelevant, strange, and antiquated. It was ever thus. We are, however, sent into the world as salt and light. It is an infected and dark world where we can demonstrate that the teachings of Jesus Christ are the only ones that will make a real difference to a bewildered humanity.

In the West we live in a secular existentialist world which is immersed in the philosophy of the age, a philosophy which has crept up on the church often unawares. Like Rip van Winkle we have woken up to

a vastly different world from that which existed when we fell asleep. For a hundred years evangelical Christians have withdrawn from the secular world at their cost and to their regret. Even now there is relatively little encouragement from Christians for Christians in politics. They are not seen as missionaries who are out there winning the world for Christ. They are usually seen as risk takers dirtying their hands in Satan's realm. Unless this attitude changes we cannot make a broad significant difference in politics, although individuals may well make a significant contribution in their own society and situation.

Although we have eternal biblical ideals, in many ways we and most other politicians enter upon the 21st century with considerably less optimism than our predecessors did when they entered upon the 20th century. It may be that as we enter the third millennium we would do well to consider the experience of jurisprudence over the past century, and indeed the past two millennia, to find the reason why.

As I was preparing this paper, I turned to the legal textbook entitled *Jurisprudence: from the Greeks to Post-Modernism*<sup>1</sup> by Wayne Morrison, a professor at the University of London and also a visiting lecturer here in Kuala Lumpur. He writes in the preface: 'This book has been worked on in London, Athens and Kuala Lumpur. Each location has left its own imprint.' Consequently, as

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Morrison, *Jurisprudence: from the Greeks to Post-Modernism* (London: Cavendish, 1997).

we are having our conference in Kuala Lumpur and with my interest in the experience of the apostle Paul in Athens, so I was curious about what Morrison would say.

His work is an historical survey of the philosophers and jurists who have made the legislative world what it is today, i.e. the real world into which Christ has sent us, the world that we seek to transform. Believing that it is necessary for us to see what the real world of jurisprudence, and therefore of lawmaking, is like as we embark on this conference, I will give a brief summary of Morrison's work.

He starts off by saying that the writings of the two Greek figures hailed as the founders of western philosophy—Plato and Aristotle—display differing approaches to the task of stabilizing social order and creating mechanisms for structuring social existence. Nevertheless, both sought the security of the 'truth' which resulted in nature. While the world may seem full of diversity and disorder, both asserted that the natural order lay behind or inherent in it, and this order could found man's social order, once its basic principles were known.

In his *Republic*, Plato laid out the foundations of the ideal state where the legal regime leads to the good life. The question is whether good is pleasure or reason. The tensions of communal life are to be balanced by the directional power that knowledge of the just, the good, and the right, offers. To reach the truth, to ascertain what is good for humanity, we need to surpass the empirical situation we find ourselves in.

Plato's ideal Republic had two key attributes: first, it is founded upon justice and then all the citizens within it are happy. For Aristotle, too, the objective of human existence is happiness, a concept that is reflected in the constitutions of a number of the states of the United States of America.

Plato asserts that:

Our job as law givers is to compel the best minds to attain what we have called the highest form of knowledge, and to ascend to the vision of the good. The objective of our legislation is not the special welfare of any particular class in our society, but of society as a whole; and it uses persuasion or compulsion to unite all citizens and make them share together the benefits which each individually can confer on the community; and its purpose in fostering this attitude is not to leave everyone to please himself, but to make each man a link in the unity of the whole.

This is a noble ideal to which many of us would aspire. You will note that the sense of law which constitutes the ideal republic in Plato's eyes is vastly different from today's liberal ideas which stress tolerance and plurality (although, as I shall say later, in truth they stress intolerance and non-plurality).

As we consider these lofty ideals we should remember that until relatively recently democracy was a short-lived experiment tried out only by the egalitarian citizens of Athens, a small city-state in the ancient Mediterranean world. It was a world of heady ideals and illustrious philosophers, but soon the Greek world was to be absorbed into a well-developed austere Roman legal system administered by heavy-handed officials for whom social justice was

an unknown concept.

When in turn the Roman Empire crumbled and the broad influence of Greek secular philosophy crumbled with it, the time came when Christian thinkers could press the jurisprudential world into the mould of Christian values. After a long personal and intellectual struggle, St Augustine came to believe that the path of true knowledge and real philosophy (love of wisdom), comes from the gift of moderation, and asserted that the path of pure knowledge is not to explore the cosmos as if we were its rulers, but rather to inquire humbly into oneself as a limited and dependent being, and thereby ascend into knowledge of what is most true and pure, namely, God.

Augustine asserted that mankind, although created by God, is decadent, and depends ultimately upon the grace of God. We may choose to do what is good but we do not have the spiritual power to do the good we have chosen. We require the help of God's grace. With Augustine, the story of mankind's personal life was part of the overall story of the final social order—God's story. Thus, the political life of the state is under the same set of moral laws as those of the individual. Behind the entities and operations of the world order stands its author and ruler: God. Natural law is a reflection of God's truth, God's eternal law.

Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas followed with his own Christian insights, but as a result of the failure of the church to reform itself and as a result of the persecution of the Reformers, especially their expul-

sion from intellectually-awakened France, the stage was left to the irreligious philosophers of the so-called Enlightenment. Starting with Rousseau and his ilk, they pursued their godless agenda which has set the scene for today's irreligious world. These people included Thomas Hobbes, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Frederick Hegel, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, John Austin, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hans Kelsen, and H.L.A. Hart. Each one descended lower into the realm of godless society, which reached its nadir in the Nazi Holocaust of the 1940s and the Soviet Holocaust from 1921 until well into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the late 1950s in the aftermath of the Holocausts, the English jurist, H.L.A. Hart, who was widely regarded as the foremost legal positivist of modern times, offered a summary of several possible tenets of legal positivism. Essentially modern 'positive' law is something 'posited' by humans for human purposes and is a label for a set of related approaches to law which have dominated western jurisprudence in the last 150 years. They include the following:

- 1) Laws are merely commands of human beings;
- 2) There is no necessary connection between law and morals, or law as it is and ought to be;
- 3) Moral judgements cannot be established or defended as statements of fact, or by rational argument, evidence, or proof.

Morrison states:

We live in uncertain times; many

commentators feel that the policies of modernity to construct societies of social justice where people would be happy have proved false. Marxism stands discredited as a political doctrine, while liberalism seems to many to be an empty shell incapable of providing the source of social meaning.

He goes on to assert that

law, utility, contract, economics—symbols of existential distance and calculation—provide the relational tools of the late-modern. By contrast, love not law, encounter not utility, contact not contract, denote concern for a different existential relation. How are they to be reconciled? Where is the beginning? In the beginning there was nothing; no words, no vision, only the void. Call this what you wish—‘black holes’ is the currently fashionable idea—but we now know that there was no God to lay out the foundation, to name the entities of the cosmos and prepare the script of our destiny. We now know that our societies are social-historical constructions; they, and we, could have become something different than they are today. We are a contingency. How can we face this? Is this realisation of social construction specifically a modern consciousness—as we tend to think—or did certain people always realise that humanity alone interpreted and laid out the meanings of the cosmos? And what does this realisation impart? Do we need to have a grasp of the totality of existence to answer questions of the meaning of social life; or is human history a constant movement of pragmatic enterprises and arguments within overall mystery?

In the depths of the depression of the 1950s and 1960s, when godless jurisprudence had proved to be the road to hell both in this world and the next, do we see a return to Christian and other religious values or to theism? No, we see new godless jurists such as Ronald Dworkin, a leading contemporary American exponent of liberal jurisprudence in the Anglo-American world in the 1970s, seek-

ing to rebuild a godless political programme of fairness and individual rights in a liberal world against the background of disenchantment and a crisis of confidence overtaking the western world as its philosophies and institutions were questioned.

Against the background of Dworkin’s work, and perhaps because of it, the Critical Legal Studies movement of the 1970s sprang up as a phoenix from the fires of the holocausts. It is, perhaps, the latest incarnation of mankind’s effort to seek its own salvation. The movement is full of both anger and hope—anger at the disenchantment of the past and hope that the human condition can be improved. But they see no Utopia and no certainties, only constant struggle and the mystery of the human condition. Twenty years after it was set up in 1977, the movement definitively asserts that God is dead (a well-known theme of the 60s and 70s). Yet it does not seem absolutely sure of this because the movement seems intent on continuing to search for proof of his death or proof that he has never existed. It is not without reason that the Bible asserts that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God.

Morrison’s concluding remarks are interesting. He writes: ‘What is clear is that our considerations of law reflect the ambiguities, hopes, confusions and fears of the post modern condition.’ As I have said earlier, Morrison was pondering these dilemmas while lecturing in both London and Kuala Lumpur. In that context he writes at the end of the book:

There are those who see the effect of colonisation as entertaining the underdeveloped world in webs of Western legal domination and those who see in colonisation the spread of a legal culture of Human Rights, equality of opportunity, and the opening up of individual life projects for new subjects. Others, however, point to the rise of the Asian Tiger economies, which combine capitalism with social traditions of patriarchy and relative authoritarianism, and fear that in the new world economic order the benefits of Western legal liberalism will increasingly come under fire and a new fascism emerge.

He points out that this contrasts with the structured world of fundamentalist Islamic Society.

He goes on:

In time, the idea of social progress was joined with law so that law was seen as an instrument to guide us to that land and time of our happiness. Law was to be the guarantor of modernity, sure in its purpose, the instrument of rational power. Law has seemed to have lost its rationality.

With those words I close Morrison's book on the philosophy emanating from the prince of this age who, with God's consent, rules God's unredeemed creation today—a book that ends with the despondency that godless efforts are bound to result in, the despondency that is the hallmark of hell itself.

We as Christian legislators could be equally despondent because we face a task that is impossible in merely human strength. Yet we must not lose heart, we must go on because our Christian philosophy is the only one which has any validity in addressing the human condition. So how do we go about our task against this background of godlessness? There are a few observations that I wish to make:

1) In elected representative democracies we can go only a little way beyond the mandate of our electorate. Although our overall mandate comes from God, our constitutional mandate comes from the electorate and we must respect it. Legislators and government are only a reflection of society as a whole. It is the job of the church, not politicians, to evangelize and turn the hearts of men and women through the proclamation of the gospel.

2) Legislation is not the answer to all society's ills, although good legislation can help. Even good legislation which is grounded in biblical ideals is often not the full answer. I think particularly of the abolition of the slave trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which was completely good in concept. It was followed by the Emancipation Laws that were enacted in a well-meaning but socially inappropriate way, which did not result in social justice.

During the time of slavery, slaves had financial worth and it benefited their owners to keep them in reasonable health so that they contributed their labours to the business. Once they were emancipated, former slaves had no financial worth in the hands of their former owners. They were cut loose from their bonds and thrown into an alien world in which they had no experience whatever. Their former owners no longer had any economic interest in them and they no longer cared. The slaves hired themselves back to their former owners in even more dire conditions than previously. Today we need to learn from this. As legislators

we need to ensure that we are not merely do-gooders. We need to take into account all aspects of the human condition.

3) As Christians we need to prick the consciences of the irreligious. The human rights we talk about are not the same as the ones they talk about. Take for example the new Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union passed in Nice, France, on 7 December 2000. It says in Article 1: 'Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected'; in Article 2: 'Everyone has the right to life. No one shall be condemned to the death penalty or executed'; in Article 3: 'Everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity'; Article 20: 'Everyone is equal before the law'; Article 24: 'Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration'.

So far, this is good, but what about the rights of the unborn child, whether one month or eight months in the womb. Medical science tells us definitively that the unborn child is fully human. No, that is not the case, say the politicians and the lawyers. They are not human. We protest when it is pointed out to us that Article 52 applies: 'Any limitation on the exercise of the rights and freedoms recognised by this Charter must be provided for by law and respect the essence of those rights and freedoms. Subject to the principle of

proportionality, limitations may be made only if they are necessary and genuinely meet objectives of general interest recognised by the Union or the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others.'

In other words, we protest, does this mean that the interests and objectives of the State are paramount and only those recognized by the State (the English word for 'Reich') are valid? Well, we protest further, surely if we accept this argument there is no difference between the humanity of the unborn child and the Jew in Nazi Germany, where by law they had no citizenship and were subhuman. No, the liberals retort, that is quite different and to suggest that it is, is to be totally bigoted—an accusation that was levelled at me during the parliamentary debate on our own abortion law in Guernsey in 1997. My critics did not have any arguments, either good or bad, to disprove the medical evidence that a child of eight months since conception is human. There was just a blank refusal to accept reason or scientific fact. There is no winning in the short term. To the godless, logic, whether legal or scientific, does not come into it, or if it does it is distorted 180 degrees by humanistic pseudo-reason. Our only hope is to change the hearts of humankind—and this is something that legislators and legislation cannot do. That is where the church has a quite separate job to do from the legislature.

4) As we all know, the question of Human Rights, which all of us approve of as much as Mum and apple pie, has been high-jacked by

'loony liberals'. Take, for example, the promotion of the human right to engage in acts of sodomy, which is being advocated, at least by the present UK government, as of equal status to normal sexual relationships between married couples. All medical evidence suggests that sodomy and promiscuous sex do immense harm and are largely responsible, at least in the West, for the AIDS epidemic that we are experiencing. One would have thought that in these conditions there would have been a concerted attempt by government to discourage errant human behaviour and advocate traditional values which have proved historically to be healthy. But no, they insisted that the legal age of children to engage in homosexual acts be lowered to 16 years. The horrendous health risks involved were simply overlooked.

5) A friend of mine had an incident some time ago. His daughter is training as a nurse in the UK. She had to write a paper on morals. In it she said that in her opinion, sex before marriage is wrong. She was told by her tutor that her attitude was inappropriate for a nurse and this was going to be noted on her professional records. In this supposed age of tolerance and human rights guaranteed, we are told, by (in our case) the Convention and the Charter of Human Rights in Europe which guarantee freedom of speech, we are being gagged by a totalitarian intolerant liberal elite who abhor tolerance or plurality. We have to destroy this denial of human rights and true liberality.

6) When Christ was on earth he

said, somewhat surprisingly, 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household' (Matt. 10:34-36). I believe that the time has come to wield the moral sword. We have to come to the rescue of the growing generation and pour scorn on the stupid illogic of their parents' generation. We owe it to the young to point out what true values are. We have to be strong and brave, because we are confronting Satan and his evil empire.

To conclude, if we are to make progress in this evil, perverse world we have to re-engage the world with all the armour at our disposal, including the following:

1) The churches must fearlessly proclaim biblical truths as the norm, yesterday, today and forever. In the past we have been timid when faced with pseudo-scientific politically-correct nonsense. We must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is and proclaim him as the only solution to the world's problems.

2) We have to re-engage in rigorous intellectual debate in all realms of knowledge and experience. In the past century we have withdrawn from the crucial battle-lines of winning over the hearts of men and women. The enemy is at the present time on top of the ramparts flying Satan's victory flag. Using the tools of proclaiming the gospel and engaging in intellectual debate, we must,

win over the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens. After all, probably only a few of them accept the present foolish liberal philosophy.

3) Having engaged in the presentation of the gospel and rigorous intellectual debate and having attracted public opinion to our side, we can then expect Christian legislators to change the legislation that has done so much to undermine our society. However, until then Christian legislators are like frontline troops fighting without supply lines of ammunition and food and without air cover, intelligence or reconnais-

sance.

When I was pondering this paper a few days ago, I was in a London Underground train. I saw a poster which read 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. What more could one have. Come to Pennsylvania.' It was almost right—but not quite. It should have read 'Come to Philadelphia'—not the capital of Pennsylvania, USA, of course, but the city of 'brotherly love' which has God as its cornerstone, the city that Augustine spoke about so long ago, the only city where social justice can survive.

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## Book Reviews

ERT (2003) 27:2, 182-183

0144-8153

**Sharing the Truth in Love:  
How to Relate to People of  
Other Faiths**

Ajith Fernando

ISBN 1-57293-054-3

Grand Rapids: Discovery House  
Publishers, 2001

*Reviewed by David Turnbull,  
Bible College of South Australia,  
Adelaide Australia*

The events of 11 September 2001 marked a significant turning point for the western world in its understanding of other religions. The Christian west has been disturbed but for the two-thirds world such expressions of religious animosity have been elements of life for decades. Ajith Fernando, Sri Lankan Director for Youth for Christ, in his latest work, *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to Relate to People of Other Faiths*, provides a way forward. He

writes with passion, integrity and authenticity from his extensive experience in Sri Lanka where Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism meet. This book builds on material published in the early version (*Christian's Attitude to World Religions*) quite substantially in response to changes since 1987 in the contemporary missiological setting which he acknowledges.

In fourteen chapters Fernando addresses key biblical, theological and practical issues for Christians in their relationships with people from other faiths in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His response draws heavily from Paul's encounter with the Athenians (Acts 17:16-34) where Paul was not afraid to clash with the thinking of his audience. In doing so Fernando challenges the assumptions and values that are inherent in pluralistic, liberal, post-modern and inclusive expressions of Christianity (see ch. 1). The deepest concern for him is the affirmation of the exclusivity of the gospel and the uniqueness of Christ despite the growing hostility to these biblical truths. There is no room for compromise, no desire to be popular and no need to surrender to the opposition of this age.

Issues addressed include dialogue (reasoning) and persuasion (ch. 2), the relationship between general and special revelation, the truth that can be gained from other religions (ch. 5), how the God of the Bible compares with the other gods promoted (chs. 7-9), the question of repentance and judgement versus *karma* and reincarnation (ch.13), and those who have not heard the

gospel (ch. 14).

His principles for relating to people of other faiths are practical, balanced and justifiable. Love within the context of relationships is crucial. Love expresses itself through respect, humility (ch. 3), cultural sensitivity (ch. 4), listening and recognizing the elements of value and truth within another faith. Conversion is still the desired outcome. In this approach he does not underestimate the power and the role of truth, especially to have an impact on the will. For such an impact the presentation of the truth must be contextualised and in response to felt needs. He often provides constructive personal illustrations to demonstrate how these principles, attitudes and skills operate in reality.

Other important features include extensive endnotes at the conclusion of each chapter, excellent summaries of seventeen other major faiths and worldviews, a bibliography of general works on world religions and a thorough index. It is disappointing that bibliographies on particular world religions were not included.

This book is particularly relevant for serious students of missiology and evangelism, but is helpful for all members of the body of Christ in the West or Two-Thirds world, whether facing a historical religion or a syncretistic combination of several belief systems. It has enhanced my teaching. In reading it the fears and challenges of relating to people of other faiths will be better understood and it will enable one to relate to people of other faiths in a period of spiritual hunger and searching.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 184-185      0144-8153

**Eusebius—The Church History:  
A New Translation with  
Commentary**

Paul L Maier

Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications,  
1999

ISBN: 0-8254-33282

412 pp., plates, bibliography,  
appendices, indices.

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

This book is an ideal example of the translator's, interpreter's and publisher's crafts. Eusebius has been a household name to many generations of students and scholars. For many of us he was, apart from the biblical documents, the first church historian into which we dipped. However, we had to fight through the long involved sentence constructions of the traditional version to satisfy our historical curiosity. It is gratifying, therefore, to find a translation that, while remaining faithful to the author's original text, is rendered in a form that is more amenable to the modern mind. Maier, by use of short direct sentences and the elimination of verbosity, has given us a narrative that moves along at a pace that holds the attention of the reader. In short, the translation is eminently readable. Rarely does one have to stop to figure out what is being said. Maier set out to achieve clarity; this he has accomplished.

The book also contains some welcome additions that enhance the clarity of the translation and make

the history even more readable. Maier has provided titles for the Books and subtitles for the sections to aid understanding of the flow of events. Dates are provided in the margins that help to keep the chronological framework in view. Judicious footnoting gives brief explanations of obscure terms, historical references, and the book and page references in authors used by Eusebius. Of great worth are the commentaries at the end of each Book. Brief and to the point, they provide a general summary of content and background, some comment on purpose and interest, highlight strengths and weaknesses and point to the permanent value of the preceding material. Of particular note in each commentary is the brief overview of Roman imperial politics during the period covered by the Book. This historical framework is a very useful aid to understanding *The Church History* in its context. Indeed, I would advise readers to peruse the respective commentary before reading the Book to which it refers.

Maier has provided a very helpful introduction outlining the life and works of Eusebius besides introducing *The Church History* to its readers. The end of the book is no less informative. There are two appendices, one on Eusebius' use of Josephus, the other a list of Emperors and Bishops. The Bibliography lists books and monographs written on Eusebius in the twentieth century. However, although acknowledging their existence, it fails to list articles in journals or dissertations. This is a

pity as it limits the book's usefulness for the serious researcher. However, this is not critical for the general reader and the information can be found elsewhere. The book concludes with three useful indices of Persons, Places and Subjects.

The publisher has done justice to the author's work by presenting his material in a very attractive format. The book is marked by its quality paper, clear size print, good binding and beautiful colour plates. The dust jacket, too, is attractive with a coloured plate of Christians in the Colosseum at Rome about to be attacked by lions. The book contains more than 150 colour photographs, maps and illustrations of locations and personalities mentioned by Eusebius. All this, especially the photographs, enrich the history, helping it to come alive. Here is a quality production. Author and publisher are to be congratulated. Eusebius would applaud were he here to see it.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 185-187      0144-8153

**The Gospel to the Nations:  
Perspectives on Paul's Mission**

Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson  
(editors)

Downers Grove/Leicester:  
IVP/Apollos, 2000  
UK ISBN 0-85111-468-7  
US ISBN 0-8308-1557-0  
Pb. xiii + 429pp

*Reviewed by H. H. Drake  
Williams, III, Biblical Theological  
Seminary, Hatfield PA, USA and  
Central Schwenkfelder Church,  
Worcester, PA USA*

This compilation of essays in honour of Peter T. O'Brien presents a fitting tribute to a man whose life and interests are marked by a missionary passion. The volume includes essays from Paul Barnett, D. A. Carson, Edwin Judge, I. Howard Marshall, Moisés Silva, David Wenham, and other established scholars. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson, who are both lecturers at Moore College where O'Brien has taught and serves as Vice-Principal, are the editors.

The volume has five sections. The first is an appreciation of Peter T. O'Brien's life written by Peter Jensen. Jensen recounts O'Brien's career interests in mission, Paul, exegesis, and biblical theology. He highlights O'Brien's mission activities in India and with groups such as the Church Missionary Society and the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. He draws attention to O'Brien's scholarly activities in the apostle Paul and his service at Moore Theological College in Sydney. The essay is also a testimony to O'Brien's devotion to the Saviour and to his family and friends. It is an inspiring tribute to a modern day Paul and is a good lead into the rest of the volume on Paul's mission to the nations.

The second section contains three essays addressing Paul's mission from a biblical theological perspective. The first is a sweeping overview of Paul's mission in the light of Acts and Paul's letters. The remaining two focus on Paul's mission to the Gentiles in relation to Abraham, the new covenant, and Pauline hermeneutics. These articles provide

an introduction to this topic, but as two of the authors admit, this is a large topic needing further space for exploration.

The third section is a strong one, containing twelve essays regarding Paul's concept of his mission from his letters and the book of Acts. There are helpful overviews of Paul's mission in the book of Acts presented by David Wenham and I. Howard Marshall. Paul's theology of mission is also examined from portions of his letters such as Galatians and 2 Corinthians. Specific elements of Paul's missionary activities are also addressed, such as Paul's weakness, the role of prayer, and his dealings with false teaching.

Two of the articles are of special note. Colin Kruse considers the effects of Paul's mission, examining ministry following Paul's appearances in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia, and Crete. He concludes that a striking feature of the churches he left behind is that they were 'charismatic churches', with Crete being the possible exception. These churches also had 'official' leaders, and there was a fairly widespread involvement of women in ministry.

In the same section, Andreas Köstenberger addresses the place of women in the Pauline mission. He examines all nineteen references to specific women in Paul's letters and examines the Pauline teaching on women in the church. Köstenberger arrives at the conclusion that women's ministry should be seen as informal and frequently centred on the home in a supporting role. Köstenberger concludes that Paul's

teaching and mission agree with each other and thus women should not serve as pastor-teachers or elders.

The fourth section concerns an emphasis on the nations, those who received Paul's gospel. Articles in this section include topics concerning: Jewish mission in the New Testament era, Paul's encounter with Stoics, the impact of Paul's gospel on ancient society, and the reception of the gospel by those influenced by Middle Platonism.

In this section B. W. Winter writes about the dangers and difficulties Paul encountered in his mission. His article helpfully surveys difficulties of travel, the danger of meeting weekly as Christians, opposition from the imperial cult, opposition from other Christians, and problems of portraying a crucified Messiah. Winter rightly cautions believers not to see the first century as an ideal age of mission activity. There were many personal dangers and debilitating experiences that Paul faced in his mission to the nations.

The fifth and final section, then, concludes with two articles on later developments from Paul's mission. These articles address Paul's mission in the light of Chalcedon and modern systematic affirmation. These articles are substantial, but this section could be expanded.

This volume provides a good basis for considering Paul's mission. There are noticeable gaps that could be developed, however. Besides the brevity of sections three and five, further contributions could be made to Pauline mission from the Pastoral Epistles and 1 Corinthians. Also

Paul's self-defence speeches in Acts could deserve separate attention.

All in all, this volume can be of enormous help for those interested in mission work. The articles are accessible to those with a college degree. At the same time, they present a fine basis for exploring Paul's mission for the graduate student and the scholar.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 187-188      0144-8153

**Searching for Truth:  
Confessing Christ in an  
Uncertain World**

by Thomas W. Currie III  
Geneva Press, 2001  
ISBN 0664501397  
Pb, 115 pp

*Reviewed by Lok M. Bhandari,  
Kathmandu Theological  
Seminary, Nepal*

This small book, one of the *Foundations of Christian Faith* series, sponsored by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church, USA, is delightfully deceiving. On the one hand, a superficial perusal of the book by some will give the impression that this is a reactionary, evangelical diatribe against theological liberalism and postmodern influences on the church and society. On the other hand, some evangelicals may be put off by Currie's deft and searching analysis of the fundamentalist impulse in contemporary American society. In a time when it is easy to take sides in the 'culture wars' and not look back, Currie has done a marvellous job of examining

both the genius and the rationale of the gospel and the biblical tradition, and the social and intellectual currents that affect the church's witness to the Truth.

This book examines the question: 'How can we [Christians] speak the truth as truth, yet speak it in love?' Or 'how can we avoid the temptation to either think that we alone possess the truth or to trim the truth to make it less offensive to the world?'

The authors and texts he references should give one a good idea of his analysis of the problems in western (and increasingly non-western) culture that present the greatest challenge to the integrity of the church's witness to Jesus Christ: Lesslie Newbigin, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, Jean Bethke Eltshain, Colin Gunton, the Barmen Declaration, etc.

The 'culprit' is modernism, with its appeal to absolute, scientific certainty, bypassing the epistemological requirements of faith and commitment, which, for Currie, is reflected in both secular thought and Christian fundamentalism. In the first chapter, he trains his attention on the implicit theology embodied in the bumper sticker, 'God said it, I believe it, and that settles it!' In true modernist fashion, 'in its desire for a kind of unquestionable certitude, the bumper sticker is worshiping at one of the most compelling idols of modern culture...the certainty of self,' a conviction that Newbigin says contrasts with scripture's description of the 'faithfulness of God'. While he is impressed with the man who sports the bumper sticker on his truck,

which stands for the universality of the truth of the gospel, over against the usual talk that religious convictions are simply private opinions or one truth among many, he asserts that the gospel of Jesus Christ calls into question both stances. Instead, he advocates Christian truth-telling as an act of love, that is, as part of the embrace of the Triune God who, in Jesus Christ, risks rejection, failure and death in the hope of the vindication of the truth of the gospel, whose goal is the reconciliation of God and humankind.

For Currie, for the witness of the truth of the gospel to be valid, it must be conditioned by the life of the Trinitarian God, incarnated in Jesus Christ. This means, for us, often 'being like the disciples in the gospel story, of misunderstanding what Jesus is telling us, of failing him at crucial times, of needing his presence constantly to find the way'. Indeed, 'the test of this risking such a commitment' consists in our 'willingness to "publish" what we know, that is, embody this tradition in our lives, to hold ourselves accountable to it for our findings, to carry it forward through the establishment of communities of faith'.

A major stumbling block in this quest is the indifference-inducing tolerance born of viewing religious claims as mere private, subjective truths. In a pluralistic context, it would appear that this strategy is necessary for peaceful coexistence; the threat of inter-religious violence is real, but, according to Currie, this type of tolerance 'is inimical to the universal and incarnational claims of

the gospel'. But he perceptively reminds his readers that the nature of Christian truth, embodied in the cross, which is both the expression of God's love and a challenge to saint and sinner alike, undercuts both the human-centred relativist claims of secular modernism and other faiths and the absolutist, triumphalist Christianity opposed by the former, confessing that salvation is a gift and that we are stewards of God's story, and thus are accountable to God for our faithfulness to Jesus. Thus Currie rightly proclaims that 'by according someone the dignity of disbelief', we testify to the work of the Holy Spirit, affirming that 'faith is finally a mystery and gift, not a product of our managerial schemes'. Yet, in the same manner, it will challenge the 'paganisms' of our culture, as we embody this truth in our witness.

In summary, this book calls us back to a serious engagement with a robust theology and praxis of the cross and resurrection. This message of the Trinitarian God, Currie reminds us, is the Good News for the postmodern world if we understand, heed and obey it. It is truly God's wisdom for this age. Therefore, Currie, aptly states, 'We are [Christ's] not because we say we are his, but because he has claimed this world as his own. We are free then to engage the other about what matters the most—the truth—knowing that this is not an argument to be won or a debate to be settled but a way of loving this world.' This is a message all pastors, evangelists, theologians, Christian apologists and believers need to digest.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 189

0144-8153

**Studying the Historical Jesus:  
A guide to sources and  
methods**

Darrell L. Bock

Michigan: Baker Academic/  
Leicester: Apollos 2002pb 230 pages indexes maps etc  
ISBN 0-85111-273-0

Darrel Bock (PhD, University of Aberdeen) has produced a useful guide to 'Studying the Historical Jesus' which students and lecturers will welcome. However, it might just as well have been titled 'Studying the Gospels' because seven of the eleven chapters fall into the section of the book headed, 'Methods for Studying the Gospels' and deal with the various forms of criticism (historical, source, form, redaction, tradition, and narrative) along with a chapter on 'The three quests for the historical Jesus'. The first part of the book is on 'Jesus in his cultural context', with separate chapters on non-biblical literary evidence for Jesus, the chronology of his life, political history (from 586BC to 36AD) and socio-cultural history. The last mentioned chapter covers not only religion and politics but also population, geography, travel and agriculture, values, life expectancy and literacy, economics, family and home. Thus, in contrast with many other recent books, there is very little on Jesus himself.

These chapters provide basic material about the subject matter in overview format with plenty of bibliographical references for further study, guidance about the skills and

methods of NT studies in general with useful details on how to approach and understand particular points, and evaluations of evidence and scholarly conclusions. This material, together with the maps and charts (black and white only) and the select bibliography should add up to an extremely useful book to put into the hands of beginning students. It should guide them to appreciate the scope of their gospel studies, the most important literature on the various subjects, the rationale for various scholarly approaches and ways of evaluating them. Even if they do not want to follow either the 'skeptical or radical approaches to Jesus that frequently make the headlines' as mentioned on the book cover, or the somewhat more conservative ones adopted by the author, the 'students of the Gospels' for whom the book is intended should certainly be able to make the choice in 'an informed, scholarly' way that the author sets out.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 189-191

0144-8153

**Across the Spectrum  
understanding issues in  
evangelical theology**

Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy

Michigan: Baker Academic 2002

287 pb indexes glossary

ISBN 0-8010-2276-2

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

Students will no doubt appreciate the idea behind this book because it gives them easy access to the key points of

eighteen different theological issues about which evangelicals take differing positions. The issues include biblical inspiration, the Genesis debate, providence and divine foreknowledge, Christology, salvation and atonement, sanctification, eternal security, the destiny of the unevangelised, the millennium and hell, the sacraments, charismatic gifts, ministry of women, and others. (Another twelve are briefly discussed in an appendix to the book available from the publisher's website.) Each chapter contains an introduction to the problem and a statement of the points about the topic which evangelicals usually hold in common. Then follow two or more self-contained essays expounding and defending the various evangelical views on the topic, usually presenting the biblical interpretation first, followed by supporting arguments and refutations of contrary views, concluded by a response to objections raised by others.

The book is deliberately pitched at beginners, not necessarily even theological students. As the introduction makes clear, it focuses on issues about which there are differing opinions within evangelicalism, so it is not intended to be a comprehensive manual of evangelical theology, although with so many issues under discussion it almost becomes one! While the authors, both from Bethel College, MN, have done a useful job in presenting the material as fairly as they can within the restrictions they have set themselves, many readers will come away dissatisfied.

One immediate problem is the

amount of repetition. This is especially noticeable where there are only two alternative positions presented so that the positive exposition, refutation and response to objections in one section is more or less repeated in reverse form in the second which takes the opposite view.

This highlights another problem—the ability of only two authors to present with enthusiasm, fairness and authenticity such a wide range of alternative positions covering so many doctrines without falling into the trap of creating ‘straw men’ or other unconvincing forms of argument. Sometimes the cases presented are obviously simplistic and the biblical material is presented as proof texts. There are only general references to leading proponents of the positions under discussion, with few documented references and a brief bibliography (often of secondary literature) at the end of each chapter. Such an approach fails to do justice to the complex nature of these problems and the sophistication of the theological effort needed to grapple with them. The pressure to simplify the biblical material into a series of ‘sound bites’ is particularly disappointing and misleading.

Of even more concern is that there is no evaluation of the opposing cases at the end of each presentation, and no pointers to the way the positions might be reconciled or even how the reader might integrate the sometimes sharp differences that are found. In working through a book like this, one is confronted with just how many differences there are within the evangelical community on a

seemingly endless list of topics. To identify and clarify these problems is one thing, but to provide some resolution of them, at least at a practical level, instead of leaving them up in the air, would have been a much greater achievement, especially for the audience intended.

ERT (2003) 27:2, 191-192      0144-8153

**Able to Teach Others Also:  
Nationalizing Global Ministry  
Training**

William H. Smallman,  
Pasadena, California: Mandate  
Press, 2001.

189 pp + Appendices,  
bibliography, and index, 40 pp.  
ISBN 0-87808-966-7

*Reviewed by Robert W. Ferris,  
Columbia International  
University, Columbia, South  
Carolina, U.S.A.*

William Smallman currently serves as Vice President of Baptist Mid-Missions, a North American mission agency, but for ten years in the 1970s he served as a missionary in Brazil. During that time he found himself charged with leading a mission-established Bible school which he determined to nationalize. His search for guidance on the process and procedures of nationalization of mission institutions yielded little fruit then, but now has yielded a book which will benefit others.

After documenting the pragmatic urgency of nationalizing mission institutions, Smallman develops a theological rationale for nationaliza-

tion which is worth the price of the book. He argues that Christ's incarnation, including laying aside his divine prerogatives, both epitomizes the essence of missions and mandates full empowerment of the national church. Next he illustrates critical steps toward nationalization from Acts and the epistles through studies of Barnabas's sponsorship of Paul ('training a supervisor'), Paul's discipleship of Timothy ('training a servant'), and Paul's mentorship of Titus ('training a successor'). Contemporary examples of nationalization from Baptist Mid-Mission ministries in Brazil, Chad, and an anonymous Asian nation also are examined for positive and negative lessons.

At the outset of his study, Smallman distinguishes indigenization ('conforming [a ministry's] cultural attributes to the patterns of similar institutions within that society') and nationalization ('transfer of administrative authority from the foreign founders ... to capable national leaders'). He argues that both processes are incumbent. While indigenization should mark every ministry from its inception, however, appropriate preparation for nationalization takes longer.

Smallman concludes this section by reflecting on 'four major issues that accompany nationalization': (1) adequate training for national faculty members, (2) accreditation, (3) initiative toward nationalization, and (4) personal relationships in the midst of transition. He surveys the educational alternatives for faculty development, but advocates opting for train-

ing in a regional seminary with congruent theological perspectives. While acknowledging pressures from alumni, students, and governments toward accreditation of theological schools, Smallman also recognizes the potential cost in external control, elitist standards, and abandoned mission. He notes, 'the ultimate test of accreditation for a seminary is whether its constituent churches will receive and ordain its graduates as their ministers' (p. 100). Smallman advocates initiative toward nationalization from the mission, rather than delaying until it is demanded by the church, and he calls for management of Christian relationships throughout the stages of transition.

The second half of this book is a manual for those charged with implementing nationalization of mission institutions. Nationalization should begin with a clear statement of the objective in view. Smallman proposes a fivefold objective: (1) continuity of the faith and convictions of the founding mission, (2) congruence with the national culture, (3) maturing national leadership, (4) administrative freedom, and (5) financial responsibility. The first is required by integrity with the mission's supporting constituency. Administrative freedom means an end to mission control, both direct and indirect, but financial responsibility need not imply full local support. Smallman notes that seminaries in wealthy western nations are sustained by externally contributed funds and concludes that a diminishing supply of mission funding to national schools also is acceptable.

Smallman then guides the reader through an eight step process toward nationalization, beginning with the decision to nationalize, including possible structural and curricular modifications required for indiginization, and concluding with transfer of property titles and evaluation of the nationalization process. Along the way he provides sample instruments for assessing an institution's human, cultural, temporal, and financial resources for nationalization.

I have one minor complaint related to format. Throughout the book the publisher has set selected sentences in a large, contrasting font, separated from the text in the block or sidebar style often found in popular journals. Skip them, however, and you lose the author's point; these are part of the text rather than supplements to it.

Without question, this is a helpful book. Although the assumption of mission initiative in launching institutions which then must be nationalized leaves one longing for a more firmly established partnership model, the book addresses a persisting reality. All who live with this reality will be thankful for Smallman's insightful guidance.

## ABSTRACTS/INDEXING

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## A Major Reference Work

# Dictionary of Historical Theology

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