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EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY VOLUME 32, NO 2, April 2008

Evangelical Review of Theology

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



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EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

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Editorial:

Evangelical Political Engagement

EVANGELICAL POLITICAL engagement, a vital subject for today's world, was the theme of the WEA Theological Commission mini-consultation held at Palmer Seminary, Philadelphia, USA on July 31, 2007. In this issue we take pleasure in presenting material from the consultation.

The 'Philadelphia Statement', which has received good responses from different parts of the world, sums up the discussions of the thirty participants. We encourage readers to use this in their own contexts and to distribute it to others (for translations, visit www.worldangelicals.org/tc/statements/). Then we have the keynote addresses. Former TC member, Ronald Sider (USA), gives an overview of issues evangelicals face in becoming politically active, canvasses a four point analysis of effective action and offers some biblical guidelines for involvement. Then current TC member, Claus Schwambach (Brazil), tackles ethical issues comprehensively, arguing that developing an international evangelical outlook on the topic is an urgent necessity. Despite the obvious pitfalls, he is confident that 'a global evangelical consensus in political ethics' is possible.

In the first of the supporting papers, Dr J. B. Jeyaraj works with Old Testament material and relates key features from that world to his own modern Indian situation, touching on topics such as human rights and international relations. Since 'interaction between religion and politics in a society is unavoidable' it is wise to seek positive

guidance from Scripture rather than allowing other forces to take control.

Taking a rather different angle, Jim Harries, writing from the African context, raises the question of how aid and development programs are administered in non-western countries. He argues that the methods used often leave the way open for systemic injustice and abuse, and calls for 'a conscious depowerment on the part of the west and westerners' to deal with the problem.

Referring to the recent anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade, John White (working in the Ukraine), focuses on 'Christian responsibility to reform society'. He emphasises that Wilberforce's experience 'shows that Christianity can be a powerful and guiding force in politics' when tackled in the right way, especially accepting 'responsibility for both the good and the bad' of the particular situation, and giving 'Christian principle [priority] over party'.

Finally, Rob Haskell, who also has close links with Latin America, looks at a well known biblical incident of the temple tax and draws the conclusion that it has political, not just religious, implications; but above all, God's children are under his gracious sovereignty although they are to make sure they are also obedient to those set over them. Yet this is not an absolute—for we are first of all under God's lordship, which raises interesting questions for those believers who also rule in this world.

David Parker, Editor.

World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission

The Philadelphia Statement, August 2007

This statement was prepared by participants of a Consultation on faith, providence and political involvement held on 31 July, 2007 at Palmer (Eastern Baptist) Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. The consultation was conducted by the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance which has issued this brief summary of the discussion. This statement may be reprinted freely in its full unedited form. Also available in other languages—see <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/tcstatements/>

The Lordship of Christ and Political and Civic Engagement

The confession 'Jesus is Lord' has immediate political implications for the witness of the church in the world. This is as true today as it was in the time of the early church when declaring that 'Jesus is Lord' was a challenge to the idea that Caesar was Lord. An authentic recognition of the Lordship of Christ means seeing Him as Lord of All. He is not merely 'my Lord' or even just the Lord of the church. Rather, He is the Lord of the whole of creation which includes all social and political realms, rulers and structures in all nations. The Lordship of Christ provides the fundamental reason for Christian involvement in social, civic and political affairs. Consequently, both evangelism and social action are essential dimensions of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The kingdom (or 'the reign') of God which Jesus proclaimed is a spiritual entity which exists wherever God is obeyed. The kingdom of God is not a

geographic or political kingdom but it has a profound impact on secular, national and political spheres of life. In humility Christians pray to the Father 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'

The Providence of God

We trust in the sovereignty of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—over the whole world. According to his wisdom and providential care, God uses governments to oppose evil and preserve his creation in good order. Being assured of God's providential care and knowing that God is in ultimate control of all things is a great comfort in the light of all personal and political difficulties and conflicts. It is encouraging to know that, despite the problems and limitations of our human nature and our social contexts, God can even use evil for good (Genesis 45:4-15). All of life exists under the providential sovereignty of God which relativizes all political systems.

A proper awareness of the providence of God which preserves, protects

and enhances human life and society creates an attitude of humility concerning our own abilities and serves to remind us that God cares for all people—for all bear the image of God. It is important, therefore, to respect rather than demonize others, to avoid undue pessimism concerning the moral future of the world and to look for a consensus concerning social and political life with all who seek peace and the common good.

The Church and Social Transformation

The church of Jesus Christ exists as ‘a light to the world’ (Matt. 5:14). It should not be a mere political critic but also a creative source to shape society, practising biblical principles and models that enhance community life. Although cultural, social and political forms vary greatly, Biblical principles are always relevant. Christians are called to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ (Jer. 29:7) and make a contribution to society. In many cultures there is a strong history of a positive evangelical engagement with society and it is our responsibility to continue this.

Evangelical theology stresses the importance of a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ and sees the transformation of individuals as an important part of the transformation of the world. However, the notion of a purely privatized faith in which the gospel affects only individual, personal or family life but has no wider implications for society must be rejected as inadequate.

As people of faith we interpret everything in the light of God’s provi-

dential oversight for good. In hope, we stand firm in the most daunting conditions, desiring to do what is right while patiently resisting the forces of evil.

Holding firmly to the virtues of faith, hope and love we affirm Christian involvement in the political processes of local communities, nations, and on the international level and encourage Christians to consider professions whereby they are able to serve in the political and social sphere. We recognize that the massive transformations occurring in our modern world must be addressed in a discerning manner. As Christians and citizens of specific nations we care a great deal about freedom, justice for the poor, peace, marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, and racial justice.

We recognize that process is also important, and the manner in which issues and solutions are presented must not contradict the values on which our priorities are based. We believe that our engagement should be a part of the mending and healing process locally, nationally, and internationally.

A Call to Kingdom living

We believe the truth of God’s revelation is indeed ultimate; yet our understanding of the truth is provisional and partial. As a result, in exercising our political responsibilities, we believe it is important to approach our task respectfully, prepared to listen and learn from those outside our religious and theological boundaries.

There are different forms of government, contexts and local issues that impact the implementation of the reign of Jesus Christ and it is important for

Christians of different nationalities and political convictions to be in discussion about these variations. However, there are important areas common to most societies where followers of Jesus Christ must pray and work for the kingdom, such as seeking human rights and religious liberty, working against corruption, violence and war, alleviating poverty, protecting the family and the sanctity of life, and caring for creation.

The church, as the primary community in which the kingdom of God is manifested, ought to embody the graceful principles of that kingdom and bear witness in life, word and action to the power of the gospel to transform lives and societies. We Evangelical Christians must repent of our failure to live as a community of faith that demonstrates the kingdom of God. Then we must commit ourselves to the common life of faith and action which will lead to a transformation of the world in which we live. As the church lives out the life of the kingdom it can become an example of community life and be a credible basis from which to impact the political sphere. The church

must not use political power merely as a means of self-protection, but should seek the benefit of the community in which it lives with humility, repentance, and in a spirit of unity.

Individuals, groups, congregations and national alliances are all called to participate in actions and programs which aim at overcoming social evil and which enhance the common good. We affirm the work of the World Evangelical Alliance in various areas of social and political action and particularly note the potential of the Public Policy Project aimed at helping national evangelical alliances/fellowships to develop an evangelical approach to political and civic engagement.

In exercising that responsibility to society which is fundamental to the mission of the church we do not assume that everything depends on the action of the church in the world. Consequently, the church exercises its social responsibility not only by direct action in the world but also by witnessing to the redemptive work of Christ and looking forward to the consummation of all things in Him.

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Developing an Evangelical Political Framework: Moving Toward Consensus

Ronald J. Sider

KEYWORDS: *Political philosophy, Moral Majority, Dispensationalism, pluralism, Natural Law, biblical theology, economics, sociology*

EVANGELICALS TODAY are up to their ears in politics. After decades of withdrawal, we are now vigorously engaged in political activity all around the world. The opportunities are enormous. But the lack of thoughtful preparation is creating tragic failure. There have been at least eight evangelical Presidents in developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s. Among the best known are: Obasanjo in Nigeria, Chiluba in Zambia, Ramos in the

Philippines, Kim Young Sam in South Korea and Rios Montt in Guatemala. In Spanish speaking Latin America alone, well over twenty evangelical political parties have emerged.¹

I The Problem

In a recent book by Cambridge University Press, Brazilian evangelical scholar, Paul Freston, surveys and analyses this sweeping new evangelical political engagement in the developing world. His conclusion? In spite of important positive developments, Freston found widespread confusion, ineptitude, misguided policies, and considerable corruption. Brazil experienced a flood of new evangelical (especially Pentecostal) political activity after 1986, but vote-selling and outright corruption 'have characterized Protestant

¹ Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 285.

Dr Ronald J. Sider is President of Evangelicals for Social Action, Professor of Theology, Holistic Ministry and Public Policy and Director of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer (Eastern) Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. Holding MA and PhD degrees from Yale University, he is best known for his Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study (1977, 5th ed 2005). He is also author of many other books including *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience* (2005), *Just Generosity* (1999) and *Churches That Make a Difference* (Baker, 2002). He served the WEA Theological Commission as coordinator of the Unit on Ethics and Society (1977-1986). This paper was presented at the Theological Commission Consultation on evangelical political engagement at Palmer Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa, on July 31, 2007 and is adapted from *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics: Why Are Christians Missing the Chance to Really Change the World?* (2008) (used by permission Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group).

politics since 1986'.² Lacking any carefully developed Christian political philosophy to guide his politics, one evangelical politician announced the principle that 'everything that is praised in the Bible should be prescribed [i.e. enacted as public law], everything that is condemned should be proscribed [prohibited by law]'.³

Frederick Chiluba, widely known as an evangelical Christian, was elected President of Zambia in 1991. He appointed several evangelical pastors to his cabinet and pronounced Zambia a 'Christian Nation'. When he issued this Declaration, Chiluba announced: 'I submit the Government and the entire nation of Zambia to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I further declare that Zambia is a Christian nation that will seek to be governed by the righteous principles of the Word of God.'⁴ Unfortunately, Chiluba violated human rights, tortured opponents in custody, bought votes and allowed widespread corruption so that he could run for a third term. He even used tear gas on groups who opposed him. Eventually, more than half of Zambia's members of parliament voted to impeach Chiluba.⁵

2 Paul Freston, 'Evangelicals and Politics in the Third World', in David P. Gushee, ed., *Christians and Politics: Beyond the Culture Wars* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), p. 109.

3 Quoted in Freston, 'Evangelicals and Politics in the Third World', p. 126.

4 Quoted in Isabel Apawo Phiri, 'President Frederick Chiluba and Zambia' in a forthcoming book, ed. Terence O. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*.

5 See Phiri's lengthy chapter (see n. 2) and Freston, 'Evangelicals and Politics in the Third World', pp. 115-120.

Freston blames many of these and other failures on a lack of systematic evangelical reflection on the nature of political engagement.⁶ 'A community that goes from apoliticism to political involvement without teaching on biblical political ethics will be susceptible to the prevailing political culture.'⁷

Ralph Reed, the brilliant strategist who led Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition in the United States for many years, provides a striking illustration. In his book, *Active Faith*, Reed reflected on what changed when he became a committed Christian and began attending an evangelical church: 'My religious beliefs never changed my views on the [political] issues to any degree because my political philosophy was already well developed.'⁸ If one assumes that a biblically informed and balanced political agenda was identical with the conservative platform of the Republican Party in the 1990s, then one can understand why Reed's new evangelical faith did not change any of his politics. But if that was not the case, then Reed offers a classical example of how Christians often uncritically embrace inherited political perspectives of right (or left) without reflecting in a systematic, biblical way on what should be a uniquely Christian political agenda.

Ed Dobson, Falwell's Vice-President in the early years of the Moral Majority, has subsequently lamented the movement's lack of a coherent,

6 Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, p. 315.

7 Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics*, p. 126.

8 Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 23.

developed political philosophy. Their approach, he says, was 'ready, fire, aim'.⁹ Their lack of careful reflection, Dobson now believes, contributed to many failures: thinking America had a 'favored-nation status with God', neglecting what the Bible teaches about the poor, unfairly attacking enemies, and using manipulative fundraising techniques.¹⁰

Evangelical historian Mark Noll has written several important pieces, analysing evangelical political engagement throughout American history. That engagement was vigorous up until the early twentieth century when evangelicals reacted one-sidedly against the liberal theology of the Social Gospel movement and retreated into separatist, fundamentalist enclaves. But even earlier when evangelicals were politically engaged, Noll argues, they did very little theological reflection on their politics. Grounded in an emotional fervour that characterized the revivalism that so powerfully shaped evangelicals, their political activity was populist, based on intuition and simplistic biblical proof-texting rather than systematic reflection.

The situation grew even worse as premillennial dispensationalism, preoccupied with the details of the last times surrounding Christ's return, swept through many evangelical circles in the first half of the twentieth century. Apocalyptic speculation about whether Mussolini, Hitler or Stalin might be the

Anti-Christ reached fever pitch in the 1930s and 1940s as evangelical political engagement plunged to an all-time low. Even as biblical a leader as Donald Barnhouse, famous Philadelphia pastor, editor, and radio preacher, declared that Christians who study the details of the end times in Ezekiel know more about current political developments than those who read the best secular news magazines.¹¹ At a time when *End Times* novels are by far the most widely read evangelical books, we need to hear Noll's warning that if evangelicals continue to be influenced by the kind of historicist dispensationalism that tries to identify current events as the detailed fulfillment of biblical prophecy, 'there is little intellectual hope for the future' of responsible evangelical political reflection.¹²

Evangelical failure to develop a systematic comprehensive political philosophy contrasts sharply with what other Christian traditions, especially Catholics have done. Roman Catholics benefit from over a century of papal encyclicals which have carefully developed and articulated a Catholic approach to public life.¹³ Mainline Protestants—both through church

9 Personal correspondence with Ed Dobson.

10 Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 105, 165.

11 Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 166.

12 Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, p. 173.

13 See especially Kenneth R. Himes, et al., eds., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005) and Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

declarations and the work of brilliant individuals like Reinhold Niebuhr—have also developed a substantial collection of careful thought on politics.¹⁴ The evangelical community has simply failed to develop anything comparable.¹⁵

The absence of any widely accepted, systematic evangelical reflection on politics leads to contradiction, confusion, ineffectiveness, even biblical unfaithfulness, in our political work. Consider the inconsistency with regard to the sanctity of human life. Almost all evangelicals agree with the principle. But many highly visible evangelical pro-life movements have focused largely on the question of abortion—as if, as one wag commented, life begins at conception and ends at birth. But what about the millions of children who die every year of starvation or the millions of adults killed annually by tobacco smoke? Are those not also sanctity of life issues?

Evangelical pronouncements on the role of government are often contradictory. Sometimes when attacking government measures they dislike, evangelical voices use libertarian arguments that forbid almost all government programs to help the poor.

(‘Helping the poor is a task for individuals and churches, not the government. Government should provide a legal framework, fair courts, and police protection but then leave almost everything else to the free choice of individuals.’) But when the issue changes from the poor to the family, the definition of marriage, abortion, and pornography, the same people quickly abandon libertarian arguments that maximize individual freedom. Instead they push vigorously for legislation that involves substantial government restriction of individual choices. It is possible that there are valid intellectual arguments for adopting libertarian arguments in the first case and non-libertarian arguments in the second. But a careful argument would have to be made. Without such argument, flipping from libertarian to non-libertarian arguments looks confused and superficial.

Or consider the agenda of many Christian political movements. One sees a great deal on abortion, euthanasia, and the family. But hardly ever do they push for public policy to combat racism, protect the creation, or empower the poor. If it is the case that the Bible says that God cares *both* about the family *and* the poor, *both* about the sanctity of human life *and* racial justice *and* creation, then should not evangelical political movements be promoting all these things? Does not a one-sided focus on just the issues that happen to be the favoured ones of either the left or the right suggest that one’s political agenda is shaped more by secular ideology than careful biblical, theological reflection?

Or consider the tough question: What should we legislate? Should pub-

14 See especially books by Emil Brunner, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Charles Kegley, Paul Lehmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Max L. Stackhouse, William Temple, Ronald Thiemann and Philip Wogaman, among others.

15 A partial exception to this generalization is provided by the books on Abraham Kuyper and recent authors inspired by Kuyper (especially James Skillen) and the Reformed thinkers shaped by Calvin College (e.g. Richard Mouw and Stephen Monsma) as well as the writings of John Howard Yoder.

lic law, as the newly engaged evangelical politician we quoted earlier said, support everything the Bible says is right and outlaw everything the Bible says is wrong? Should public law allow divorce only in the narrow circumstances under which Jesus permitted divorce?¹⁶ Or should the state's law on divorce differ from what the church teaches? If one believes that adultery and homosexual practice are sinful, does that mean that the law should make such activity a crime? If not, why not? Answering the complex question of what to legislate and what not to legislate requires a lot of thinking about the proper, limited, role of the state, the nature of human freedom, and the purpose and limitations of laws. In short, it requires sophisticated thinking about a biblically grounded, factually informed political philosophy.

II Why Politics?

All that may sound so complicated that some conclude: 'Forget it. We don't need all that "high fallutin intellectual stuff."' Would that be so bad? After all, politics is certainly not the most important activity in the world. It is not as important as evangelism. Being good parents, church members, neighbours, school teachers—none of these things are politics, but they are enormously important and help build good societies.

So should faithful Christians just forget about politics? No, for two reasons—one practical, the other theological. It is a simple historical fact that political decisions have a huge

impact—for good or bad—on the lives of literally billions of people.

It is through politics that country after country has come to enjoy democracy. It is through politics that nation after nation has stopped jailing and killing 'heretics'—thousands of my ancestors in the sixteenth century were burned at the stake or drowned in the rivers by fellow Protestants who disagreed with our belief that the church should be separate from the state. It took centuries, but eventually more and more politicians in more and more countries decided that religious freedom for everyone is a necessary mark of a just political order. It is through politics that Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism first conquered and developed and then waned and disappeared in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It is through politics that we develop laws that either restrict or permit abortion, allow or forbid 'gay marriage', protect or destroy the environment. Politics is simply too important to ignore.

The theological reason for political engagement is even more compelling. The central Christian confession is that Jesus is now Lord—Lord of the entire universe. The New Testament explicitly teaches that he is now 'ruler of the kings of the earth' (Rev. 1:5). 'All authority in heaven and on earth' has been given to the risen Jesus (Mt. 28:18). Christians who know that must submit every corner of their lives to their wonderful Lord.

Since we live in democratic societies where we have the freedom to vote, our votes—or even our failure to vote—shape what happens in important areas of politics. If Christ is my Lord, if Christ desires the well-being of

16 Matthew 19:8-9.

all, and if my vote has the potential to encourage political decisions that will promote the well-being of my neighbours, then the obligation to vote responsibly follows necessarily from my confession that Christ my Lord calls me to love my neighbour. One way Christians must live out our belief that Christ is Lord, even of political life, is to think and pray for wisdom to act politically in ways that best reflect Christ our Lord.

The failures of recent evangelical political engagement flow to a significant degree from the fact that we failed to develop a biblically-grounded, systematic approach to the complicated task of politics. We failed to do our homework before we took the test. We need more careful attention to developing a wise methodology for engaging in politics.

Our basic goals are fairly clear. As Christians we want to wholeheartedly submit our politics to the Lordship of Christ. We want to be uncompromisingly biblical. We also want to be grounded in 'the facts'—in an honest, accurate reading of history and the social sciences. Finally, we want a comprehensive framework that helps us make consistent, faithful, effective political decisions about very concrete questions: Should I oppose or support this law? Should I vote for this or that candidate for Congress or the Presidency?

III The Starting Point

There is another huge problem. Even if a broad range of evangelicals could agree on major aspects of a biblically informed political philosophy, they would still face the tough reality that

modern society is highly pluralistic. Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and especially the secular intellectuals who dominate our great universities have little or no interest in political ideas offered by Christians as 'biblical truths' for shaping politics. Radically divergent, mutually contradictory views about almost any topic relevant to politics exist in contemporary society.

In two widely influential books, *After Virtue* (1985) and *Whose Justice?* (1988), Alasdair MacIntyre has concluded that it is impossible to develop a set of common values that all can endorse as the foundation of social order by starting with some allegedly neutral, objective philosophical starting point. No such place exists. We are simply left with competing values rooted in competing religious and philosophical traditions.

Before we accept this conclusion, we need to review two of the most significant twentieth century attempts to find a neutral, objective, starting point for discovering common values that all citizens can embrace: natural law and the political philosophy of John Rawls.

The natural law tradition, articulated so clearly by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, developed by Catholics over many centuries, and promoted brilliantly by twentieth century Catholics like John Courtney Murray claims that simply on the basis of reason which all persons share, it is possible to discern universal moral values adequate for building a good society. This approach is highly attractive.¹⁷

¹⁷ Some evangelicals are attracted to this position. See Paul Henry in Koopman, ed., *The*

Many objections, however, have been raised to natural law theory. Natural law theorists have defended both monarchy and democracy, both state enforcement of religious orthodoxy and the separation of church and state. Prominent philosophers including David Hume and Immanuel Kant have mounted powerful objections.¹⁸ Many Protestants have argued that since the fall, sin has distorted not just the will but human reason to such an extent that it is impossible for sinful persons to discern moral truth with unaided human reason. We need special divine revelation which we have in the Bible.¹⁹

Biblical Christians, however, cannot totally dismiss the idea of natural law because the New Testament clearly affirms it. It is certainly true that sin has distorted our minds as well as our wills (Rom. 1:21, 28). But Paul insists that even Gentile sinners who do not know of God's special revelation through Israel nevertheless have some moral insight (Rom. 2: 14-15). This limited moral insight is not sufficient

for salvation. But Paul does clearly insist that some fundamental awareness of right and wrong is embedded in every human being.

Unfortunately, human sin is so powerful that, to a great extent, it obscures and conceals this moral insight. That means that our only certain guide to ethics is God's special revelation in the Bible. Only the gospel has the power to overcome sinful humanity's perverse desire to deny the ethical truth that at some level it still partially understands. But the fact that no living person, however sinful, can fully obscure this moral insight written on the heart is enormously important when we try to appeal to non-Christians and urge them to accept moral claims that Christians understand clearly only on the basis of biblical revelation.²⁰

What does this mean for a Christian political philosophy? It means that we should turn primarily to the Bible, not to unaided human reason, for a clear understanding of morality, the nature of persons, justice, family, etc. Our normative framework, our fundamental normative principles for politics, properly come largely from the Bible, not mere philosophical reflection. It also means that careful systematic reflection on politics within the Christian community must be where we begin. We need structures and processes among Christians to think through both a uniquely Christian framework for politics and also the concrete implications of that framework. But when we seek to make a case in the larger, pluralistic

Thought of Paul B. Henry, p. 86; David L. Weeks, 'The Uneasy Politics of Modern Evangelicalism', *Christian Scholars Review*, XXX, 4 (summer 2001), pp. 403-418; and, carefully, J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997). For a classic Catholic example, see John A. Ryan, *Economic Justice*, ed. Harlan R. Beckley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), p. xix.

¹⁸ See Weeks' helpful summary of major objections (and a critique of the objections), 'Uneasy Politics of Modern Evangelicalism', pp. 412-415.

¹⁹ Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, trans. Mary Hottinger (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), p. 91, and Carl Henry cited in nn. 41, 42 of Weeks' 'Uneasy Politics'.

²⁰ See the helpful comments by Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart*, pp. 179-186.

society for political proposals (eg. that abortion is the taking of innocent human life, that marriage is only between a man and a woman or that justice demands a special concern for the poor) we know that at some deep level even secular thinkers who reject these claims actually have these truths written on their hearts, even though they deny it. And it also means that we may be able, at times, to develop common language that most if not all citizens will embrace. That means that although natural law will not work to overcome the impasse we noted earlier, it is, nonetheless, very important.

What about John Rawls? Does his political philosophy offer access to the basic principles needed for a fair, democratic society without any prior acceptance of the specific moral judgments that are so much disputed in our pluralistic society? That is what he claimed in his famous book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971)—probably the single most influential secular book on political philosophy in the last three decades of the twentieth century.²¹

Many critics, including Michael Sandel, however, have rejected Rawls' claim to a neutral, objective starting point.²² Sandel argued that Rawls'

approach assumed a particular (and wrong) view of persons as isolated, abstract individuals unattached to any community.²³ In later writings, (eg. *Political Liberation*, 1993) Rawls himself admitted that every person operates with some view of the good grounded in a religious or philosophical system and Rawls has abandoned the search for a purely objective starting point. Thus the work and debate about John Rawls confirms the fact that contemporary society is so fundamentally pluralistic that it is impossible to find some neutral, objective starting point for political thought.²⁴

How then should biblical Christians proceed? We must start by accepting the fact of pluralism. That does not mean embracing relativism and abandoning Christian truth claims. John Courtney Murray once noted that he did not like pluralism (he wished everyone would accept the truth) but he accepted it as a reality. Christians can and should believe and claim that Jesus Christ and biblical revelation represent the truth that all people should embrace even as we respect the vast variety of people in our pluralistic society who disagree with us.

That means that Christians should start with biblical revelation and work within the Christian community to develop a framework for political

21 For this overview and critique of Rawls, see Paul A. Brink, 'Selves in Relation: Theories of Community and the Imago Dei Doctrine' in Thomas W. Heilke and Ashley Woodiwiss, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science: Christian Scholars Engage Their Discipline* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001), pp. 85-123.

22 See the lengthy discussion in Raymond Plant, *Politics, Theology and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 331-47.

23 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

24 See Ashley Woodiwiss, 'Rawls, Religion, and Liberalism', chapter 3 in Heilke and Woodiwiss, *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*, and John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 380.

engagement that is thoroughly grounded both in a biblical worldview and in systematic analysis of society. Applying this framework, we then encourage individual Christians as well as groups and associations of Christians to decide how to apply that framework to specific proposed laws and actual candidates for office.

At that point, a crucial question of language and translation emerges. 'The Bible says' is not the most effective way to persuade non-Christians—whether Jews, Muslims, or 'secular humanists'—to adopt our specific proposals. We must be ready to search for language and arguments that others can understand. As we do that, we remember that there is a basic natural law that is still written on the hearts of all our neighbours. Therefore we will not despair of the possibility of frequently persuading a majority of our neighbours that our proposals (grounded in a biblical worldview about persons, justice, etc) offer a wise way forward. At the same time, knowing the depth of human sin, we will also expect our fellow citizens frequently to reject good proposals.

Precisely because of our own principles, however, especially our respect for human freedom and our recognition of the reality of widespread pluralism, we will distinguish between what biblical norms should be legislated and what should not. We will also refuse to seek to impose our good legislative proposals on society until a majority in our democratic society freely embrace our proposals. Because we respect the freedom and dignity of every person, we will nurture not a naked public square free of all religious reasons for political proposals, but rather an open,

pluralistic, civil, public square open to all the different religiously and philosophically grounded arguments and proposals that every citizen and every particular community wish to advance.²⁵ Thus, 'the separation of church and state' will not mean the exclusion of religious language and arguments from public, political debate. We will listen carefully to every view even as we argue that proposals shaped by unbiblical worldviews are wrong and destructive.

IV Toward a Faithful Methodology

1. Four Components of Every Political Decision.

Every careful political decision requires four different, interrelated components: (a) a normative framework; (b) a broad study of society and

²⁵ My argument is parallel to that of James W. Skillen in *Recharging the American Experiment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); see for example, pp. 122-123. My proposal rejects any suggestion that public theology must use only arguments that are independent of a particular faith (see for example, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, [New York: Crossroad, 1981]). See also Ronald Thiemann's helpful critique of Tracy, *Constructing a Public Theology*, pp. 20-21. Ashley Woodiwiss makes a proposal similar to mine in calling for a Christian political approach in which Christians first define the Christian community's identity and interests and then negotiate with other communities in our multi-cultural, pluralistic society. 'Deliberation or Agony? Toward a Post-Liberal Christian Democratic Theory', chapter 6 in Heilke and Woodiwiss, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*.

the world; (c) a political philosophy; and (d) detailed social analysis on specific issues.

a) Normative Framework

Virtually every political decision of any significance is grounded in fundamental beliefs about morality and the nature of persons. Many people do not think consciously about this normative framework. Some pretend that it does not exist. But in fact, it is simply impossible to make political decisions without some religiously or philosophically grounded normative framework about what is good and just.

Earlier I argued that Christians should derive their normative vision from biblical revelation. Discovering relevant biblical norms for politics is not, however, a matter of simple proof-texting. The Bible is full of commands, stories, proverbs—in short, a wide variety of materials written over many centuries.

We dare not arbitrarily select one text or one theme. Some want to focus only on God's ordination of government in Romans 13 or government as the beasts of Revelation 13. Similarly, some one-sidedly emphasize the theme of Exodus, others Jubilee, still others Nehemiah's nation building. Instead of an arbitrary emphasis on this or that text or theme, we must submit to the full biblical canon with Christ at its centre.²⁶

To develop a fully biblical perspective on political issues, we need two things: (a) a biblical view of the world

and persons (this comes especially from what I will call the biblical story); (b) comprehensive summaries of biblical teaching related to many concrete issues—for example, the family or economic justice (I call these biblical paradigms). To develop a normative biblical framework we must in principle examine all relevant biblical passages, understand each text according to proper principles of exegesis, and then formulate a comprehensive summary of all relevant canonical material. The most sweeping comprehensive summary would articulate a biblical view of the world and persons that flows from the biblical story. The other comprehensive summaries (or biblical paradigms) would cover things such as the poor, the family, work, justice, the dignity of persons, etc.

Some may argue that the Old Testament, at least, is irrelevant for society today since it was God's special revelation for the people of Israel living in a theocratic society. But that is to ignore the fact that God promised Abraham that 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gen. 12:3) and that God called Israel to be a priest to the nations (Ex. 19:6). Israel was to be God's instrument of revelation to share with all people how the Creator wants people to live together in community. Repeatedly, the prophets applied the same standards which they used to judge the Israelites to surrounding nations (Amos 1, 2; Dan. 4:27). Again and again, the prophet Isaiah looked ahead to a Messianic time when all nations would stream to Jerusalem to learn God's law (Isa. 2:2-4; 66:18; 25:7-8; cf. also Jer. 3:17).

That does not mean, however, that we should try to legislate today the

²⁶ Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 22.

specific details of Old Testament civil law. Modern society is vastly different from either ancient Israel's agricultural society in the time of the Judges or Kings or first century Roman society. It is the biblical paradigms that we apply. 'A paradigm is a particular case used to illustrate a general principle. It functions as a pattern for other cases where details and contexts vary but a basic principle remains unchanged.'²⁷ Thus the Bible does not offer a detailed blueprint for political life today.²⁸ But it does offer an important, essential normative framework.

b) Broad Study of Society and the World.

By itself, however, the biblical framework is insufficient. Nothing in the Bible talks explicitly about the pros and cons of a market economy or multinational corporations or the impact of over 6 billion people on the natural environment.

In addition to a normative framework, we need a broad, comprehensive study of our world. That study takes many forms. It includes reflections on

the historical development of society, the economy, political systems, etc. (As finite historical beings, we come to see some things more clearly as history unfolds.) It also includes, in principle, detailed, comprehensive socioeconomic and political analysis of everything relevant to any particular political question.²⁹

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

²⁷ *Political Christians in a Plural Society: A New Strategy for a Biblical Contribution* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1994), p. 58. For further discussion of this paradigmatic approach, see C.J.H. Wright, 'The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics', *Transformation*, 1/1 (April, 1984), pp. 11-20 and *Living as the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1983). See also the somewhat parallel argument in Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (New York: Harper, 1945), pp. 118-123.

²⁸ Mark A. Noll, *One Nation Under God: Christian Faith and Political Action in America*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988) p. 172. William Temple, *Christianity and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 3-5.

²⁹ That of course raises the complex question: which sociology, which social science? Liberation theologians have been especially insistent on this question (see for example, Jose Miguez Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], chap. 3.). They have also been too quick to adopt a Marxist sociology and economics. Christians must be aware of secular and other non-Christian bias that often creeps into so-called neutral methodologies. See, for example, James Skillen's attempt to develop a Christianly informed method for political science in 'Toward a Comprehensive Science of Politics', in *Political Theory and Christian Vision*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 57ff.

c) Political Philosophy

In addition to a biblical framework and a broad study of society and the world, Christians engaged in politics also need a political philosophy. It is simply impossible, every time one wants to make a political decision, to spend days (actually years) reviewing mountains of relevant biblical material and complex studies of society. We need a framework, a road map, a handy guide—in short, a political philosophy. Furthermore, a political philosophy is much more than a handy road-map. If developed carefully, it provides a coherent, systematic framework that reveals the many interconnections of different parts of one's political philosophy. But we dare not adopt our political philosophy uncritically from some non-Christian source. It must emerge from our normative biblical framework and our painstaking, extensive socioeconomic and political analysis.

d) Detailed Social Analysis on Specific Issues

Even after a Christian has a political philosophy shaped by both a normative biblical framework and careful study of society and the world, he or she still needs to do detailed social analysis on everything relevant to a particular legislative proposal or a specific election. Two people could, in principle, have identical normative frameworks, identical historical analyses of modern society, and identical political philosophies and still disagree on whether or not, for example, to raise the minimum wage. Why? Because they rely on different economic analyses of the actual effects of raising the minimum wage. The only way to make progress on set-

ting such a disagreement is to go back together and do further detailed economic analysis. Careful social analysis of all the available information relevant to a specific political judgment is the fourth essential ingredient of responsible Christian political engagement.

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

Knowing the complexity of such political judgments and the possibility of mistakes at every step, we must always hold our specific political conclusions with humility and tentativeness. But we should dare to advocate boldly for specific policies because we have sought to ground our specific conclusions in a biblical framework and responsible social analysis even as we honestly invite friend and foe alike to help us improve our analysis of both Scripture and society at every point.

It would help immensely to reduce political disagreements among Christians (and others) if we would be more precise about exactly where we disagree. It is unhelpful to confuse a dis-

agreement over the proper interpretation of Matthew 25 with lack of compassion for the poor or disagreement over the relative merits of more or less government intervention in market economies. To the extent that we can be precise about exactly where we disagree, we can make more progress in overcoming our differences.

It is absolutely crucial, however, that Christians first articulate and develop their political agenda and concrete proposals within the Christian community on the basis of biblical norms. If we do not, we will end up adopting secular norms and values and their corresponding political ideologies. The result will be a compromised, often fundamentally un-Christian, political engagement.

In this short paper, I do not have the space to flesh out the results of applying this methodology. I have tried to do that in my forthcoming book, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics*. Here, I want to make just one central claim: If we start with a normative framework derived from biblical revelation, then our political agenda must reflect biblical balance.

V A Biblically Balanced Agenda

In the Scriptures, it is perfectly clear that the God of the Bible cares about the poor and the family, about peace-making *and* the sanctity of human life, about freedom *and* creation care. Any political engagement that claims to be Christian must be concerned with the full range of things that the Bible says God cares about. We dare not pick out one or two issues that suit our personal

preference or some narrow political agenda—whether family and abortion or economic justice and environmental concern—and neglect the others.

‘For the Health of the Nation’, the recent (2004) statement adopted unanimously by the board of the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States says pointedly: ‘The Bible makes it clear that God cares a great deal about the well-being of marriage, the family, the sanctity of human life, justice for the poor, care for creation, peace, freedom, and racial justice.’ The conclusion? ‘Faithful evangelical civic engagement must champion a biblically balanced agenda.’³⁰ The declaration goes on to focus seven crucial areas for evangelical political activity: religious freedom, family, the sanctity of human life, justice for the poor, human rights, peace and creation care. All are essential because God’s revealed word teaches that they all matter a great deal to God. Therefore we cannot pick and choose. We must embrace them all. If our politics is to be Christian we must adopt a biblically balanced agenda.

Of course that does not mean that every individual Christian must spend equal time on every issue. Individuals rightly specialize. Nor does it mean that Christian organizations focused on one issue (whether poverty or abortion) are wrong. But it does mean that all Christians must speak and act in such a way that everyone knows that they are not ‘one issue’ or ‘two issue’ people. It means that church leaders will teach their people how faithful

30 Sider and Knippers, eds., *Toward An Evangelical Public Policy* (Baker, 2005), p. 366.

Christians can develop and promote a biblically balanced political agenda. It means that when Christians vote and when they work full time in politics they will strive to encourage a concern for that same balanced agenda. If Christian political engagement focuses on just one or two issues, it is misguided, unfaithful, unbiblical.

VI Next Steps

I believe there is an urgent need for national evangelical alliances/fellowships all around the world to engage in a careful, extended process to develop a consensus evangelical statement on political engagement for their country. The basic methodology sketched here needs to be applied country by country. In the process, evangelicals/Pentecostals should listen to, interact with and critique both the history of Christian political thought and also the recent work on political engagement by Catholics and liberal Protestants.

But I believe the first, crucial step if evangelicals/Pentecostals want to develop a more biblically grounded, factually rooted, sophisticated political engagement is for the evangelical/Pentecostal community, country by country, to carefully, systematically develop a consensus evangelical/Pentecostal framework for civic engagement. Evangelicals/Pentecostals have significant things in common that they do not share with liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics. Furthermore, it is our community that is most lacking in solid, extensive reflection on this topic. Therefore I think we need to develop a country-by-country process to develop a consensus framework on political engagement that is widely

accepted as a faithful evangelical/Pentecostal framework.

As we do that country-by-country process, each country needs to listen to the parallel developing work on this topic in other places. Then, after several years of work in dozens of individual countries, it would probably be helpful to have a global conference of evangelicals/Pentecostals to see how much common ground has emerged. A global evangelical/Pentecostal declaration outlining the consensus that has emerged on political engagement could be an important help for national fellowships since brothers and sisters in other places often help us perceive blind spots which our particular setting prevents us from understanding clearly.

As evangelicals/Pentecostals develop much more extensive reflection on political engagement, they will become better prepared to work with other Christians in areas where they share common political views.

Imagine the impact if even a quarter of the total Christian community embraced a new political engagement that truly reflected a biblically balanced agenda and was conducted in an honest, confident yet humble way.

In Africa, south of the Sahara, professed Christians represent a substantial majority of all voters. The same is true in most of Latin America and the Philippines. In many countries in Asia, there is a rapidly growing Christian minority.

In the United States the vast majority of the citizens claim to be Christians. Because of its unique global power today, the United States could become a powerful force to reduce poverty, to promote freedom and

peace, to care for creation and to respect the sanctity of human life and the importance of the family—if a strong, minority of American citizens would decide to act vigorously and wisely to promote a biblically balanced political agenda.

One recent development is especially striking and potentially momentous. The new evangelical declaration, 'For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility' now represents the official stance of the National Association of Evangelicals (the largest evangelical network in the United States). Prominent evangelical leaders like Charles Colson, Rick Warren, Richard Land, and James Dobson have also signed it.

What is especially striking, however, is that the policy proposals of this evangelical declaration are overwhelmingly parallel to the official public policy agenda of Roman Catholics.³¹ Both communities' official teaching promotes a pro-poor and pro-life, pro-peace and pro-family, pro-freedom and pro-creation care agenda. Evangelicals constitute one quarter of all American voters. Catholics make up another one quarter. If these two communities, representing at least half of all American voters, discover how to work together over a couple of decades to promote their common framework for public life, they will transform American politics.

Similar things could happen in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines. It is absolutely essential that evangelicals/Pentecostals and

Roman Catholics learn how to cooperate more deeply and effectively.

Wise, honest, biblically balanced political activity by Christians could dramatically transform our world in the next twenty-five years. We could substantially reduce poverty around the world. We could increase respect for the sanctity of human life and renew and strengthen the family. We could care for creation and pass on a sustainable planet to our grandchildren. We could reduce injustice, violence, and war. All of that is worth vigorous, sustained effort on the part of devout, biblical Christians.

Never, however, dare we expect utopia or exaggerate the importance of politics. Even the most successful, most faithful Christian political engagement will not bring in the kingdom. Christ will do that when he returns. Sin, injustice and violence will continue. But wise, biblically grounded Christian political engagement could save tens of millions of our neighbours from agony and death. It could create a better planet for our grandchildren to inhabit.

Above, everything, however, let us never forget that politics is not the Christian's only responsibility. It is not even the most important. Let us never forget to be the church, to worship our Lord, and to share the gospel with those who have never heard. Politics is important because it can nurture a better, more wholesome life for billions of neighbours for their brief sojourn on this gorgeous planet. But sharing the gospel leads not only to life abundant now but also life eternal. As we rejoice in the important but limited results that flow from faithful political engagement, let us revel in the unlimited, eternal blessings that flow from the gospel.

³¹ See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

On Political Ethics as the Basis of a Global Evangelical Consensus

Claus Schwambach

KEYWORDS: *Gospel, social ethics, globalization, liberation, oppression, democracy, eschatology, state, power*

I The Necessity of a Global Consensus in Questions of Political Ethics

When the message of the Kingdom of God in and through Jesus Christ reaches us, it confronts us with the call of God that commands us to repent (Mt. 3:2). God wants to redeem us in Christ and through the work of the Holy Spirit. When this message reaches us and leads us to believe in Christ (Jn. 1:12), God changes our lives and makes us into 'new creatures' (2 Cor. 5:17). He makes us his disciples (Mt. 10). He reconciles us with himself and gives us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Jesus Christ has therefore called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Our witness should reach all people on this earth—it should be in

our churches and congregations as well as in our societies and nations (Mt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:9). This witness should deeply permeate our lost and chaotic world. Through our witness in word and deed, people far and near, from our own countries and other countries should experience and come to know the goodness of the triune God both as Creator and Sustainer and as Redeemer and Judge of the world. We Christians are both *witnesses* and *instruments* of the triune God acting in the world and acting to redeem. God wants to use not only our words, but also our thinking and actions and our whole lives for his ministry. This is the task of the global church of Jesus Christ.

In our pluralistic and globalized world we are becoming more and more aware of the imminent *global* dimension of our witness and ministry in a special way. What a single individual or group or people does can be spread across the whole world by TV news and the Internet in seconds. The postmod-

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ern world brings us many dangers, but it also opens up to us tremendous opportunities and extends the scope of our tasks and responsibilities as witnesses to and servants of Jesus Christ. Perhaps more than ever before we are quickly becoming aware of how closely we are connected to one another. The world has become a giant net. Global awareness dominates thinking everywhere. In all possible areas of post-modern society things are done increasingly on the global scale. The same is also true of politics. Surely more clearly, we notice today, than ever before, how decisions that people make can have desirable as well as undesirable consequences for many other people as well.

In this context the question of how the Christian faith affects the political involvement of Christians worldwide constitutes one of the most urgent topics we must discuss within the scope of the WEA. Why? Several observations should be made here:

a) In the age of globalization, if global organizations such as the WEA do not want to fall prey to the processes of postmodern fragmentation and become politically irrelevant on the global scale, they must work towards global unity perhaps more than ever before.

b) To achieve an assured unity between the churches, fellowships, groups, and individuals who identify with the WEA worldwide, it is not enough just to work on common statements regarding doctrine or cooperation in practical tasks, but also to promote common views on ethical questions, including political-ethical questions.

c) An effort for an international dis-

cussion of political questions within the WEA is therefore important and urgent today because political circumstances form the socio-political, economic, and ideological background of our understanding of many theological and practical questions. Time and again in the past decades, political questions have created tension, misunderstanding, mutual accusation and so on in many countries on the local, regional, and international level. This has been true to the extent that now the question of whether or not work should be done on forming an international consensus in the area of *political ethics* has become acute.

d) The treatment of this topic within the framework of the WEA is pressing also, because today enormous differences in the interpretation of international political relationships dominate the ethical-political views of Christians in some countries of the so-called First World and countries of the so-called Two-Thirds World. Such differences between wealthier and poorer countries expose a tender spot in evangelical North-South international relationships which must be dealt with.¹

1 Cf., e.g., C. René Padilla and Lindy Scott, *Terrorism and the War in Iraq: A Christian Word from Latin America* (Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2004). Which problem are we talking about exactly? If you consider, on the one hand, that, according to statistics, 80% of the evangelical branch of American Protestantism was in favour of the U.S. War in Iraq (p.12), and, on the other hand, the absolute majority of Latin American Protestant Christians, including evangelical circles, clearly were against this war (p.11-26), then there are, even within Evangelicalism, almost insurmountable differences in the attitudes with regard to the topic, 'war on Iraq'.

e) This means that it is not enough today in discussing political questions to treat only local or regional topics, or to limit ourselves to the inner ethical-political problems of our own countries, because only a global approach would really be effective.

f) Achieving a global, evangelical consensus on the foundation of an evangelical socio-political ethic would, in my opinion, improve the health of North-South relations between Christians within the scope of the WEA because these are very burdened today by many events of recent world history.

g) A worldwide consensus on political ethics could give tremendous political power to our Christian witness and our mutual ministry, especially in view of the global growth of new religious movements and world religions, as well as the growth of all possible forms of political fundamentalism.²

h) Global consensus and international evangelical cooperation in questions of political ethics could help in that certain ethical-political problems seen in all our countries could be tackled on a wider, international level and balanced growth and corresponding development could be promoted.

i) Political-ethical questions also form, in my opinion, a field in which, despite, among others, theological and philosophical differences, cooperation even with other international organizations—such as, for example, the World Council of Churches—could be possible in some respects; in fact, depending on the place, in some countries, inter-religious cooperation would be not only conceivable, but also necessary.³

Based upon all these observations, we cannot, in my view, simply limit ourselves in this consultation to investigating the correlation between faith in providence and political involvement. I will therefore attempt to give also some ideas for an honest, international, brotherly dialogue on some background topics of Christian political ethics based on theological reflections from the context of Latin America.

The following questions must be considered: How can Evangelical Christians from the First and from the Two-Thirds Worlds talk about political questions in a theologically healthy, honest, and brotherly way? How can existing tensions be overcome? How can we have a healthy, international, Christian culture of dialogue in which our Christian faith helps us to hear what brothers and sisters from other countries are saying with respect to the political situation in our own countries and their international conse-

2 A specific example is the discussion about the war in Iraq: cf. Lindy Scott, 'The War in Iraq: The Latin American Churches Speak Out', in Padilla and Scott, *Terrorism and the War in Iraq*, p. 26: 'The invasion of Iraq by the United States and England has raised great interest again in political ethics and the role of churches in modern societies. Latin American churches have begun making their voices heard. Their pronouncements are making a contribution to the ethical debate needed in our contemporary world.'

3 The fight against world hunger or against AIDS in Africa or even worldwide could, for example, be a joint inter-religious concern so that an interreligious dialogue is, in my view, definitely necessary in treating socio-political questions.

quences? How do we as Christians deal with the political evils of our own countries and of other countries? How do we deal with political differences of opinion and differing political options among ourselves? How do we handle critical-prophetic questions in the area of the foreign policies of our countries?

If we, as the WEA, want to formulate an internationally valid statement, we must somehow take into careful consideration the existing North-South and East-West tensions and help our brothers and sisters worldwide to achieve an honest, humble, and healthy international culture of dialogue on political matters. If we seek only a minimal amount of international consensus within the WEA and thus do not tackle this difficult topic in an honest, Christian manner, this can, in my view, lead to failure in the search for a wider, international consensus.

In Latin America, José Mígues Bonino has recently emphasized the necessity of finding a 'joint ethical awareness', or a 'universal ethical consensus'.⁴ This means consensus between Christians and people of all kinds of other religious views. Bonino recognizes, for example, that with ethical positions in today's societies, the use of certain values such as 'justice' occurs from very different ideological, religious, utopian and ideological perspectives. Even 'non-religious' worldviews and their values are regarded in the same way as religion is with Christians.

This is something that must be taken into account. Bonino quotes Clifford Geertz's distinction between 'thick description' and 'thin description' and talks about 'minimal consensus' and 'maximal meaning' (Spanish, 'significados máximos'). The *minimal consensus* should serve to create common laws for all of society. In practice, laws are often the result of this 'minimal consensus'. When it is a matter of applying the law to everyday life, each person will act according to his own worldview and its special motives. That is, he will put into practice what is binding as minimal consensus in its *maximal meaning* only according to his own worldview.

Because of this, our political involvement as Christians cannot be about introducing the breadth of our particular Christian motives and interpretations, but about working on minimal consensus. To this extent, Bonino speaks of a maximal and a minimal morality. In Argentina, cooperation was achieved even by people of different worldviews in a pluralistic society with respect to concrete mutual goals and the definition of common ethical concerns regarding human rights.⁵

A joint intra-evangelical statement can thus serve as a guideline for Christians and churches in our countries. It can also encourage them to perceive more acutely the political challenges in their countries and help them to speak and act with clear biblical-theological and ethical criteria. It can even exercise a preventive and corrective function with respect to worldwide political

4 José Mígues Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político. La participación de los evangélicos en la política en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 1999), p. 19.

5 José M. Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, pp. 43-45.

evils which have been caused partly by evangelical Christians.

II Evangelical Political Involvement—Observations From History

When one asks today about the relationship between Christian faith and political involvement, we can see from the history of Protestant Christians from the Reformation until today that this topic has been examined many times.

Protestant Christians of all periods of time, whether consciously or unconsciously, have given testimony to their belief in the providence of God, as well as holding a definite view of the current political situation. There will, however, be differences regarding views on both providence and political involvement between various Christian Groups. In their discussion of these two topics even Protestant Christians will be under the influence of the respective spirit of the age. One can think, for example, of the period of the Enlightenment, of the Industrial Revolution, or of today's globalization.

Moreover, there is no other way possible. For faith in God's providence, whatever its strength, determines to a great degree our Christian attitude (whether positive or negative) towards this world, including its culture, philosophy, science, technology, law, institutions and politics. The same is also true with regard to our political attitudes. Because we as individuals and as Christian churches always live in a certain socio-political setting, our action in society always says something about our political attitudes.

European political theology (Johann Baptist Metz) and South American liberation theology have long since pointed this out in a very critical way—even if it was also done in a one-sided and overly critical way. They emphasized, for example, that all Christian or church action inevitably carries political weight so that there is no neutral or apolitical action, and that this action, moreover, either promotes the current political *status quo* or intends to change it. There is no such thing as a third way.

Liberation theologians of the 1970s and 1980s in Latin America gave, for example, Christians of all churches the choice—either the capitalist system or the socialist system which was making headway then. All so-called political neutrality was very sharply criticized because it only confirmed the existing political *status quo*—which, of course, was interpreted as the wrong political option by liberation theologians from their understanding of the Kingdom of God. They affirmed that the socialist system corresponded more to the Kingdom of God than the capitalist, and therefore they chose a political, ethical, and Protestant option for the poor against structurally-ingrained poverty.⁶ According to their own understanding, liberation theologians presented a political hermeneutic of the gospel.⁷

⁶ For a more detailed exposition see Schwambach, *Rechtfertigungsgeschehen und Befreiungsprozess. Die Eschatologien von Martin Luther und Leonardo Boff im Kritischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004), pp. 170-175.

⁷ This is how Gustavo Gutiérrez, explains it in his famous book *Teología de la liberación*, 1969 (*Theology of Liberation*).

The demand for political involvement brought the socio-political conflict of that time into many churches, including the Protestants. The political option or the particular party affiliation or party option of individual Christians was practically raised to the level of an act of confession. In this way, the political events and ideas of the past became in many ways matters of salvation and ruin, of sin and grace. One can imagine that the discussions of that not so distant past in the churches of Latin America were often heated and very emotional. In certain areas, a deep chasm arose between liberation theologians and evangelical Christians, and in other areas a kind of 'evangelical liberation theology' developed. Looking at the whole, a deeper awareness of political responsibility also entered the evangelical arena through these discussions.

Even if we cannot agree with the radical views of Latin American liberation theology at that time, discussion about it still raises the question of if and to what extent *the mixture of politics and religion, or, the religious overload of political options does not continue to present a problem to be treated worldwide*.

When we try to study the history of the involvement of Protestant, and today evangelical, Christians, then we quickly notice that Protestant Christians ever since the Reformation have always had to deal with political questions and challenges and, in fact, dealt with them in many ways. Countless examples from history could be mentioned here. That Protestant Christians have been apolitical can, in my opinion, be clearly assumed as a wrong starting point. Protestantism—and

this is true throughout the different fellowships and denominations—has, since its beginning, made a big effort to found schools and colleges. The advance of cultural development as well as the path to democracy in western countries cannot be imagined without the influence of Protestant thinking.

While part of the modern theory of democracy has clear rationalistic Enlightenment-era roots, the other part of its source is the western, Christian tradition. The separation between church and state has clear roots in different developments of Protestant theologies and has shaped in different ways the history of many western countries, depending on whether they stood historically more under the influence of Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, or other Protestant movements.

Today, generally accepted democratic principles, such as religious liberty or freedom of conscience, the right of private ownership, freedom of the press, human dignity, national sovereignty, government tolerance with respect to the religious options of its citizens, societal and political pluralism are only some examples of the common heritage of Evangelical Christians as well. The fight for political 'freedom' has unmistakable Protestant roots, even when we encounter the idea of freedom in the modern age in a secularized form.

Although Protestantism did not directly invent capitalism, Protestant ideas have always contributed to its rise and worldwide development. Social and economic development in many of our countries is also, among many factors, due to Protestant politi-

cal influence. National history, American in particular, gives us a wealth of examples of how Protestant Christians have worked hard to form society according to Christian values and principles. The different human rights declarations can in no way be viewed in a one-sided way as the heritage of the French Revolution; they also have very definite Christian, indeed, Protestant roots, as the first declarations from the U.S. show. It is a profound Christian, in fact, Protestant awareness that originally appeared in them.⁸ The idea that Protestant Christians should lead a simple lifestyle can clearly be found quite early in Reformation history and did not begin in modern times with the Lausanne conference.

The same is true for the emphasis on the necessity of social justice. That Protestant Christians owe people not only the gospel for the soul, but also practical help in all possible forms of human and societal difficulties, was always understood. One thinks here of the time of the revivalist movements in the Industrial Revolution. From the 17th to the 20th centuries, testimony is found to the many ways, and the many places in different countries, in which Protestant Christians took in the poor, worked for social justice, provided education, helped the unemployed and groups of the population suppressed and marginalized by poverty, treated the sick, created trade unions, founded political parties, fought for better laws and for social reforms at all possible levels of government. A prime example

of this is William Booth of the Salvation Army with his motto of 'soup, soap, and salvation'.

There are, therefore, countless examples and testimonies from each of these centuries,⁹ which we evangelical Christians today should not forget as they are a part of the greater history of Protestantism and of our fathers in the faith and of our own denominations. So, anyone today who talks about the 'political involvement' of Protestant Christians should not speak of it as if it had no history. We have a rich heritage that can constantly inspire and motivate us in many ways. But, this also means *that global evangelicalism today should not make decisions in these questions without an awareness of history and should not simply disconnect itself from the history of Protestantism*. For better or worse, the worldwide evangelical movement is in some way a part of it. The *ahistorical thinking* of some of our churches must also be overcome.

However, the history of Christianity does not show us only positive things with respect to the political activity of Protestant Christians. The reality of human sin has left behind a clear, embarrassing, and terrible trail even in the political involvement of Protestant Christians. Religion and politics have all too often been mixed in a disastrous way. The Thirty-Years' War shows

⁸ Cf. José Mígues Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 47-72.

⁹ The best overview in Portuguese can be found in Robinson Cavalcanti, *Cristianismo & Política. Teoria Bíblica e Prática Histórica*. 2. ed. (Niterói: Vinde; São Paulo: CPPC 1988). Cavalcanti is a former member of the Theological Commission of the WEA, where he also was active in a theological study unit on 'ethics and society'.

how Protestant Christians fought and killed one another. Historic denominations that have been placed in a secure position by their respective governments (e.g., Lutherans, Anglicans, Presbyterians) often had intolerant attitudes towards other Protestant groups. Quite often those groups, which arose as 'independent churches', were persecuted by the former, as were for example, the Anabaptists.

Broad secularization processes were sanctioned by changes in Protestant doctrine. The strong individualism of western societies has Christian, especially Protestant, roots. The same can be said for the overestimation of private capital or private property. Large and small wars were and are still fought by politicians who are members of Protestant churches. Even in Protestant-led governments, moral scandals, corruption, and the suppression of minorities can be found. Many countries were explored and exploited by Protestant and Catholic colonial powers and even today, there is still often a prevalent ethnocentric colonialistic attitude. The large Protestant missionary initiatives of the 18th and 19th centuries often mixed the gospel with western culture, looked down on ethnic minorities and violated human rights.

The influence of the colonial powers was not only positive, but, in many ways, negative and oppressive. There are many examples here that could be given. Yet it is our concern to show that we evangelicals today cannot just simply opt out of the negative side of the history of Protestant Christianity regarding politics. *Even the Evangelical movement and the churches and move-*

*ments that are indebted to it have definite roots in this history.*¹⁰

These negative examples also serve as a warning to us, as a call for repentance before God and change for us as individuals and nations. *The Word of God in the Scriptures teaches us about the on-going reality of sin even in born-again Christians; history confirms this as well with regard to the attitude of Christians in political matters.* An evangelical standpoint on politics must, therefore, constantly take into consideration the theological aspects with regard to creation, humanity's fallen nature, and sin so that it does not digress into utopian or unrealistic idealism. Protestant understanding of political involvement should be characterized (and guided) neither by a sense of pessimism from theological standpoints regarding creation and anthropology nor by a kind of optimism, but by a balanced *realism*.

Finally, when you attempt to get a short historical overview of our topic, you notice that there are some difficulties in the evangelical movement regarding 'political involvement' which must also continue to be worked on today with a view to overcoming them. Some of these may be mentioned as follows:

a) We must examine carefully whether the all too strong and one-sided emphasis on individual salvation to the detriment of the diaconal and social service activity of Christians in evangelical circles has, in fact, been already overcome. The rise of the *Social Gospel* movement had the worldwide effect that many evangelicals

¹⁰ Cf. Cavalcanti, *Cristianismo & Política*, pp. 115-150.

developed a polemical, intimate, and individualistic understanding of salvation.¹¹ Since the Lausanne Congress (1974), much work has been done on overcoming this one-sided understanding.

The concept of 'integral mission', which René Padilla strongly introduced into the discussion, has established itself both in the worldwide evangelical movement and even far beyond. And yet it remains to be asked if the practice of evangelical Christians and churches really fits this understanding, particularly in political questions, or if this has only remained in 'theory'. Has this great biblical vision also become action? Do not our Protestant churches still remain without any firm position regarding political questions?¹²

b) The continuously renewed call to social-political involvement by Protestant and evangelical Christians has, on the other hand, led to the dedication of many in many countries and in many ways to societal problems and even politics. These are surely positive results stemming from the many publications and worldwide discussions, especially since Lausanne I.¹³

But, today there are also several critical analyses that show that some instances of evangelical political involvement have become problematic, particularly in the past few years. Biblical-theological understanding is

unclear or completely lacking. Instead, problems can be found even among some evangelical politicians and among certain Protestant church groups in several places of the world, such as the application of biblical literalism in the understanding of what 'law' is, corruption scandals of evangelical politicians and in so-called 'Protestant' political parties, suppression and even persecution of groups of people who think differently, different forms of social injustice, lack of democracy and the abuse of human rights.¹⁴

This shows that there is still a great need for discussion even among us as evangelicals and that the question of the 'ethical criteria' of political action has not yet been treated adequately. It could be that our standpoints, whatever their differing contexts, must be more definitely founded on ethical criteria.

III Impetus for Discussion of a Consensus-Building Evangelical Political Ethic

Reflection on political ethics from an evangelical perspective must dare to tackle certain specific topics if it really wants to work hard on getting an international consensus and not just remain ineffectively superficial. In doing so, it must deal with the background to ethi-

11 Cavalcanti, *Cristianismo & Política*, pp. 142-144.

12 Cf. Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 11.

13 Cf. José M. Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 9.

14 Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Paul Freston, 'Evangelicals and Politics in the Third World', in David P. Gushee (Ed.), *Christians and Politics: Beyond the Culture Wars* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, pp. 11-13.

cal-political issues. Presumably, even so consensus cannot be reached. Yet, the following suggested questions are aimed to stimulate us to further reflection and show us the complexity of some problems which our ethical-political reflection must confront today.

1. Politics and Ethics

Politics is a legitimate subject of general ethics and, in this respect, is also a matter for Christian ethics as well. First of all, it is important that we remain aware that we, as theologians, are not experts in government, law or social politics. Strictly speaking, we are amateurs in political matters and we are dependent on experts and their special studies. And yet we should not mislead ourselves about the fact that, in our complex, plural and global world, even political experts today have only a limited view. This means that, more than ever before, we should not have a static understanding of what politics is actually about.

Politics is the art of what is possible in a rapidly-changing world. All politics is discretionary, a matter of judgement, an art. Biblically and theologically speaking, it has the task of securing the progression of public life in a chaotic world with as peaceful a means as possible. For neither the expert nor we as Christians have the right formula for correct political decisions. We will find ourselves in the situation again and again where we can hardly judge what is or was right or wrong. History is very complex and, for this reason, it can repeatedly surprise us. This makes us modest and careful to avoid hasty ethical judgements. For us as Christians, decisions on political issues must still

be understood as the art of Christian discernment in the sense of Romans 12:1-2. We can therefore have neither a purely negative attitude towards political topics nor an uncritical accommodation to the schemes of this world, for it is a task that must be undertaken responsibly (see Romans 12:4-8).¹⁵

It is also important that we remember constantly that the arena of political involvement is very different from other activities. It is not limited to the national government, but includes individual state governments, counties and cities, churches, schools and universities, industries, trade, business, political parties, trade unions, and particular groups within the population. Throughout all of these there are complex networks of different relationships. Politics works, therefore, to form public life at all these levels. In doing so it is constantly influenced by different cultural, ideological, and economic interests that are often divergent. Because of this, the task is always that of balancing different demands and ideals.

Moreover, it always has to do with 'change', that is, with the change of social needs, political figures, ideas, and historic situations. Politics begins where people consciously want these changes, where they either support change or hinder it, and where they try somehow to influence the course of things. For this reason, there is no politics without a vision for the future, and without the attempt to form society

¹⁵ Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 33.

according to a certain view or vision for the future. Because history, at least until the Second Coming of Christ, does not come to an end, there is also a further future behind the immediate future.

In this perspective, politics always has a dual limitation in relation to its ends and its means. With respect to its ends, it should make possible a common future, that is, not pursue its own interests, group, partial or private. With respect to the means, it should remain limited to peaceful means. It must guarantee free expression in word and in written form, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, free association of and dialogue between individuals, it must balance different interests through compromise.

The fact that we experience politics practically as a complex, dark world of unethical fighting between group and personal interests or perhaps as a power struggle using non-peaceful means, shows us exceptionally clearly as evangelical Christians how politics should, in fact, be focused on ethics, particularly in situations of tension. A person involved in politics should be continually seeking the good and the just for all, however difficult this may be.¹⁶

In summary, in their political involvement evangelical Christians should constantly recognize the complexity of politics, with the main goal of acting according to clear Christian eth-

ical standards on all levels of activity. Superficial sweeping judgements about political situations should be avoided. We are not helped in this either by purely fundamentalist casuistry, or by a purely situational-ethics position, or by a purely deontological approach, or by a purely teleological ethic. Utilitarian values also prove themselves to be limited in scope and very often unjust. Rather, each ethical norm must be strictly related to the specific situation and carefully examined to discover its real effectiveness.

2. The Christian View of the Modern State

One basic difficulty in gaining a worldwide consensus on questions of political ethics is that our churches come from very different theological traditions. There are the so-called historic churches as well as the older and newer independent churches. The theological presuppositions they all start out from in their views of government are very different. For some, government may be viewed more positively, but for others, more negatively. Older views of governmental authority and its power that go back to the Lutheran and Reformed theological traditions and influence many of our churches even today may neither be disregarded on the one hand nor overestimated on the other. They should be a firm point of reference for our ethical thinking as we find in these traditions mature theological reflection which is based on the positive and negative experiences of several centuries.

Luther's distinction between two dominions is certainly the most important and, throughout the centuries

¹⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Trillhaas, *Ethik* 3rd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1970), pp. 410-420, whom I have mostly followed in this section.

until today, the most discussed example. Even when today these traditions can be maintained only with certain reservations, they still contain theological concerns that can hardly be ignored. On the other hand, one cannot overlook the fact that the Reformers and their descendants had no clearly defined doctrine of government and that their convictions in many ways presuppose a *societas christiana* that is no longer a given. Our modern democratic state has become a secular state which stands over against the churches, either in a well-meaning, indifferent, or a somewhat forced position of tolerance.

Moreover, the modern problem of government can be no longer adequately understood within the traditional relationships of authorities and those subject to them. Obedience to the governing authority is no longer the dominant problem of today's citizen, but rather it is a question of responsibility (or joint responsibility) for the success of public life on different levels. Today's political systems demand not so much obedience, as cooperation, deliberate effort, and raising of awareness. For the older doctrine of government authority, political order is a matter of preservation of power, resisting destructive forces opposed to it; the democratic view of the state takes a different view.¹⁷

The problems caused by a lack of hermeneutical reflection about the transfer of the principles of Lutheran theology were evident, for example, in Germany in the conflict between the so-called 'German Christians' and the

'Confessing Church'. If one holds fast only to the basic tenets of the traditional dogmas about submission to the governing authorities, they may, in my opinion, be understood as *regulative principles*, and they should then be useful to us in our task. For they say nothing about the form of government, the constitution, and rights. They accommodate to monarchies just as well as they do to democracies.

Another model that has had much influence in the Protestant world is the understanding of Karl Barth. The civil community (state) is seen as analogous to the Christian community. Both have a common origin and centre. The civil community is, on the one hand, outside the church, yet not outside the rule of Jesus Christ and is, therefore, also within the realm of his Kingdom. In accordance with this, Barth develops directly from Christian views and creedal statements foundational political statements.

Even this view, which gained worldwide importance in the twentieth century, cannot simply be accepted without reservation or critical inquiry in the context of today's Protestant ethics. Can one really just place our modern government into the Kingdom of Christ without any reservations? Can one just unveil basic tenets of the faith and translate them into political sanctions of dominant systems? 'Can one forget that the government is the world and its theological meaning must be directed toward the darkness and ambiguities of this worldliness that is closed and against the revelation of God in Christ in this age?'¹⁸

17 Trillhaas, *Ethik*, pp. 425-432.

18 Trillhaas, *Ethik*, p. 432.

For an evangelical view, these observations mean that however much we might like to describe the state as 'Christian', we cannot claim to be designing a *constructive* doctrine of government. Our theology of government and the state, which will look different even within the WEA, will probably have only a *regulative meaning and function*.¹⁹

a) There is no direct 'Ten Commandments' in favour of government. The Bible cannot be understood as 'a political or economic program'. However, this does not mean that we do not find anything in it about the topic of government.²⁰ The state is the domain of the unseen Creator who rules over all the world, that is, Jesus Christ as the mediator of creation. What government means theologically, it means for all people, not just for Christians. The 'worldliness' of the state has thus an indispensable theological significance.

This does not mean that we as Christians simply allow it to proceed according to its 'own autonomous laws'. To speak of the state as 'worldly' means that we cannot see how God, the Creator and Lord of the world, uses the government of the state. The state, according to Christian understanding, is the 'worldly' state.²¹ This means that the state and its order belong to areas that should be shaped by human cultural work and cooperation.

To this extent, the so-called 'cul-

tural mandate of God' (Gen. 1:26-28) also affects the organization of states. God gives this into the hands of humans so that they may deal with it responsibly. In this way, God involves people in this task as his servants. To this extent it is also a part of their cultural task that governments secure peace and order among members of their countries, shaping positive laws, regulating economic life according to law, equally protecting all citizens, distributing the social burdens equally among all members and groups, providing help for the socially weak; they should also take responsibility for the protection and care of religion, morality, education, art, science, and technology.

b) Protestant ethics should take careful notice of the different dimensions of the *modern* state—that is, the territory that belongs to it; every government claims sovereignty; every state lays claim to moral character within the scope of law, so that there always exists a certain idea of what is morally good; each state needs power to be able to enforce what is right (although this power is not to be confused with violence. It is more a moral power which has to do with the influence of the state); every state has a government that exercises power in the state, represents the state, and bears responsibility for it.

c) For Christians, the state is the area of God's dominion as Creator who keeps us in his providential care in a way hidden to us and leads us to his goal and his judgement as Judge. If one speaks of the reign of Jesus Christ in this context, then this must be understood as a part of the mediative Creator role of Jesus Christ; likewise, it must

19 Trillhaas, *Ethik*, p. 433.

20 Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 32.

21 Trillhaas, *Ethik*, p. 434.

be understood in the sense of hidden activity in the world. In this 'worldliness' lies also the self-limitation of the state with respect to religion. Because this is so, every state and constitution that arises ultimately exists in the twilight between justice and injustice, and good and evil. This is true also in every respect of today's democracies and of all forms of government without exception. There is no state in our world whose origin and history is free from shadowy parts—theologically speaking, from the reality of sin. For evangelical ethics, this means that we should not just consider how the ruling system came to power, but how this power is used.

d) It is a basic tenet of faith in God's providence that he works to sustain the world in order even through the laws of government. The gospel is preached to people who live under all different kinds of government. This means that no preference can be given to one special form of government over against another. This can be seen clearly in Jesus' attitude and that of Paul and the other apostles (cf. Rom. 13:1-7).

This does not mean, however, that Christians should not give constructive criticism to the state or that they cannot work towards another form of government where they have fundamental problems and problems of conscience with a certain given order. More than this, this statement means that one must understand very seriously that the Kingdom of God does not come any closer to us when a change of government occurs and a new government order is introduced. Even when many of the desired improvements occur with a change of government, no new

order is free from the power of evil. In the same way it is also true that any new government does not fall away from the sustaining activity of God.²²

In a mysterious way, God's sustaining and providential activity includes all forms of government throughout the whole history of human sin. The Christian doctrine of sin and also Christian eschatology which reminds us that this world in its present form is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31), helped early Christianity and can also help us every today to maintain constantly a healthy scepticism regarding a basic improvement of the world order before

²² We have noticed this in very specific ways in Latin America in the conflict over liberation theology. In many ways, liberation theologians in the 70s and 80s appealed to Christian action in establishing a new socialistic economic system with the statement that this system would be closer to the Kingdom of God than the current capitalistic economic system, which was criticized as 'sinful and unjust'. While we in Brazil must also agree in many respects with this criticism of the capitalistic economic system, it proved to be an illusion that the transfer of power to the workers' party [PT—Partido dos Trabalhadores] by current president Lula would bring about a qualitative and noticeable improvement. Some improvements have certainly occurred, but in a short time there have been a series of corruption scandals that have involved key individuals of the current government again and again. These political experiences have contributed to a greater sobriety and to a healthy scepticism towards everything political in Brazil. The same could be observed in many ways within the scope of the fall of Communist eastern Europe after 1989.

the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.²³ This should lead us neither to a cosmological and anthropological pessimism nor hinder our political involvement, but, rather, contribute to the necessary biblical realism of our political involvement.

At any rate, there are, in my opinion, very few biblical-theological reasons for an anthropological and cosmological optimism in the sense of a naive or a well-thought out belief in progress. In any possible form of government, we will recognize how this world in its present form is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). All of these limitations that, in my view, need to be considered from an evangelical political ethic, should lead us as Christians not to passive scepticism, but to active responsibility.

e) In view of the power of the state, our emphasis on the theological ethical aspects mean that, on the one hand, governments should be maintained, but on the other hand, we should be aware of their limits. In many ways, science and philosophy are superior to government. In transcendental matters, religion has the final word. The human conscience judges in many ways without taking external authorities into consideration. Strictly speaking, the authority of the state, therefore, has to do with the order of public life in a certain area. It is responsible for the order of the whole—a situation which includes all people. The more totalitarian the state is, the more

anonymous its authority becomes, as authority is based on the diverse networks of relationships within the state and between states.

3. The Relationship of the Christian Church to Politics

The relationship of the Christian church to politics is characterized today in many countries by repression and polarization. Political decisions and political conflicts today are theologized in theologically and ethically questionable ways so that one can speak of a *religionizing of political issues*. In many countries the topic of 'the political responsibility of the church' is already on the agenda. When I think of Latin America or of Germany, for example, the question of the political responsibility of the church is often articulated in criticism of the government. Often churches become controversial platforms for political opposition outside of parliaments. Politically involved representatives of Christian churches struggle for political influence. Christians argue among themselves with theological arguments about political and social decisions about which there can be opposing positions without any connection to the church. Spiritual authority is misused all too often for political purposes.

The pressure under which the Christian church finds it necessary to express itself either critically or in agreement with political-social matters in every age has, in many ways, led to the situation where the church has lost insight into her own task. On the other hand, there are certainly also countries in which Protestant Chris-

²³ In this context, one must also discuss our views of the question of a 'millennium reign of Christ' upon the earth (cf. Rev. 20), which could even be very controversial within the WEA.

tians—for ethnocentric-patriotic, ideological or even ‘justifiably Christian’ reasons—stand fundamentally behind the political decisions of their government.²⁴

On the one hand, in the Christian view the state may neither be viewed as a separate, independent entity, nor may it be viewed as something that has its own autonomous power or is a self-enclosed entity. Government is a part of God’s ordering activity in the world and is therefore from God just as much as it also stands under God’s sovereignty. On the other hand, the task of the church is defined by the witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed. That church and politics become so often a topic of conflict in many countries has its cause, therefore, in the fact of the proclamation of Christ. The Kingdom of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36), and because, in fact, the Christian church is about repentance and election, faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, understanding and hardening of hearts, church and politics go separate ways when the gospel is preached. ‘For not everyone has faith’ (2 Thess. 3:2).

The political involvement of Christians is motivated by *love* (Rom. 13:8–10). This means that Christians live in this world, help in shaping it politically on all possible levels, and yet know that they do not have permanent residence here on this earth and that their

citizenship is in heaven (Philp. 3:20f; Heb. 13:14; 2 Pet 3:12f).²⁵ Seen from this view, even evangelical political ethics must have as its starting point the position that *all political involvement must be relativized eschatologically* and must be viewed from the perspective of Pauline eschatology (1 Cor. 7:29–31). Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s distinction between the *last* and the *next to last things* aptly describes this idea. The same is true for the Reformers’ distinction between the Kingdom of God *on the right* and *on the left* (Luther), despite all of the attempts to reinterpret or misinterpret this. The Christian church stands critically, therefore, against any ‘Christianizing’ of political parties, systems, or individuals and sees in this the seeds of idolatry (cf. 1 Sam. 8:9; 1 Kgs. 21, and particularly 20:25f).

In its stance towards the state, the church has the following functions, according to Mígues Bonino:

a) inspiration or education: ‘The religions are the realms of socialization and making individuals aware of life values.’ Their task is to work on ‘a maximal morality’, which can base itself upon the minimal consensus of society;

b) a critical function that one can also call a ‘prophetic function’;

c) the defence of the neglected and marginalized groups of society, or the ‘option for the poor’ in the biblical sense;

24 An example for this seems to be the U.S. For more information on ethnocentrism, cf. Lindy Scott, ‘Materialism and Ethnocentric Patriotism: Twin idolatries’ in Padilla and Scott, *Terrorism and the war in Iraq*, pp. 107–150.

25 Cf. Reinhard Slenczka, ‘Kirche und Politik’ in Reinhard Slenczka, *Neues und Altes. Ausgewählte Aufsätze, Vorträge und Gutachten*. Ed. by Albrecht I. Herzog., Vol. 1. (Neudettersau: Freimund-Verlag, 1999), pp. 389–395.

d) when laws are unjust, it has the moral duty to denounce these in the proper fashion and try to change or abolish them through the given public and legal avenues. Direct civil disobedience (cf. Acts 4:19) should be practised only as the *ultima ratio*, when all other attempts have failed.²⁶

The greatest temptation of the Christian church and of politically involved Christians today lies in taking their eyes off their essential character and their mission and confusing them with political or ideological objectives. This temptation can, in some situations, be seen in different forms, for example:

a) *The temptation to place or functionalize political power in the service of the Christian church.* This is talking about the use of political power to gain privileges, special conditions, or to do good things for the church.

b) *The illusion that we believers are above corruption,* that is, the illusion that we are less susceptible to all kinds of political sins or corruption. This would show disregard for the Christian understanding of sin;

c) *the temptation to believe that honesty and good intentions alone will bring about a successful political life.*²⁷

Nikolaj Berdjaev (1874-1948), a Russian philosopher who went from Marxism to Christianity, describes the political temptation of the church of Jesus Christ in the following way: "The spirit of the bourgeoisie then gains the upper hand among Christians when the

earthly city is confused with the celestial and when Christians no longer experience themselves as pilgrims in the world."²⁸

4. Concerning the Goals of Political Involvement by Christians

With respect to the goals of political activism of Christians, the most important points are mentioned in many ways again by very different writers. Among ourselves, there may be a broad consensus about these goals and how they may be implemented in particular cases, depending on the context and the country.

The following general goals of political action can be mentioned here by way of example, although many of them are linked: Social justice; the preservation of all forms of life and the concern for the protection of creation; the enforcement of human rights; the dignity and the welfare of all people, including the material, cultural, and political conditions that lend themselves to human development; political and religious freedom, order in society; peace, cooperation between different groups of society and nations.

These goals are the common property of different worldviews and they are accordingly fulfilled in different ways. They sum up the common concerns of both Christians and non-Christians, and so constitute an arena where Christians can cooperate with non-

²⁶ Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, pp. 45-48.

²⁷ Cf. Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, pp. 14-15.

²⁸ Nikolaj A. Berdjaev, *Carstvo Bozje i carstvo kesarja* (Putj 1, 1925), p. 52, quoted by Slenczka, 'Kirche und Politik', p. 397.

Christians in certain situations in their political involvement. However, one necessary—and critical—aspect of these concepts, using Bonino's idea of 'maximal meaning', is the necessity for a foundation of interpretative principles based on biblical theology, which would then distinguish them from other worldviews.

The Christian doctrines of creation, sin, Christology, and eschatology will then form the most important theological framework of this critical usage. The historical background of these concepts must always be considered, not just in the West. From the standpoint of biblical theology, these concepts must, in addition, be understood more in the sense of dynamic relational concepts than static principles in the strict sense of the word. In this, how the poor are treated can be seen as a measuring rod of a just understanding of societal relationships and goals.²⁹

IV Concluding Remarks

The ideas given above serve first to stimulate us in reflecting critically on these matters. They lead us to many questions and present many problems to us. They also show a complete way toward reaching a global evangelical consensus in political ethics. Yet, above all, they encourage us to discuss and invite us to pursue theologically consistent political action. I believe that if we Christians from all continents leave political polarizations behind us and set out to have an honest dialogue with one another in which we treat our political options as well as the strengths and weaknesses of our governments in a humble and sober manner, then consensus may in fact be possible. May God grant us the grace we need and the favourable time!

²⁹ Bonino, *Poder del evangelio y poder político*, p. 29.

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Religion and Politics in Ancient Israel and Modern India: Issues and Inter-Actions

Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

KEYWORDS: *Monarchy, prophets, Egypt, Canaan, syncretism, restoration, Diaspora, justice, temple, nationalism, Aryans, Brahmins, colonialism*

SCHOLARS ARE PAYING more attention to the interaction between religion and politics in different historical periods and seeking to relate the lessons learnt to the contemporary situation and to shape the history of the nations. One of the main reasons for this recent trend is the growing religious fundamentalism and violence in different parts of the world. Some religious leaders try to impose on their contemporary societies the conditions and requirements of their scriptures or traditions which were written or developed in a particular historical and cultural context and so try to religionize the politics. In India, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and *Vishwa Hindu Parishad*

(VHP) try to promote their fundamentalism through the ideology of *Hindutva* and their own understanding of nationalism.

Such leaders want the politics, economy and culture of their nations to be like those of the historical and cultural milieu in which their scriptures were written. It could be a reaction against modernization and globalization which influence their societies and threaten certain long cherished superstitions, beliefs and practices. In the struggle of the Cultural Revolution, countries such as Iran and Afghanistan were dominated by Ayatolla Khomeini and Taliban leaders respectively. On the other hand, during the political revolution in countries such as Russia, Cuba and China, religions were controlled by the political leaders. The politics of many nations are controlled by religious fundamentalists. Economic policies depend on the religious lead-

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ers who often control the governments of these nations. International relations also are based on religious trends in different parts of the world.

We notice a tension between the movement to take countries back to the situation of the scriptural period and the desire to move forward with a new interpretation of the scripture and accepting modernization in order to make progress. Can religion and politics play appropriate roles without trying to dominate or control one another? Can they complement each other, and contribute to the welfare and progress of society?

In this paper I am trying to apply the method of political reading to the history of ancient Israel to highlight the interaction of religion and politics. The main resource for the study of the history of ancient Israel is the written documents in the Old Testament. I will attempt to point out the important issues relating to the study of the interaction of religion and politics in the history of Israel, covering the period from Abraham through to the birth of Jesus during the rule of the Roman Empire. During this long historical context, the religion of Israel encountered the political powers within and outside the country.

I Interaction of Religion and Politics in Different Historical Periods

The three major divisions in the history of ancient Israel are the Pre-Exilic period (which includes the period of ancestors, bondage in Egypt and liberation, settlement in the land of Canaan and monarchy), the Exilic Period in

Babylon and the Post-Exilic period of return and restoration of the land. The books of Esther and Daniel tell us of the persecution of Israelites by the Persian and Greek rulers at a later part of the post-exilic period.

1. Ancestors and the Canaanites

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ancestors of Israel received promises and instructions from Yahweh. Their faith began to take shape as they received the divine revelation and started worshipping Yahweh. Their worship was simple. They used stones to make altars and sacrificed animals. The entire extended family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob took part in the worship and enjoyed sacrificial meals together. Worship strengthened their sociological relationship. The covenant established between the ancestors and Yahweh strengthened their religious relationship and enabled them to identify themselves as a community of Yahweh. This new community which began as a religious community of people believing and worshipping Yahweh had the prospect of becoming a political nation. The three elements essential for a political nation, 'land or geographical territory', 'people' and 'becoming great', are imbedded in the promises to Abraham and confirmed by the making of covenants (Gen. 12:1-3; 15; 17) between Yahweh and Abraham.¹

Interaction with other ethnic groups which used the city-state political sys-

¹ Theotonius Gomes, 'Biblical View of Religion and Politics', *Journal of Dharma* (Bangalore: Dharma Research Association), Jan-March, 2000, pp. 251-253.

tem occurred only when the ancestors of Israel and the people of Canaan had to settle a dispute over a well of water (Gen. 21:22-31; 26:19-31) or in times of exchanging sheep and hide for food or purchasing a piece of land from the Canaanites (Gen. 23: 3-18). Settling the disputes over the well of water involved making a covenant. Although the covenant made between Abimelech and Abraham and later between Abimelech and Isaac was not strictly for a political purpose, it was an important example of interaction between a local king and tribal leaders in the interests of peaceful co-existence. The military action of Abraham against the kings who came against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted in liberating not only Lot and his family but also the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14).

Abraham's action in fighting against those invading kings and liberating the captives was a fulfilment of his responsibility towards his kith and kin (14:14). But it brought freedom to the kings and people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was not willing to take advantage of the victory and keep the spoil of war to himself. Nor did he accept what was offered by the kings of Sodom and Salem as a reward for liberating their people (vv. 22-24). In his interaction with these kings, Abraham showed that his action was not for profit or making himself rich, but with humanitarian motives without expecting any reward. What sort of religious interaction went on between the ancestors and the Canaanites is not clear. The Canaanites did not interfere in the faith and worship of the ancestors.

2. Egyptian politics and the faith of Israel

The religion of Israel and the political power of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, came into conflict when the descendants of Jacob were oppressed in bondage. We can list the political, social and economic reasons for the oppressive policies of the Egyptian government. Pharaoh and his officials regarded the Israelites as a political threat. As they had multiplied in Egypt, they could come to power and rule the country. Egyptians did not like the idea of immigrants ruling over them. Another suspicion was that the Israelites could join with the enemies of Egypt and fight against them in a time of war. Doubts about their political loyalty to Pharaoh during such an emergency became a reason to oppress them. Socially, the Israelites were looked down upon because they followed a pastoral occupation. They were also racially different from the Egyptians.

From the point of religion and culture, Israelites followed a different faith, one that was exercised by their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were not willing to compromise their faith with the religion of Egypt by worshipping the Sun God Re or Memphis, or to mix with them in marriage. Economically, if the Israelites could be turned into bonded slaves, they would provide cheap labour for Egypt in the building of cities and store houses. All these factors led the Egyptians to adopt the policy of oppression.

The Israelites were not only denied freedom to continue their pastoral occupation, but were also denied the supply of raw materials like straw and

clay to make bricks. They had to find their own material and yet make the number of bricks fixed by the Egyptian authorities. They experienced the cruelty and exploitation of the Egyptians, and there was no one to raise a voice against this injustice. Any uprising of the Israelites against the Egyptians was met with an iron fisted reaction.

So the Israelites cried to the God of their ancestors to remember the promise and covenant and liberate them from bondage. Exodus 2:23-24 narrates their suffering in terms of crying, groaning and longing. This is an important text for Liberation Theology. We have to understand, as Walter Brueggemann says, that their outcries were not an expression of retreat and internalizing their fate but an expression of their struggle for justice.² Liberation of the poor and marginalized can begin only when they express their rejection of injustice and begin the struggle for freedom.

Exodus 2:24 tells us that God was not silent and inactive. God's initiative ignited the interaction between the politics of Pharaoh and the religion of the people of Israel. The verbs used in this text make it clear that God saw their plight, understood their pain and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Some questions come to our mind: Why did God allow this oppression? Why was God silent for so many years? The answer is that the oppression was not created by God. God is against injustice and exploita-

tion. God has given us the freedom and responsibility to respect others and protect their rights. God wants the people to oppose any form of violence and injustice. A few people carry out oppression for their own gain. God waits and gives enough time for them to repent (cf. Jonah 3-4) and render justice to the victims.

Changing the lives of the oppressors is more important for God than punishing them. Repentance is better but it is difficult on the part of the oppressors. Once this expectation becomes a failure, God intervenes for the sake of the victims and brings the oppressors to justice. Meanwhile God wants the victims to raise their voice against the injustice done to them and calls on other well-wishers to express their solidarity with the victims in working for the justice. This struggle and experience in the liberation of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt became a lesson for them not to oppress anyone in and outside their community and to work for the protection of human rights (Ex. 22:21-24; 23:9).

The encounter between religion and politics began to deepen when God sent Moses to Pharaoh through a vision of the 'burning bush', a call to serve him and a mission to rescue his people.³ One of the key factors in the religious faith of Israel is that Yahweh does not approve of slavery and bondage of human beings. The Israelites wanted to live with freedom in the land promised to their ancestors.

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 21-23.

³ J.B. Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry: Models of Ministry and Training* (Bangalore: TBT, 2002), pp. 91-94.

But Pharaoh used his political power and authority to resist their faith and ideology and suppressed them more. So the plagues followed (Ex. 3-12). These are regarded as miracles done by God.

We need to raise the question of the purpose of the plagues. The aim is not merely to show God's power or threaten Pharaoh. Hard-hearted people cannot be blackmailed or threatened to change their ways by doing miracles in their sight. These plagues could be looked at as economic sanctions against Egypt. There was no United Nations organization to impose economic sanctions against Egypt because of their oppressive policies. God had to use nature to put pressure on Pharaoh's government. Water got polluted. Agriculture suffered. Egyptians were affected and faced calamities, which worked out like economic sanctions against them. We cannot interpret all calamities as God's punishment or sanctions, particularly when the innocent poor and powerless suffer. What happened to the Egyptians is a particular case of sanctions against their injustice for a long period. This kind of pressure could persuade the Egyptians to do justice to the Israelites.

They yielded finally when they lost their first-born sons and animals. Should God have killed the eldest of the families and animals of the Egyptians to liberate the Israelites? This question is valid. The final plague was clearly targeted against the first born of the family and was not a random measure. For, according to primogeniture system, the first born of the families were the ruling class in Egyptian society, and this ruling class was

responsible for the oppression and exploitation. Whether they sat in the royal court of Pharaoh or in a village *panchayat* (court under the tree), they failed miserably to speak out against injustice or to work for the freedom and welfare of the Israelites living in the midst of them. They were accountable in the sight of God and had to face the verdict at the court of God.

God does not take pleasure in the suffering of the people or in punishing the culprits. But God has to maintain his stand against injustice, punish the oppressors and vindicate the victims. Otherwise God cannot be the God of justice and righteousness and can be easily rejected by the suffering people. The liberation of the bonded slaves from Egypt is an important experience, showing how God took the side of the poor and powerless. Religion should challenge political power whenever politics is misused to oppress people, curtail their freedom and violate human rights.

3. Politics of occupation and practice of religion

The journey from Egypt to Canaan was not easy. The worship of the Israelites started taking shape during the wandering in the wilderness. Their faith in Yahweh as the God of liberation played a significant role in the occupation of the land of Canaan.

a) The usual understanding is that the Israelites fought against the Canaanites, drove them out of their land and settled in it. This method, termed the 'Conquest model', is supported by texts in the Book of Joshua (e.g., chapters.6, 8, 10-12). A second theory, the 'Immigration Model',

speaks of the Israelites moving into the areas where there was no opposition or resistance.⁴ A third theory suggested by some scholars is the 'Revolt model' or 'Peasants' struggle'.⁵ This theory, which links the faith of Israel with the political system of Canaan, is also an answer to the question raised by the readers of the account of the settlement. Can the righteous God of Israel take the land of the Canaanites and give it to the people of Israel by instigating violence and battle?

According to the scholars who follow this theory, Yahweh is still the God of justice and righteousness. The entire land belongs to God and God can allow the Israelites who were landless to share the land of Canaan. The violence took place because the landlords and the rulers of the Canaanite cities did not allow the Israelites to settle down in the land. The attack was not targeted against the innocent peasants of Canaan but against the rulers. The ordinary peasants of Canaan were suffering under the rule of these landlords and kings. They were longing for freedom and to have the land for themselves.

When these poor Canaanite peasants came in contact with the liberated Israelites, the theology of liberation of the Israelites encouraged the peasants to struggle for freedom and gain their rights. So they joined with the Israelites and drove the landlords and rulers of Canaan. Their joint struggle was against the rich rulers and not

against the ordinary Canaanite families. They believed that God takes the side of the struggling peasants and the landless Israelites and supports the revolt. For they understood that the God who liberated them from the political power of Pharaoh could liberate the poor peasants of Canaan from their rulers and enable all the landless to share the land. The faith of Israel had encountered the political power of the rulers and landlords of Canaan in settling on the land.

b) Encounters between the religion of the Israelites and of the Canaanites became unavoidable because the two groups were living side by side. Their new environment compelled them to move into the occupation of agriculture in addition to continuing their pastoral work. The people of Israel depended on the Canaanites to learn about the agricultural seasons, nature of the soil and seed, the skill of ploughing, sowing and harvesting and even preserving the food grains. Canaanite agriculture was connected with their worship of Baal and the fertility cult. Canaanites believed that they should sacrifice animals, human beings, bring offerings and worship Baal to get rain and abundance of fruits and practise cult prostitution as a symbol of increasing fertility. They believed that Baal, the male god married to the goddess Ashtoreth, brought blessings to their agriculture and family. Baal and Ashtoreth were nature deities. The Canaanites worshipped the creation and practised superstitions and rituals.

The Israelites were warned not to accept their religion and worship Baal and practise human sacrifice and immorality. But the Canaanites taught them their religion which is so closely

4 John Bright, *History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), pp. 126-139.

5 N.K. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* (New York: Orbis, 1979), pp. 191-220.

connected with agriculture. Israelites started worshipping trees and plants and offering sacrifices and practising cult prostitution. They tried to keep both Yahweh and Baal in their lives and practise syncretism. This violation of law and covenant brought the indignation of Yahweh who allowed the Midianites and Philistines to attack and subdue the Israelites (Judg. 2:12-15; 3:12; 6:1-2; 13:1). The interaction between the religion of Israel and Canaanites, according to the narrative in the Book of Joshua, affected the political history of the Israelites. They had to become subservient to the Midianites and Philistines in their own land and serve these foreign nations for a number of years. But their repentance brought them freedom through the leadership of judges. This phenomenon of the close integration of religion and political destiny can be seen throughout their history.⁶

4. Monarchy, state and religion

One of the main reasons for the rise of the monarchy was the constant attacks of the neighbouring nations, such as the Philistines, Midianites, Edomites and Syrians, on the tribes of Israel. The system of tribal confederation and the leadership of the judges could not provide a permanent and stable administration. The political and security threat compelled the tribes of Israel to approach Samuel and ask for a king as in neighbouring nations (1 Sam. 8:1-9).

a) Religion played a major role in selecting the political leader. First, God had to reveal the person who was

to be the king of Israel. It was God's choice and not the choice of some individuals or priests. The choice is revealed to the prophet. Second, the prophet confirmed the choice of God to the people and asked the priests to conduct the worship and pour oil on the head of the selected person and consecrate him as king over Israel. Third, all the people assembled in the worship accepted the person of God's choice as their king and shouted 'Hail the King'. Kingship was not hereditary in Israel. It needed the approval of God, the prophet, priest and the public. No man could agitate to become the leader of the nation by bribe or by military coup. This principle of linking religion in the process of selection can be seen in the cases of Saul, David and Solomon (1 Sam. 8-10, 16, 1 Kgs. 1), but it was ignored later. We notice, therefore, the appearance of coups and resultant confusion in relation to the monarchy.

b) In Israel, kings were not authoritative leaders or superior figures. They were called as servants and representatives of God to the people. They had to carry out what God wanted in their administration and leadership. They had to practise only the values and principles of God and not follow their own interests. They were to protect the nation, provide justice and welfare and promote the worship of Yahweh. But many kings violated these principles and proved themselves irresponsible and therefore they were pronounced failures. The religion of Yahweh represented by the institution of priests and prophets supported the kings as long as the kings were fulfilling the expectation of Yahweh. Quite often, these religious representatives had encounters with the political authorities, crit-

⁶ Read 1 Sam. 8-2 Kings 25.

icizing their unjust policies and actions. For example, Nathan criticized David for his injustice to Uriah the Hittite and proclaimed God's punishment (2 Sam. 12: 1-19). Elijah's condemnation of the killing of Naboth and taking his vineyard is another example of the way the atrocities of Ahab and Jezebel were challenged (1 Kgs. 21).

The eighth century prophets, Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah, raised their voice against unjust policies and actions of kings and judges and demanded justice and welfare to prevail (Amos 2:6-16; 5:24; Hosea 6:6; 9:9; Micah 2:1-5; 3:1-4; Isa.1:17; 3:12-15). They criticized the injustice done to individuals, community and other nations (Amos 1: 2-15). From the reaction of kings such as Ahab, Jeroboam and others (1 Kgs. 18-19), it is clear that the message had reached them. The state took action against the prophets. The prophets who represented religion had to endure persecution or humiliation. The state and religion clashed and some priests (e.g., Amaziah in Amos 7) joined the state machinery, but others stood with the prophets.

c) Interaction between kings and prophets continued to occur, either positively or negatively, during the division and fall of the monarchy. Sometimes the prophets supported and encouraged the kings to face the critical period in their history. For example, Shemaiah the prophet advised Rehoboam not to make war against the tribes which followed Jeroboam and made him as their king. By proclaiming God's words to Rehoboam and guiding him, the prophet avoided a civil war between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and the rest of the tribes of Israel

in the north (1 Kgs. 12:20-24). Another prophet supported the plan of military action against Ben-Hadad who came to attack Israel (1 Kgs. 20:13-20). Elisha encouraged Jehoash, the king of Israel to attack and destroy the Arameans (2 Kgs. 13:14-25). Isaiah supported Hezekiah during the attack of Sennacherib and encouraged him to trust Yahweh for miraculous deliverance from the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 19:5-7).

At other times, they opposed the policies of the kings and called on them to face the consequences. For example, a prophet from Judah condemned Jeroboam for placing golden calves at Bethel and Dan, leading the Israelite to worship them and preventing them from going to Jerusalem for worship (1 Kgs. 13:1-5). Elijah condemned Ahab and Jezebel for promoting the worship of Baal in Israel and proclaimed God's judgement on them (1 Kgs. 18). The event at Mount Carmel is significant not only for religious reform but also for showing how risky it was to oppose political authorities. Hanani, the seer, criticized Asa, the king of Judah for relying on the support of the king of Aram rather than on Yahweh. For this criticism, Hanani was put in prison by Asa (2 Chron. 16:7-10). Hilkiah, the high priest brought religious reform through Josiah, the king of Judah (2 Kgs. 22:8-23). These incidents show that prophets and priests representing Yahweh took an active role in the politics of their time.

5. Political crisis, prophets and exile

As a result of the strong Babylonian attack on Judah from 600 BC to 587 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed. Many

families were deported to Babylon; in exile, they lost their freedom and hope of returning to their land. The southern kingdom went through a political crisis for a number of years. The monarchy in Israel came to an end in 587 BC. During the critical period before and after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah played an important role interacting with the kings of Judah. Officials at the court, priests and the community were deported to Babylon and the remnant were left in Judah. Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles and advised them not to rebel against Babylon but to settle down, prosper and seek the welfare of Babylon because the exile was not going to end soon (Jer. 29:4-7). He advised Zedekiah the king to surrender to Babylon rather than to fight and lose the battle (Jer. 38:14-28).

The remnant left in Judah started migrating to Egypt to avoid the attacks of the Babylonians and sought the advice of Jeremiah. He advised them not to go to Egypt but to remain in Judah and survive. However, the leaders of the remnant rejected his prophecy and went to Egypt (Jer. 42:1-22). Jeremiah predicted the disaster coming upon Babylon. He wrote this message of judgment on Babylon and sent the letter through Seraiah to be read in the land of Babylon and then to be thrown into the Euphrates. So, he said, would Babylon sink to rise no more (Jer. 51:60-64). To play the role of a religious leader and guide the rulers and community in the period of political crisis is not easy. Jeremiah was misunderstood, persecuted and punished. His interaction contributed to major political decisions.

Ezekiel, another prophet of the exile, was known for his visions of God

and for the prophecies about the fate of the people which he proclaimed. Unlike Jeremiah, he did not interact with political leaders and the people—except once when he advised the elders of Israel who came to consult him about the future of the nation. Ezekiel proclaimed God's decision that the punishment on Israel would continue for some more years (Ezek. 20:1-44). Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah might not have had personal interaction with political leaders and authorities of Babylon but their prophecies encouraged and strengthened the faith of the people of Israel in exile. They proclaimed that Yahweh, the God of Israel is powerful and would bring the Israelites to their land again from the captivity in Babylon (Ezek. 40-48; Isa. 40:1-5; 43:1-13; 49:8-18).

6. Governors, prophets and restoration

As the prophets predicted, the people of Israel were able to return from exile. It is believed that some officials and influential people of the Jewish community who lived in Babylon could have played an important role in convincing Cyrus, the Persian king, to enact the Edict in 537 BC. This law enabled the Jews to return to their land, reconstruct the temple and reorganize their society. The rise of good leaders among the Jewish community such as Sheshbazzar (538 BC), Zerubbabel (520 BC), Ezra (458 BC) and Nehemiah (445-430 BC) gave confidence to the people to return in different groups under their leadership and restore the land. However, politically, they were not able to re-establish the monarchy or govern themselves, but

instead, they had to live under the governors appointed by the Persian kings. Tattenai, the governor of the province of Judah was not in favour of the Jewish people restoring the temple and the wall. He objected to the effort of Zerubbabel and the Jewish community (Ezra 3-5).

This encounter between the political authority of Tattenai, the governor, Rehum, the commanding officer, Shimshai, the secretary on the one side and Zerubbabel, priests and people of Israel on the other side, could have resulted in the murder of Zerubbabel (cf. Isa 52-53).⁷ But Nehemiah's interaction with Artaxerxes, the Persian king convinced the king to send Nehemiah himself as the governor of Judah, granting him the authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8). The confrontation of Tobia and Sanballat with Nehemiah did not stop the work of rebuilding the wall or reorganizing the post-exilic community (Neh. 2:9-10; 4:1-5; 6:1-9,11-12). The confrontation between the political and religious institutions became unavoidable in restoring the land.

In restoring the land and community, the prophets of the post-exilic period, such as Haggai and Zechariah, supported the effort of Zerubbabel and encouraged the people to co-operate with their leaders (Ezra 5:1-2). Not only strengthening the infra-structure such as the temple and wall of Jerusalem and its administration but also reforming their religion and society became important. Ezra and

Nehemiah worked closely with the people to bring changes in society and to set a new direction as they continued as the community of Yahweh (Ezra 7:25; 9:1-4; Neh. 5:1-3; 13:1-31). The visions and proclamations of Ezekiel and Trito-Isaiah for a renewed and restructured society provided motivation for the restoration to continue. The tremendous achievements and progress in the post-exilic period after a long period of desolation and hopelessness is evidence of healthy interaction and co-operation between the leaders of religion, politics and community.

7. Political persecution and survival of Jews in Diaspora

The word 'Diaspora' means scattered, and it is used in connection with the Jewish people being scattered in different countries such as Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, Babylon and Persia. They went to these countries over the years due to famine, war, business or religious and political persecution. The interaction of Esther with the Persian king to save the Jews settled in Persia deserves mentioning here because it was a political action.⁸ The plot against her was based on the religious and cultural issue but initiated by the political authority of Haman (Esth. 3:8-9). As a member of the royal family, Esther was expected to support the policies of the king and the court. But she took the side of the Jewish community which was the target of genocide, and encountered the king after careful preparation, liberating the Jews from

⁷ John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1987), Vol. 25, pp. 222-229 and Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry*, pp. 38-41.

⁸ Jeyaraj, *Christian Ministry*, pp. 130-132.

the wicked plan of Haman. The book of Esther is not just a story of the Jews but a story of a woman activist for a humanitarian cause.

After the death of Alexander, Greek rulers were hostile towards the Jews living under their rule. Antiochus Epiphanus IV persecuted the Jews in Palestine and compelled them to accept Greek culture, philosophies and forms of worship. He went to the extreme of sacrificing pigs in the temple in Jerusalem to desecrate the temple and provoke the Jews. He placed the statue of Greek emperors in the temple and asked the Jews to follow the worship of the emperor. The Book of Daniel (Ch. 7) describes this person as the beast pitted against the Israelites. The reaction of the religious leader Matathias, the High Priest and his sons, called the Maccabees, against the political and religious persecution of Antiochus ended in the military attack in 161 BC. The Maccabees won the battle, cleansed the temple and rededicated it. A new Jewish state was born in Palestine under the rule of Matathias and the Hasmonean family.

II Issues in the Interaction of Religion and Politics

A few key issues are identified in the interaction between religion and politics in the history of ancient Israel and highlighted below. Repetition of information is unavoidable here

1. Human rights and justice

a) Religion played a vital role in establishing justice and the rights of the people. This issue is elaborated in the struggle against Pharaoh and the lib-

eration of the bonded Israelites. The liberated community of Israel was warned repeatedly not to oppress others, particularly the Canaanites when they occupied their land (Ex.23:9; Dt. 15:12-18). In this case Yahwehism stood in support of the Canaanites although the Canaanites were following a different faith and worshipping the nature deities of Baal and Astharoth. When the Egyptians were oppressed later by the Assyrians, Yahweh took the side of the Egyptians and, through the prophet Isaiah, condemned the injustice done to them (Isa. 19:19-23). Another event is the struggle of Esther in protecting the lives of Jews living in Persia from genocide.

The principle in the religion of Israel is that God takes the side of the oppressed and opposes the exploiters. That the God of Israel wants justice for all, irrespective of their faith, race and culture can be seen in the Old Testament. As the creator of all human beings, the God of Israel wants the rights of all the people, particularly the minorities and marginalized such as the poor, widows, children and aliens to be protected. That every one on this earth is eligible for justice, peace, welfare and dignity is the theology of their religion. This theology led the priests and prophets to confront the political leaders at different periods and challenge them on their violation of justice and human rights. The priests and prophets struggled to modify the religious and political laws to improve the welfare of their society.

b) Another aspect to this issue of justice and human rights is the influence of the religion of Canaan. The faith of the Israelites had to confront the wrong values of Baalism which pro-

moted the worship of nature, belief in magic, sorcery and omens, fertility and procreation through sacrificing human beings and practising cult prostitution. Some of the kings in Israel who followed Baalism promoted these values in the society. Their goal was to gain prosperity and military security by any means.

Some of the kings made political compromises by marrying the daughters of neighbouring nations and encouraging religious syncretism. They ignored the traditions of their religion and adopted the values of nearby nations. They did not care about the influence of such practices on the question of justice and rights. They went to the extreme of persecuting the prophets who raised their voice against this practice and demanded that justice should prevail (Amos 2; 7; 1 Kgs. 17-21; Isa. 1:16-17; 5:8, 20-23; Jer. 3:1-5; 10:1-10). In this encounter we notice the issue of the surrounding religions as well as the challenge of their own political leaders. Religious interaction with another religion and with the politics of a nation is necessary to establish justice and strengthen the rights of human beings.

2. Temple and worship

a) During the period of ancestors, worship was simple. The ark of the covenant and tent of the meeting became the centre of Israelite worship during the exodus and settlement in Canaan. The temple built at Shiloh to accommodate the ark of the covenant replaced the tent. However, the ark of the covenant was not accommodated permanently in one centre but was taken to different locations in their

tribal territories. During the settlement period, there was no idea of one cultic centre for the Israelites.

The notion of one permanent cultic centre was developed during the monarchy. Jerusalem was selected first to be the political capital of David's kingdom. Although it was called the city of David (2 Sam. 5:6-10), it did not get much recognition, possibly because it was in Jebusite territory. Another factor is that the place where the ark of the covenant was lodged was regarded as the important centre in Israel. The people of Israel believed the presence of Yahweh was focused in that place. It united the tribes of Israel because people went there to offer prayers, sacrifices and celebrate the festivals.

The problem then was how to gain recognition for Jerusalem, the new political centre, from all the tribes of Israel. David, the political leader, used religion to make Jerusalem an important centre by transferring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. The biblical account (2 Sam. 6; 1 Chr. 13) does not state this motive as the reason for transferring the ark to Jerusalem. But John Bright believes it could have been, and so he writes, 'It was David's aim to make Jerusalem the religious as well as the political capital of the realm. Through the Ark he sought to link the newly created state to Israel's ancient order as its legitimate successor, and to advertise the state as the patron and protector of the sacral institutions of the past.'⁹ His tactic of religionizing politics by bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and planning to

⁹ Bright, *History of Israel*, p. 196.

construct the temple in the political capital could have contributed to the justification and consolidation of his rule. By using religion, politicians consolidate their position and power and achieve political gains.

b) After religionizing his political centre, David went on to politicize the new religious centre by appointing his own men as the priests. Abiathar who helped David was asked to move to the capital and become the official priest of the cult in Jerusalem (1 Sam. 14:3; 22:20; 2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Kgs. 2:26). A simplistic reading of the text indicates that David was grateful to Abiathar and his family and appreciated his concern for the progress of religion. But David's use of Abiathar in this way could be seen as a hidden agenda for controlling the cult as well as using it to strengthen his rule. As John Bright says, 'David established both Ark and priesthood in the official national shrine. It was a masterstroke. It must have done more to bind the feelings of the tribes to Jerusalem than we can possibly imagine.'¹⁰

Solomon similarly politicized religion by sending away the family of Abiathar (which supported Adonijah becoming the king) and appointing Zadok as the key priest in the capital (1 Kgs. 2:26-27; 36). Jeroboam followed the same principle by appointing Amaziah as the chief priest at Bethel and using him to suppress any religious voice raised against the king or to quell any riot which might topple his government (Amos 7: 10-13). These priests either appointed or supported by the politicians had to function as

their agents (cf. Hilkiah in 2 Kgs. 22; Pashhur in Jer. 20). They might have been pleased with the encouragement of the kings towards their profession and efforts and financial support in promoting the religion in the country. Unlike the prophets, how much freedom these priests had to question the politics of the kings is not clear.

c) The priests and kings, representing the religious and political institutions respectively, join together to promote the temple ideology, that is, the temple at Jerusalem as the only official cultic centre recognized by the government and God. But the prophets, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah who looked at the process of politicizing the religion and religionizing the politics through temple ideology, criticized the vested interest of the politicians and priests (Amos 5:4-5, 21-24; Isa. 19:18-25; Jer. 7:1-12). They enlightened the public about the actions of the politicians and priests by informing them on the meaning of true worship, pointing out the destruction of cultic centres and proclaiming that Yahweh required justice and not rituals and false pietism.

Jesus, standing in the prophetic tradition, pointed out that neither Jerusalem nor any other temple is important. People should worship God who is present everywhere with true spirits and minds. It is clear from the OT that giving undue importance to one place as the authentic worshipping centre is unacceptable (cf. Jn. 4). The prophetic voice clearly interacting with politics and religion is needed even today.

3. International relations

Israel was surrounded by the

¹⁰ Bright, *History of Israel*, p. 196.

Philistines, Midianites, Edomites, Moabites and Amorites, and was controlled by political powers such as Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece in different periods of their history. So she had to relate to these nations on political and economic levels. Israel's attitude to other nations itself is a vast and complex subject. This issue needs a separate study. What I am trying to point out here is that the interaction of politics and religion touches the international relations and policies of a nation. How far the matter of policies and relations with neighbouring nations was developed during the period of Judges is not clear. Proper international relations could have developed from the period of David. Three key issues in international relations are war against the attacking nations and gaining security, maintaining peace and trade, and marriage with men and women of other nations. These issues were based not only on the political administration of the day, but also on their religion.

a) During the monarchical period, political and military powers were vested with the kings but religious authority remained with the priests and prophets. Saul could not go to war without the blessing of Samuel (1Sam. 13).¹¹ Religion controlled the power of the kings, otherwise kings would have become the most powerful persons having political, military and religious authority vested in them. Before going to war to defend themselves, the kings

waited for the word of Yahweh either through a seer or prophet or by the use of *Urim* and *Thummim* by the priests and the offering of the sacrifices. Kings could not call for war and mobilize the people whenever they wanted to attack another nation or gain territorial expansion.

In times of attack by other nations and crises of security, prophets played a role in proclaiming God's word to the kings and people, gave guidance and interceded for the nation (1 Kgs. 12:20-24; 20:13-20; 2 Kgs. 13:14-25; 19:5-7; Isa. 7:1-17). Prophets also condemned the actions of kings when they violated the procedure and justice of other nations (Amos 1:3-2:3; Isa. 19:18-25; Jer. 51:24-49).

b) Negotiations for peace and trade with other nations initiated by the political administration were encouraged by the prophets. David established a good relationship with Tyre. Hiram, the king of Tyre sent cedar logs and labourers to build the palace of David (2 Sam. 5:11). Solomon also had a good relationship with the king of Tyre and with the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs. 10:10). He received cedar and labourers from Tyre in exchange for food, materials (1 Kings 4:20-21,25; 5:8-11; 9:26-28), gold and other things from Sheba. Solomon received large sums of tribute money from neighbouring countries (1 Kgs. 4:20-21). The peaceful situation promoted overseas trade and economy (1 Kgs. 9:26-28). When the Israelites became exiles in another country, the prophets encouraged them not to rebel but to seek the welfare of the nation where they lived as captives. The Jews were asked to seek the peace, continue their business wherever they are scattered and make

11 J. B. Jeyaraj 'Religion and State' in *Biblical Insights on Inter-Faith Dialogue* (ed. I. Selvanayagam; Bangalore: BTE/SSC, 1995), pp. 143-145.

progress (Jer. 27-29).

c) Religious leaders condemned the policy of marrying men and women of other nations whether they are kings, priests or people. This attitude was not based on racial discrimination or cultural differences but was aimed at avoiding religious syncretism in their faith and life (1 Kgs. 11:1-13; Ezra 9). The history of Israel shows the success and failures of their international relations. However, the principles cherished in relating with other nations were peace with neighbours, security and economic progress.

4. Nationalism

a) When Israel become a nation is a debatable question. The answer depends upon the definition of 'nation'.¹² Abraham and his extended family could be regarded as a nation in the sense of an ethnic group governing themselves. Similarly a tribe as an ethnic group could be regarded as a nation. The twelve tribes of Israel occupying the land and governing themselves under the leadership of elders and judges could be regarded as a nation. David's kingship having a political capital, royal court with different officials of administration and a standing military gives the idea of nation in the political sense rather than ethnic sense.

Three components are important in being a nation: people, land and gov-

ernment. Nationhood could be strengthened further if a standing army is added to these components and international relationships are promoted. Since the nationhood of Israel is a gradual development, their understanding of nationalism is also a developing process. Different definitions for the word 'nationalism' are suggested—political nationalism, religious nationalism, majoritarian nationalism and cultural nationalism. I notice three kinds of nationalism in the history of Israel and call them for convenience sake as *Theological Nationalism*, *Political Nationalism* and *Cultural Nationalism*.

b) Theological nationalism and cultural nationalism have their roots in religion. But there is a difference. Theological nationalism is 'religion-as-faith' and cultural nationalism is 'religion-as-ideology'. Theological nationalism was dominant during the period of ancestors, Egyptian bondage and the settlement period. It was based on the belief that they were elected and covenanted by Yahweh to exist as Yahweh's community with an experience of liberation and to function as a paradigm community in the land given by Yahweh. Their leader, administrator and king is Yahweh himself. He moves with his community wherever they go and live. Yahweh is not bound by one place. He is on pilgrimage with his pilgrim community. They are stewards of Yahweh. They need not be a political nation like the nations around them. On the other hand, they should continue as a community realizing and implementing the liberating impulses of their exodus-covenant theology.

The theological nationalism of Yahweh's community, worshipping and

¹² The Hebrew Word *goy* is used to refer to people as nation in the ethnic and political sense. Refer to *TDOT*, 1988, vol. 2, pp. 426-433. A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan, 2000), p.xxx.

fulfilling the commandments prevailed not only in the earlier period but was subverted to a certain extent during the monarchical period. However, prophets tried to revive the exodus-covenant theology during the period of division, decline of the monarchy, loss of land, temple, military and governance by themselves (Hos. 3:16-20; 11:1-4; 12:13; Micah 7:15; Isa. 40:1-5; 41:1-10; 42:6; 51:9-11; Jer. 11:10; 14:22; 22:9). Although, theological nationalism continued in the post-exilic period, it was constantly encountered by the idea of political nationalism in which the monarchy existed from the dynasty of David. Messianic prophecies were used to bring political nationalism again in Israel.

c) Political nationalism is based more on having a king, royal court, structured government, standing army, territory under the control of the king, people as subjects, trade within and outside, collection of taxes and economic policies. This idea of political nationalism was dominant in the period of monarchy. Kings in Israel who cherished political nationalism attempted to overthrow any foreign domination and to expand their territory by war and trade. They made political and military negotiations with other nations.

d) It is my assumption that the problems of monarchy such as constant violation of justice and human rights, promotion of syncretism, adopting the customs and culture of other nations, neglecting the official cult of Yahweh and its centre in Jerusalem and the decline of the economy provided an opportunity for the growth of cultural nationalism which emphasized the philosophy of 'One People, One God, One

Land and One Cultic place'. This philosophy is seen in sections of Deuteronomy (7:6; 12:5-7).

This ideology could have been developed from the exodus-covenant theology and used as a reaction against the growing problems in their religion and society. Ezekiel's vision in chapters 40-44 promoted cultural nationalism by re-establishing the temple in Jerusalem, and restoring the priesthood and rituals to the state they were in during the monarchy. The Book of Chronicles too emphasized the centrality of the temple in Jerusalem more than the exodus-covenant theology.¹³

Trying to create cultural nationalism by over-emphasizing the aspect of the election of Israel or Jerusalem or the promise of the land or the covenant of Yahweh and thrusting it upon people of other race, religion and culture who lived together in the land would be oppressive. It could have brought disaster in society as well as violating the true spirit of Yahwehism. People of other races, faiths and culture continued to live in the midst of Israelites. The Israelites could not expel them from their land but instead forced them to conform with the new Israelite culture (Judg. 1).

On the one hand, we notice an emphasis on 'One God, One People, One Land and One Temple'. On the other hand, some prophets criticized the atrocities of political nationalism and the fallacy of cultural nationalism. Amos reinterpreted the tradition of

13 Scaria Kuthirakkattel, 'Fundamentalism: Biblical Perspective', *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religions Studies* (Pune: Jnana Deepa Vidyapeethi), Vol. 6, 2, (July 2003), pp. 37-38.

election for punishment. He criticized the rituals and sacrifices, and predicted the destruction of cultic centres. He ranked the Cushites, Philistines and the Arameans as equal to Israel (3:2; 5:5-6, 21-27; 9:7). Hosea demanded justice, mercy and true knowledge of God rather than sacrifices. Jeremiah criticized the false temple theology of the people and predicted the destruction of Jerusalem (7: 1-12) and announced a new covenant (31:31-33).

Some of them emphasized election and covenant less or even ignored or reinterpreted them to emphasize the responsibility of being an elected community with responsibilities towards others. They tried to uphold theological nationalism although they did not deny the monarchy. Whenever political or cultural nationalism tried to dominate, the nation of Israel faced the loss of monarchy, land, political governance and cultic centre. The nation was reminded of their theological nationalism which accepted and protected the people of other faiths, race and culture. Theological nationalism which provided an understanding themselves as the community of Yahweh for service to others was a challenge to the political or cultural nationalism of Israel.

III Modern India: Issues and Inter-actions

From a methodological point of view, shifting from ancient Israel to modern India needs detailed explanation. However, my interest is to point out briefly that the interaction between religion and politics has been going on for a

long period in India, particularly with reference to the modern period. This calls for a special study comparing and contrasting the interactions in the history of these two nations.

1. India has a long history of interaction between religion and politics. The history of India can be classified broadly into three major periods: pre-colonial, the colonial period of the British Empire and the post-colonial period. It is not easy to discuss each period in detail except to highlight certain interactions and issues particularly with reference to the modern period of India.

With the arrival of Aryans and the growth of Hinduism in the ancient period, the Brahmins, particularly the priests ministering to the gods and goddesses, had a close relationship with the kings and local rulers. They performed the rituals for the temples, consecrated the kings and played an important role in giving advice to the royal families and the court. Some of them acted as messengers during war time, negotiating peace between the parties. In turn, the kings and rulers gave land, gifts and status to the priests. Both the rulers and priests worked together. During the Islamic rule of more than 1000 years, Islam was made the official religion and Hindus were encouraged rather than forced to embrace Islam. The values of Islam penetrated politics, society and culture. Tension also mounted in different parts of India between Islamic rulers and local communities.

2. Interaction began to reach different levels during the British colonial period. On the one side, the British rulers and the western missionaries interacted on two or three issues viz.

conversion of Indians to Christianity, secular education and supporting the independence struggle of Indians.¹⁴ Some of the British rulers and missionaries got along well in promoting Christianity and secular education. The Anglicists believed that the Hindu culture needed to be challenged. The way reforms could be introduced was to convert Hindus to Christianity and to offer western education. To a certain extent, this resulted in some reforms in society.

However, this policy was criticized by the leaders of Hinduism and the Orientalists.¹⁵ Some of the Hindus could not differentiate between the attitudes and policies of the British rulers and those of the missionaries. The established opinion was that British colonialism was for Christianizing India. So some of the social work of the missionaries to transform the society were opposed since reform was misunderstood as the tool for converting Hindus.

Regarding the participation of the missionaries in the independence struggle movements of *satyagraha* (non-violent protest) organized by the Quit India movement, the British rulers restricted the missionaries and

pastors and instructed them not to support the independence struggle or to identify with the leaders of the National Movement.¹⁶ The missionaries were expected to do only their religious duties and not to enter into political matters which were contrary to the policy of the British colonial rulers.

On the other side, the interaction between the British rulers and the religious leaders of Hinduism and Islam was based on the intention of securing political freedom and building India. Those leaders who supported the idea of an independent India as a secular and democratic state did not bring their religion into the politics. However, on the basis of the teachings of V.D. Savarkar and Golwalker, the RSS wanted independent India to be a Hindu nation and promoted the ideology of Hindutva.¹⁷

This tension between religious fundamentalism and political governance on the basis of secularism resulted in the clash between Hindus and others in different parts of India. It posed a problem for national integration and the aim of uniting a fragmented India under one banner. Ever since the beginning of the period of indepen-

14 Antony Copley, *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) and J.C. Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India: Issues in Protestant Missionary Education in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000) discuss these issues in detail.

15 Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*, (New Delhi: Rupa Co., 2004) quotes the responses of M.K. Gandhi, adding his criticism based on the documents of the British rulers and Orientalists.

16 D. Arthur Jeyakumar, 'Christians and the National Movement in India: 1885-1947' in *Nationalism and Hindutva: A Christian Response* (Ed. Mark T.B. Laing, Delhi: ISPCK/UBS, 2005), pp. 91-102.

17 John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India*, (New Delhi: OUP, 2002) and Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) discuss the history and development of Hindutva ideology and Hindu nationalism.

dence, the tension between Hindu fundamentalism and the secular polity of India has been growing.

3. Scholars have differences of opinion about the modern period of India. Some believe that the modern period began with Nehru as the Prime Minister of independent India. Others argue that Nehru laid the foundation for the growth of industrial and technological progress with the political polity of democratic socialism. Some others think that the real modern period of India began with Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister who initiated the policy of liberalization and Dr. Man Mohan Singh, the then Finance Minister laying the foundation for globalization and Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

This modern period of India started witnessing economic progress, growth in foreign currency reserve and FDI as well as the growth of religious fundamentalism and clash of civilizations. As a reaction to modernity, RSS emphasized the ideology of Hindutva and Hindu cultural nationalism. They want society and politics to be governed on the basis of Hindutva and to establish the Ramraj having Ayodhya as its political capital as narrated in the *Ramayana*, and to have a religious centre with Ram temple. The leaders of RSS are willing to allow the rest of the minority communities to live in India as secondary citizens under the ideology of Hindutva.

To make it a political reality, RSS started supporting the BJP in the last election, resulting in a BJP victory so that it ruled the nation. RSS exerted so much pressure on the BJP government to revise the Constitution, bring an anti-conversion bill on an all India

basis and change the curriculum to include their interpretation of Hinduism, history and culture. The RSS cadre demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on the 6th December, 1992 and went on to construct the Ram temple in its place claiming that place as the birth place of Rama.

The issue of constructing the Ram temple in Ayodhya became their election mandate and an important agenda to be carried out during the rule of BJP. The main reasons for constructing the Ram temple in Ayodhya are to give historical evidence for the myth of Rama and to unify the Hindus around the temple, in the same way as Jews have Jerusalem, Christians have Rome and Muslims have their Mecca as a focal point for unity. Constructing the Ram temple is not merely a religious issue. The *Hindutva* ideology can be strengthened only by historicizing the myth of Rama and theologizing the Ram temple in Ayodhya as the realization of the Kingdom of Rama.

Integrating religion and politics in the issue of Ram temple indicates to Hindus that India is under the rule of Rama and Hindu ideals and culture would be promoted under this rule. Secular forces in India and the other religious communities resisted these efforts of making India a Hindu nation. Some of the issues emerged in religionizing politics during the BJP period were nationalism, freedom of worship and conversion to another religion, pluralism and national integration.

4. Conservative Christians in India insisted on freedom of worship and conversion. In addition to freedom, ecumenical leaders insisted on the importance of pluralism, dialogue and redefining nationalism and raised their

voice for national integration.¹⁸ A significant development which occurred as a result of the problems created by the BJP rule was that even those Christian pastors and evangelists who separated their faith and politics, started discussing their role in shaping the politics. Extensive discussions went on in local churches of many denominations (including fundamentalists) regarding support for political parties in the next election. Christian Minority Forum in local regions took a stand to support the secular forces and cast their votes in favour of the Congress and their allies as UPA in the election three years ago.

There has been an awakening among Christians about political trends in the country and increasing interest about their role in the election for the State Assembly and Central Parliament. I see this awakening and growing interest in using their faith in shaping the politics as a new beginning towards socio-political transformation. However, Christianity, particularly evangelical Christianity, has a long

way to go to integrate its faith for transforming the electoral system, critical co-operation with political parties, playing the prophetic role for justice and challenging the policies of the government.

IV Concluding Remarks

Interaction between religion and politics in a society is unavoidable. Each of these institutions should challenge the other and contribute to the welfare and progress of society. The norm or the basis for their interaction is not merely the Scriptures or Vedas which could be interpreted to promote fundamentalism or liberalism or even to destroy nature and humans. The scriptures of the various religions can be one of the guiding principles along with the values drawn from humanism, secularism, economics, sociology, science, and so on.¹⁹ Both religion and politics should have the perspective of how God would want the interaction to be. The divine values such as love, sharing, justice, equality, welfare and peace should become the foundation of the inter-action whatever the political system of the state.

18 J.M Athyal, 'The Return of the Sacred: An Indian Christian Perspective on Religion and Politics' (pp. 145-161), Kirsteen Kim, 'Indian Christian Theological Responses to Political Hinduism' (pp. 162-176) and L. Stanislaus, 'A Christian Response to Hindutva' (pp. 177-203) in *Nationalism and Hindutva* (ed. Mark Laing, Delhi: ISPCK/UBS, 2005).

19 J.B. Jeyaraj, 'Inter-Faith Relations for Transformation and Higher Education' in *Inter-Faith Relations and Higher Education* (ed. M. Valliammal, Delhi: LDC/ISPCK, 2007), pp. 1-30 and also in *Asia Pacific Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 2,1, (Jan 2006), pp. 65-86.

Providence and Power Structures in Mission and Development Initiatives from the West to the Rest: a Critique of Current Practice

Jim Harries

KEYWORDS: *Donors, recipients, feedback, accountability, providence, dialogue, development, language, mission, payment, capitalism.*

HEALTHY TENSIONS in power relationships that are a normal part of western businesses, schools and churches help to render these institutions effective. But what of the institutions of 'mission' and 'development intervention' from the 'West to the rest'? Rooted historically in the biblical command to go to all nations with the gospel (as found in Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8 and elsewhere) the latter can be said to be founded on a providential basis. Such a providential foundation for operations unfortunately leaves recipients with little effective authority for counterbalancing or critiquing the way in which they are carried out. While advocated

in the Bible for the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the much wider application of such providentially based principles between the West and the rest today may not be wise.

This author suggests that power relations that include effective mechanisms for feedback from recipients to donors are vital in order to achieve successful aid / development programmes. Until these are put into place the current system of doing development by foreigners is on dodgy ground. (The motivation found in western societies today for engaging in development activities in distant parts of the 'poor' world is here assumed originally to be Christian. As in the activity of sharing the gospel, the continuation of development interventions is not dependent on their success, but arises from a perceived spiritual/heart-felt imperative.)

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I Foundational Assumptions

In the arguments made in this essay I assume a linguistic incompatibility between the West and the non-West. The fact that one language (such as English) is used in international debate does not mean that people from vastly different cultural backgrounds such as African as against European can engage in intelligent dialogue, because the implicatures underlying African people's uses of words are as different from the European ones as are the cultures.

I also question the commonly assumed nature of 'dialogue'. Considering discourse as dialogue ignores the role played by 'third parties'. These could be ancestral spirits, witches or gods eavesdropping on conversations, or the concern that conversants in a 'dialogue' have as to how their words will be reported to others. That dialogues are actually polylogues with unknown participants is, I suggest, often insufficiently considered. ('Speakers must take all their recipients into account to some degree [and this]... can lead to apparently contradictory utterances' shares Kerbrat-Orecchioni.

Given these factors, western people relying on Africans to tell them about the impact of their interventionist strategies is as bad as African people's relying on Europeans to guide their country's development. For development to be effective, I suggest in this essay (as also elsewhere), it needs to come from the 'inside'.

I use the terms 'missionary' and 'development worker' largely interchangeably in this essay because of an apparent merging of roles in recent

years. Rational and materially based means towards the promotion of material human well-being have usurped much of mission's traditional evangelistic and proselytizing role. That is, more and more 'missionaries' and mission agencies are these days involved in and concerned for 'development activities', broadly defined, rather than primarily in gospel-transmission. (This is sometimes known as integral mission or holistic mission.)

Many of today's charitable institutions, such as Oxfam, the UN, the World Bank, ODA etc. operate on an apparently secular foundation. This is surprising to some African people, who understand God as being the source of good and the motivation for people to be compassionate in this world.¹ How can some western people be denying the relevance and action of God in their lives, yet continue to be motivated to be charitable, they ask? One likely reason (to me the most plausible) is related to 'the ghost of dead religious beliefs'.² That is, the West continues to be driven by its Christian heritage even in cases (such as in today's 'secular' European Community) when Christianity is officially repudiated.

We can take an example of how this has arisen from anthropological accounts of non-western peoples, particularly those practising primal religions ('animism'). Many researchers tell us that primal religionists are

¹ Personal observation based on many conversations about God and godliness with African people.

² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Translated by Talcott Parsons) (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), p. 182.

chiefly concerned for the wellbeing of fellow clan members or blood relatives. My own research into the history of the Luo people of Western Kenya indicates the same. So, for example, the theft of cattle is not traditionally considered by the Luo a crime if it is from those people outside of one's kinship network or clan.³ It is biblical and Christian teaching, I suggest, that has given many western peoples a global view of the world and a heartfelt desire for the wellbeing of otherwise unknown human beings with whom they have no blood relationship.

It is important to remember that the biblical command for love to non-relatives, exemplified by well known (in evangelical circles) passages such as John 3:16 and Matthew 28:19, originated in pre-modern society. Therefore the good news that it was commanding should be shared with people from all lands was primarily of a providential nature. That is, it was good news of what God has done and can do, and not good news of what man can do without God's help. I suggest that today's secular western society has retained the moral imperative of being concerned for all of mankind around the globe, while rejecting its original divine workings.

This accepting of a principle while denying its source and the details of its original association is what I am suggesting has put current mission and development practices onto an uncertain foundation. Does a moral imperative for Christians to spread the Christian gospel extend to the same impera-

tive for the spreading of western wealth, technology and civilisation? If it does, we can still ask whether the same methodology is necessarily appropriate for both, or whether the means for spreading the good news of material wellbeing ought to be different from those of spreading the gospel of Jesus?

I suggest that they need to be different, and that this is for at least one important reason: while the gospel is held by faith and spread by the use of words without creating dependency on either foreign thought-forms, rationality or technology, the same cannot be said for so-called 'development'. A basic fault with recent practice in the area of so-called 'development intervention' is that it is inappropriately modelled on a Christian foundation, while the broader features of Christian practice are ignored. Development, and that part of Christian-mission that go beyond the biblical foundation of 'vulnerable mission' (in which the carrier of the message is not loaded with material and financial advantage), has still to find a model for intervention that can render it truly effective.

Such a model needs to be politically and not merely providentially astute. That is, we should not rely on God to intervene to ensure that development thinking and technology takes root, just because he inspires people to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words the model needs to overcome the tendency to create situations whereby it is in the interests of receiving communities to accept the material that is being advanced, without necessarily understanding or implementing those parts of the original plan that are a pre-requisite for the long-term sus-

3 Paul Mboya, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (Kisumu: Anyange Press, 1983), p. 12.

tainability of the intervention concerned on rational grounds.

Consulting the literature, one finds numerous anecdotal accounts of failure in interventions into the Third World. That is, numerous incidents in which projects supposedly designed for some long-term self-sustaining strategy, are used for short-term material gain.⁴ This is sometimes called mis-appropriation of funds, corruption, 'eating' (East African English) or even theft. The very frequency of this occurrence, however, suggests that this negative perspective on such practices is not shared by many of the recipients of outside funds.

II The Running of Institutions in the West

Western institutions usually operate in the West with (at least) two kinds of political players—those in charge, and those under them. The tension arising from the interaction between these two groups, if well handled, results in effective performance of the task at hand. For example, college principals do not expect automatic and total acquiescence on the part of students. Rather, a good Principal (US English—President) will optimize acquiescence. Too little is called indiscipline. Too much prescribes innovation, initiative, imagination and with it contentment, satisfaction and, we could say, normal types of healthy social interaction. The same applies to the director of a company, president of a country, parents of chil-

dren, consultant in a hospital or even pastor of a church. While the details in types and limits of authority vary widely, it is always true that authority exercised within appropriate limits results in a healthy tension between leaders and followers whereas excessive or insufficient authority will result in problems.

An effective institution will have mechanisms for dealing with authority that is exercised in excess of or below acceptable limits. These mechanisms include: strikes, complaints procedures, verbal persuasion, incentives and reward structures, regulatory bodies, reprimands, the press, and regulations such as on the freedom of speech, rights of appeal, and so on. At the very basic level these include: a common language and culture between leaders and followers, mutual appreciation of the objectives of the institution concerned, commitment to a common aim, patience and perseverance, an ability to persist in the face of adversity and so on.

Having described these very familiar authority structures, I want to go on to consider Christian mission and Christian or secular development activities from 'the West to the rest' in the same respect. That is, given that western societies are very careful to pay close attention to mechanisms such as the above in their key institutions 'at home', I want to consider how they are handled in respect to foreign mission(s). How do western-originated institutions ensure an appropriate equilibrium in authority relationships in promoting mission and development?

Authority structures clearly vary between types of institution. Mission is inseparable from the church. The

⁴ This is explained well by David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters: observations from Africa* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001).

authority structures of churches can be very different from those of other institutions. Some would argue that church structures need to be the starting point in considering mission. Characteristics of church authority structures appear to include that a church is (these days) a voluntary organisation. Most of the people contributing to the work of a church are laity. People function in the church on the basis of love. The church provides a context for serving and obeying God, hence theology is a key part of it. The motivation of both clergy and laity is assumed to be other than financial or material, and have much to do with spirituality, eternity and, of course, God.

Few Christians would question that mission work should be integral to the church. For some, mission defines the church, and it is a missions oriented church that is a 'renewed' church. ('Contemporary theology needs renewal by mission studies,' says Walls.⁵) The prevalence of the word 'mission' indicates that it also has its own distinct identity: i.e. 'mission' is not a synonym for church. The existence of this distinction means that there must be some kind of power-relationship between church and mission.

It may be important to consider this relationship. On which side can the 'authority' figures be found? Who follows whom? How do the various leaders enforce their authority? What mechanisms exist for ensuring that

authority is exercised appropriately? What happens when contraventions occur that would result in indiscipline or in too great a control of the church by mission, or mission by the church?

I am going to focus my attention on foreign mission as carried out by the western church. Mission from the West is often considered to be bedevilled by paternalism (including mission studies itself according to Walls).⁶ What are appropriate authority roles for these mission-sending institutions, whether they be professional agencies, committees put in place by churches, the missionaries themselves or any combination of the above? What mechanisms are in place to ensure that an appropriate equilibrium is maintained for good relationship and effective performance in the various tasks engaged in by the two sides—mission and target community? Who holds the authority, pulls the strings and sets the pace, and who are the 'followers'? With what other institution can the relationship between western missions and the people they are reaching be compared?

The initiative in mission from the West has been and is in the West. Hence mission consists of the western church's efforts at reaching the rest of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, or motivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Non-Western churches are also engaged in their own mission efforts. These are not my concern in this essay.) The mission enterprise is in this respect unlike a college (the example considered above), but more like a business. This is because

5 Andrew Walls, 'Structural Problems in Mission Studies' in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15:4 October 1991 (electronic edition), pp. 146-155.

6 Walls, 'Structural Problems in Mission Studies'.

whereas in schools teachers work to meet expressed needs of parents to provide education for their children under the direction of government, in business the initiative is taken by a businessman to meet the needs of people for other reasons.

A missionary will take the initiative to meet the needs of people. But a missionary will not intend to make a material profit from the people, and the needs that a missionary will seek to meet are not only material or temporal but also spiritual and eternal. As a businessman will often attempt to make people aware of needs so as subsequently to satisfy them, a missionary may endeavour to make people aware of needs (for salvation, a relationship with God, an infilling of the Spirit of God etc.) of which the people may have been unaware, before enlightening them on how to fulfil those needs. The accountability of a businessman to his customers occurs via the market and people's satisfaction with the product they receive. Government activity assists the market process by providing watchdogs to counter the setting up of monopolies, standards regulations and a facility for the customer to take legal action should a product not meet specifications. But, what are the measures that make missionaries (development workers) accountable to the people they are reaching?

We have already mentioned that a gospel-missionary's prime motivation in making a 'product' available is 'out of this world'.⁷ Because customers do

not pay western missionaries for their service, there are no market mechanisms in place to ensure quality either of the product or its delivery. When payment by customers is not required to ensure the continuation of the mission exercise, then the market cannot be relied upon to ensure product-quality. The same applies to many aid or development workers today who are funded from the West.

In terms of the valuation of its product, mission more closely resembles schools than businesses. Hence mission is about making 'disciples', a term that is close in meaning to 'students' (*mathātōs* in the Greek New Testament). Schools are forced to use examinations and assignments to evaluate their output. What then of missions? People evaluating the performance of certain missionary activity, typically the donors supporting the activity concerned, are forced to use types of 'examination'. Because the missionary (or development worker) is operating in a culture and context with which the donors themselves are largely unfamiliar, qualitative measures are generally ineffective (for example, the donor does not know the language of the recipients), so quantitative alternatives must be employed. These include

of a person to come to faith in Christ with all that this entails for the benefit of this world as well as the next. Yet promoting the gospel in the interest of this-worldly gain easily results in the prosperity gospel. And because the gospel is considered to be ultimate truth, a missionary will share it even in circumstances in which its worldly-helpfulness is beyond human comprehension. This applies also, I have argued above, to the development worker.

⁷ This is only partially true. A Christian missionary assumes the Bible and the church to be God ordained and for it to be in the interests

measures of the number of people converted, number of churches planted, attendance at events, and, less specifically, time spent on the field, languages learned by the missionary, perceived measurable changes in people's ways of life resulting from conversion to Christianity or adoption of a particular practice such as cell churches, and so on.

On the part of development workers the situation is similar, where donors will attempt to measure some quantitatively discernable improvement in 'well-being' of the target population—such as a reduction in the incidence of disease, improvement in longevity or increase in the quantity of food produced. Both these cases differ from the businessman's model because the products that they offer, do not require payment.

The reader may want to point out that payment can be required. For example, a development worker may demand money in exchange for fertiliser, a hospital for medicines, and a Christian missionary for hymnbooks. While this is true, it is not the mission or development part of what they are doing. The whole point of their activities could be described as being 'subsidy'. That is, missionaries can bring Bibles for sale without charging for their transport, hospitals make medicines available cheaply and development workers' delivering fertiliser saves a trip to the store. Whatever charge is made is not a part of the missionary or development work, but a residue of the market system in the context of which the missionary or development worker operates.

The difference between mission as it is done 'from the West to the rest' and

the operations of a church, include the idea that whereas members in the West typically make a nett contribution to their church, members (i.e. people reached by) western missions are often major net recipients of funds from the mission. Whereas the church offers services arising from the contributions of its members, western-missions (as also development agencies) offer services for its members to receive.

Whereas the operations of western churches, schools and businesses are well known and relatively easy to study, the same cannot be said for the receiving-end of intercultural mission or development work. The primary reasons for this include the fact that the recipients are culturally, linguistically and geographically distant from the West. In addition, because they have been made dependent on a supply system that they do not understand or control, the only role that they may be left with is that of doing whatever is in their power to ensure its continuation.

Perhaps a few more examples will illustrate this lack of effective feedback mechanisms. Someone who goes out to a shop (or uses the internet) to purchase a new watch will be likely to return it and complain if it is not working, because not to do so would be to allow the money they have spent to go to waste. But they are much less likely to take action if an unknown foreigner makes a donation of a watch, and then the watch fails to work. They may even thank the foreigner for their gift in appreciation of their good intentions and choose not to say that actually the watch never worked so as not to discourage the foreigner's charitable orientation. This applies to many kinds of gifts and services.

Schools have different kinds of feedback mechanism from this, but are careful to ensure that they do exist. Students themselves can take action in schools, as can parents through all kinds of complaints procedures such as making an appointment with the Principal, choosing to move to another school, speaking to the chairman of the parent-teacher association etc. Church members communicate with their clergy through their elders, by speaking up at committees, through visiting the clergy, or threatening to leave the church.

However, mission and development projects seeking to reach people in the Third World generally have none of these mechanisms. Members of churches in the Third World are often net recipients from their churches because church finances are bolstered by foreign aid. As a result, church leaders are not answerable to their members in the same way that they are in the West. It is difficult to complain or take action about something to which one is not contributing, so malpractice in provision of services through aid tends to continue. Nationals appointed to supervise aid/development projects are closer to the communities of the recipients than those of the donors and so will side with the locals on questions of (mis)appropriation of funds. One doesn't complain if something received is poor quality when it is given without cost.

To try to avoid some of the above difficulties, donors may insist that a proportion of the contributions to a given project or initiative arise locally. They apparently do not realise that there are other donors operating on the same basis, and it is not difficult for local

people to use one donor to make the contribution which the other donor requires to be of 'local origin'. Communities can quickly tire of donors who think that, through having made their contribution, they have acquired the authority to force local people to take certain actions. After all, it is hard to say no to a donor because of the financial spin-offs that arise from almost all projects, or because it is not wise 'to look a gift horse in the mouth', or because head-on confrontation with someone who has clearly expressed what they want to do is widely considered to be disrespectful.⁸

I began this essay by explaining the importance of having healthy interactions between givers and receivers of services and authority. I have looked at three models in the west—church, school and business. I have found that mission (and development) work fall somewhere between these. But I have also found that a major difference between mission and the other three is in the feedback mechanisms that are possible. Schools, businesses and churches in the West can have effective feedback mechanisms, as each provide a service that costs the consumer and/or in the success of which the consumer is closely invested and/or of which the consumer has a relatively close understanding. None of these apply to missionary efforts as practised by the West to the rest today.

⁸ See www.jim-mission.org.uk/index for more articles on related issues.

III Implications for Providence and Political Involvement

It would appear that in institutions such as churches, schools and businesses in the West, Christians (like others) make much use of feedback and regulatory mechanisms to ensure smooth interaction between leaders and followers. But then, why do mission-based activities continue on the basis of 'providence' (i.e. without effective feedback mechanisms)? Is this not a double standard? In my view, this is unjust. It could even be considered racist, as such practices continue only for certain non-western 'races'. It is certainly risky—as it is operating blind. The impact of doing 'mission' and 'development' in this way is, in these days, being seen in the form of much publicised widespread failure,⁹ although the source of this failure is less commonly understood.

Known negative impacts are largely anecdotal. But there are *many* of them, and stories of the disasters created by aid and paternalistic mission are widely known (see above.) I suggest that trusting providence in the implementation of (integral or holistic) mission and development initiatives is not good enough. There is a need for polit-

ical accountability. That is—attention to the power implications of the roles of the parties involved. Only this will enable us to bring about the kinds of interactions that are normal in effective institutions within the West itself.

The New Testament enjoins believers in Jesus Christ to spread the good news to all people. In recent decades (centuries?) the good news of Jesus being confused with the 'good news' of western material prosperity, has resulted in the assumption that this prosperity needs to be spread like the gospel as a matter of providence. But this ignores the very real difference between the two. Spreading the gospel (if well done) because it does not need material investment, results in healthy relationship, interdependence rather than dependence and a boosting of existing local culture and institutions.¹⁰

On the other hand, spreading wealth that happens to be generated through an economic system of questionable biblical legitimacy (capitalism) quickly, and it seems unavoidably, generates dependence, corruption, division, idleness and so on. (Some continue to argue that this is avoidable within the existing system. These people are determined to engage themselves in trying to avoid it while continuing with the development/mission process in the same way. But, given the lack of effective control mechanisms mentioned above, I suggest that these problems are an inherent part of the way mission/development is done these days, and not an unfortunate occasional

⁹ See for example Michael Phillips, 'Unanswered Prayers in Swaziland. U.S. Preacher Sees his Dream Vanish. Mr. Wilkinson hits wall trying to push "orphan village"', *Rodeo Stars Safari Guides. The Wall Street Journal*. Monday December 19 2005. CCXLVI no. 133 pp A1/A8/A12. See also David K. Leonard and Scott Straus, *Africa's Stalled Development: international causes and cures* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: the missionary impact on culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 3-6.

anomaly.) The way the West continues to spread wealth without consideration of the political (i.e. power) dynamics that arise as a result is an inappropriate leaning on 'providence'.

As a result, I suggest that the model of doing-mission (and doing-development) with extensive use of resources from the wealthy West, needs to be reconsidered. What I have clearly identified in this essay is a lack of (or even the absence of) feedback mechanisms in current ways of operating. The causes for the absence of such mechanisms needs serious attention in order to get responsible institutions onto a realistic foundation. The ways to do this include:

a. The use of the language of the people being reached to be used in the design, implementation and evaluation of a project.

b. Having projects that are not dependent on foreign financial or material inputs, so as to avoid the imbalance in power and dependency that this generates.

c. A reduced reliance on 'providence' by the West in activities that they would never consider carrying out through 'providence' in their own contexts.

An alternative to (c) would be to adjust institutions in the West to be more reliant on providence. That is, allowing a greater role for God in western society will assist westerners to understand how institutions operate on the basis of providence, and therefore be more able and informed to honestly operate in the same way in the non-West. That is, for western societies (such as the European Union) to be more overtly theological in their operations.

IV Conclusion

This article has shown that the West is happy to allow the impact of aid through missionary or other engagement with the Third World to be worked out 'providentially', even though equivalent actions by the West to their own people are carefully planned to include feedback mechanisms that ensure effective outcomes in other ways. This double standard—an expectation for God to work amongst foreign peoples that is not there in the West's own context—is unhelpful, if not immoral. It needs to be corrected by attention to the power balance. That is, correcting the current situation in which almost all formal power in integral mission and development efforts, is in the hands of the donating West.

This correction requires a conscious self-depowerment on the part of the West and westerners in these activities. Development and mission is these days guided primarily by western languages, and powered by western money. The way forward that I suggest, is that it be guided by languages local to the point of implementation, and be independent of western funds. This is not to say that westerners should not be involved in mission or development of the 'poor' parts of the world, but that they should operate using local languages, without subsidising their key activities using resources of foreign (western) origin.¹¹

¹¹ For details of proposed conferences and other activities oriented at promoting 'vulnerable mission' as here espoused, see www.vulnerablemission.com.

Christian Responsibility to Reform Society: the Example of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect

John White

KEYWORDS: *Parliament, crime, slavery, politician, prisons, moral change, public opinion, media, abortion*

'AMAZING GRACE!—how sweet the sound—that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.' These famous words of John Newton point to the way that God changed this former slave trader into a Christian and a pastor. And although this man himself was changed, the horrific practice of slavery continued. Yet the Reverend Newton was introduced to a young man who would, based on his Christian conviction and calling, lead the charge to end slavery. This man's name was William Wilberforce. In considering the role that Christians should play in the face of moral atrocities, it is valuable to look at the life of this important man in history.

I The Man and his Times

Wilberforce lived in pre-Victorian England from 1759-1833, and was a member of parliament from 1780-1825. He lived in a time when the upper class of society expressed an outward Christianity but still participated in such practices as duelling and gaming.¹ In factories, children sometimes worked up to eighteen hours per day,² national drunkenness in the 'Gin Age' was rampant,³ and the crime level was extremely high with horrible punishments for even small crimes. For example, pick-pocketing could carry the death penalty.⁴ This was all in addition to the unspeakable cruelty of one race

1 David Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce' in John Woodbridge, editor, *More than Conquerors* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 242-245.

2 Clifford Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2004), p. 76.

3 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 69.

4 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, pp. 81-82.

to another in the form of slavery throughout the British Empire.⁵

Wilberforce was already a member of parliament when in 1786 he converted to Christianity, in what he referred to as his 'great change'.⁶ On the advice of John Newton, he decided to stay in politics, but now realized that he must dedicate his political service to Jesus Christ.⁷ On 28 October 1787, Wilberforce wrote in his diary, 'God almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.'⁸ That year he convinced the king to 'issue a proclamation which would urge magistrates to enforce existing legislation against drunkenness, blasphemy, and similar misdemeanors'.⁹ In this first action, Wilberforce showed that what he meant by 'the reformation of manners' was the need to morally reform society. Over the course of his career, Wilberforce would continually seek to obtain both of these 'two great objects'.

Wilberforce was certainly not the first to speak out against slavery. In the eighteenth century, Quakers had taken a stand against slavery, and thus there was already a base of support for

the anti-slavery movement.¹⁰ But Wilberforce was uniquely positioned to challenge slavery in parliament, being a long-standing friend of William Pitt, the Prime Minister during most of Wilberforce's years in parliament, and being a compelling speaker from the upper class.

II The Motivations of a Christian Politician

First, it is important to consider Wilberforce's motivations. Wilberforce saw that it was his calling to be a Christian politician, and not just a politician who happened to be Christian. He wrote to a constituent in 1789, 'A man who acts from the principles I profess reflects that he is to give an account of his political conduct at the Judgment seat of Christ.'¹¹ This view is clearly reflected in his voting record, in which he often voted against the ruling Tory party of his friend, Prime Minister Pitt. Some thought that Wilberforce would have succeeded Pitt as Prime Minister if he would have voted in line with the Tory Party. Yet, Wilberforce often drew his greatest support against slavery from the opposition party, and so often voted with them against the Tories.¹²

Over the course of his forty years in parliament, there were at least 112 ministers of evangelical faith who voted with Wilberforce, either occasionally or often. There were thirty

5 Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of The Expansion of Christianity*, Volume 4 (1800 A.D. to 1914 A.D.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 158.

6 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 49.

7 Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce', p. 242.

8 Robert Isaac Wilberforce, and Samuel Wilberforce, editors, *The Correspondence of William Wilberforce (Vol. 1)* (London: John Murray, 1838), p. 149.

9 Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce', p. 242.

10 LaTourette, *A History of The Expansion of Christianity*, p. 158.

11 Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce', p. 242.

12 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, pp. 57-58.

ministers that formed his core of support, and they all put their Christian faith above their political party affiliation.¹³ This desire to vote in the name of principle over party surely cost Wilberforce and those who voted with him dearly in terms of political gain. Yet, it is precisely these actions which show the true nature of a *Christian* politician.

Furthermore, Wilberforce himself took personal responsibility for the corporate sin of slavery. Whereas politicians often seek to contrast their proposals of improvement with the evils of the status quo, Wilberforce identified himself with the evils of his time and the people more directly involved in them. Instead of speaking as judge, he spoke as convict, showing the way to open the prison door. For example, Wilberforce said in his speech to parliament for abolition on 12 May 1789,

I mean not to accuse any one, but to take the shame upon myself, in common, indeed, with the whole parliament of Great Britain, for having suffered this horrid trade to be carried on under their authority. We are all guilty—we ought all to plead guilty, and not to exculpate ourselves by throwing the blame on others...¹⁴

He said further that he, 'came not to accuse the Merchants, but to appeal to their feelings and humanity'.¹⁵ This

method of persuasion is clearly a Christian one, recognizing that all human beings are sinners before a holy God. As was the case of Jesus himself, Wilberforce interceded on behalf of his people, willing to identify with even their actions in order to change them. This example of accepting personal responsibility for the moral failings of government is another important characteristic of the Christian politician.

III Doing Research and Reaching Out to All Classes

Next, it is important to consider Wilberforce's methods of seeking moral change. Although he was a gifted orator, Wilberforce did not wish to convince the government to abolish slavery based on rhetoric alone, but based upon the facts. In his speech to Parliament for abolition on 12 May 1789, he said: 'It is not their passions I shall appeal to—I ask only for their cool and impartial reason; and I wish not to take them by surprise, but to deliberate, point by point, upon every part of this question.'¹⁶ Further, Wilberforce claimed that,

It was no party question, and he flattered himself that the voice of reason and truth would be heard. He was resolved to be regulated by temper and coolness, and challenged a fair discussion. It was not a proposition grounded upon particular motives of policy, but founded in principles of philanthropy. It was no idle expedient or speculation of

13 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 61.

14 William Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England. From the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the year 1803* (Vol. 28) (London: T. Curson Hansard, 1806-1820), Cols. 41-42.

15 *The Morning Star*, 13 May 1789, p. 78.

16 Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England*, Cols. 41-42.

the moment, but derived from the most mature deliberation.¹⁷

Rhetoric can be a powerful instrument that can be used for good or evil. But ultimately, facts determine whether a cause is right or not. Wilberforce insisted on seeking and deliberating upon the truth instead of merely appealing to emotion.

In order to seek the facts and properly interpret them, Wilberforce clearly needed help. So, he helped organize a group of people that became known as the 'Clapham Group' or 'Clapham Sect.' It included politicians, businessmen, lawyers, churchmen, and researchers who each played a part in rallying support behind moral reform. Of this latter group, field researchers compiled detailed information on the condition of slavery and the slave trade.¹⁸ Armed with this information, Wilberforce worked towards convincing Parliament of the evils of slavery. For example, referring to the transit of slaves to the West Indies, Wilberforce said,

Upon the whole, however, here is a mortality of about 50 per cent, and this among negroes who are not bought unless (as the phrase is with cattle) they are sound in wind and limb. How then can the House refuse its belief to the multiplied testimonies before the privy council, of the savage treatment of the negroes in the middle passage? Nay, indeed, what need is there of any evidence? The number of deaths speaks for itself, and makes

all such enquiry superfluous. As soon as ever I had arrived thus far in my investigation of the slave trade, I confess to you sir, so enormous so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for the abolition. A trade founded in iniquity, and carried on as this was, must be abolished, let the policy be what it might,—let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest till I had effected its abolition.¹⁹

Toward this end, in 1797 Wilberforce wrote the book, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious Systems of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*. Although the evangelists John Wesley and George Whitefield had had great success at changing society among the lower classes of England, the upper class remained largely unaffected. It was Wilberforce's aim to reform the middle and upper classes, and thus end slavery and improve morality. Coming at the time of the French Revolution and overthrow of the French upper class, the English upper class were ready to listen to the voice of reform. Thus, Wilberforce's book about 'vital Christianity' sold over 7500 copies in six months and the call to hold to 'spiritual values' spread quickly through the upper class.²⁰ Contrasting the atheistic nature of the French revolution

17 *The Morning Star*, 13 May 1789, p 78.

18 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, pp. 63-64.

19 Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England*, Cols. 41-42.

20 Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce', pp. 242-3.

and the political turmoil that ensued for years to come in that nation, the effect of Christianity on politics in England was remarkably positive, and a force that should be seriously considered in all nations.

Wilberforce also raised support from among the masses. The Clapham Group used newspapers and other forms of public media to bring pressure on the members of parliament to vote with Wilberforce on different moral issues, including slavery. This method of lobbying was unknown in that day, and it proved to be quite effective. On the issue of allowing missionaries to work in India through the East India Company, the Clapham Group gathered more than 500,000 signatures at a time when the total population was only nine million. Wilberforce hoped not just to change the law, but to change the conscience of his nation.²¹ He believed that ultimately culture needed to change if politics were to change. And only in this cultural change would a society have hope for its future.

IV Wide and Lasting Impact

Because of these moral changes in English society, England prospered. R.C.K. Ensor said that the key to understanding Victorian England and its success was to understand its faith:

if one asks how the 19th century English merchants earned a reputation of being the most honest in the world (a very real factor in the 19th century primacy of English trade), the answer is: because hell

and heaven seemed as certain to them as tomorrow's sunrise, and the Last Judgment as real as this week's balance sheet.²²

Because Wilberforce was successful in bringing his cause to the grassroots level, the work to improve morality in England continued long after those in the Clapham Group had passed away.²³ Bishop J.C. Ryle of Liverpool in 1885 commented on the great changes that had taken place.

I ask my readers to remember that the good works with which everyone is now familiar did not exist 100 years ago. Wilberforce had not yet attacked the slave trade. Howard had not yet reformed prisons. More had not established Sunday Schools. We had no Bible Societies, no ragged schools, no city missions, no pastoral aid societies, no missions to the heathen. The spirit of slumber was over the land. From the religious and moral point of view, England was sound asleep.²⁴

It is clear that Wilberforce's work had a lasting effect, encouraging others of a similar mind to pursue further social and moral reforms. The key to this appears to be his effectiveness in persuading the masses of his cause—changing the underlying culture of England in order to change its laws and government for the long term.

²² R.C.K. Ensor, *England (1870-1914)* (Oxford: n.p., 1936), p. 137.

²³ Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 166.

²⁴ Ryle, J.C. *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century*, (first published in Edinburgh, 1885, reprinted by Banner of Truth, 1997), pp. 18-19.

²¹ Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, pp. 65-66.

Finally, it is important to consider some of the important accomplishments of Wilberforce's work to reform society. Wilberforce's crusade to improve morality and end slavery lasted his entire career in the parliament. In 1788, Wilberforce played a large role in the passing of a law to reduce the exploitation of children.²⁵ He continually worked to pass laws to improve the conditions of the poor and to provide education for children of the poor.²⁶ His group had international influence as well, affecting international conferences, councils, and peace treaties.²⁷

Wilberforce also worked to create change outside of parliament, establishing the Society for Carrying into Effect the Enforcement of His Majesty's proclamation Against Vice and Immorality in 1788. This society served as a model for the establishment of numerous other reform-minded societies over the next fifty years. These included hospitals, educational work, missions, relief of distress and poverty, and other kinds of social reform.²⁸ In 1807, Wilberforce finally succeeded in passing a law to end the slave trade. But, his work came to full fruition only in the year of his death, 1833, when all slaves in the British Empire were emancipated.²⁹

His perseverance was certainly a key factor in his eventual success.

Considering the many facets of his work, both within and outside of parliament, it is clear that Wilberforce did not limit his work to only one issue, even as important an issue as slavery. It seems that his goal was always a broad one, to reform society in all directions. He worked on behalf of the children, the poor, the uneducated and the slaves. He strove to convince the upper class to personally reform and to use their wealth and power for good. He worked to promote missions work throughout the world. His willingness to cross party lines and to take such extraordinary ends of gathering years of research show the depth of his conviction. Wilberforce appeared to be interested to work in all areas where he saw moral deficiency, in contrast to the compartmentalization of Christianity in many parts of the world both then and today.

V Summary and Application

In summary, William Wilberforce's example shows that Christianity can be a powerful and guiding force in politics. The Christian should be motivated by principle, and be willing to lose political power and work with political enemies in order to keep one's principles. The Christian who gains political authority should accept responsibility for both the good and the bad of the government he joins. Identifying with the problems of the nation allows one to consider the facts more fairly and to persuade people to change—not as opponents, but as colleagues.

Furthermore, the Christian should be guided by truth, and this requires

25 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 149.

26 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 153.

27 Ernest Marshall Howse, *Saints in Politics: The Clapham Sect and the Growth of Freedom* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1952), p. 177.

28 Hill, *The Wilberforce Connection*, p. 170.

29 Bebbington, 'Abolition: William Wilberforce', p. 242.

working hard to research problems and discuss the results of research with others. It is important to change the minds not just of the members of government, but of all people in society. To do this, it is wise to publish books and use the media to explain one's position and convince the masses of it. All levels of society should be addressed and convinced. Broad, popular support is the key to lasting change. Those that pass laws but ignore the opinions of the masses will make only short-term changes. As Wilberforce showed, convincing the masses of society to follow Christian morality led to changes that lasted long after his death.

In order to apply Wilberforce's principles and methods, one must consider the issues that society and politicians struggle with today. In some countries, an issue such as abortion would be considered by Christians analogous to slavery in Wilberforce's day. Yet in other countries, this is not an important political issue. Issues such as government corruption, injustices in the use of taxes, poor health care, and failure to care for orphans, the handicapped and the elderly stand as much more important. International issues such as political alliances abroad and the use of military force are also hotly debated.

If Wilberforce were alive today, it is probable that he would have a say on all of these issues. Some Christians focus entirely on one issue for change, such as abortion. Even though Wilberforce became famous for his stand on slavery, he realized that being a Christian meant that he must seek to influ-

ence all levels of society, making government a force of good for all. He would certainly seek to pass laws and help establish social organizations that would help improve health care, house orphans and reduce government corruption.

On the other hand, Wilberforce would surely speak up on the issue of abortion, even if he lived in a society where many Christians ignored this issue in the political arena. He would conduct research to determine all of the medical facts and present this information both to the government and in publication for the masses. He would attempt to change public opinion, so that both Christians and non-Christians would see the truth of his argument, and demand legal changes.

Wilberforce did have the advantage of working in a time following Christian revival under Wesley and Whitefield's influence, so there were more Christians in pre-Victorian England than there are in many parts of the world today. Yet, the forces of revolutionary France pushed for atheism to gain political primacy. Conditions in times and places will inevitably vary, but ultimately the Christian must choose to take responsibility to morally improve the world around him. From Wilberforce's example, one must dedicate oneself to Christian principle over party, to seek help from other Christians, both politicians and others, and one must persevere. Change always takes time, but as has been clearly shown, even vast political changes are possible through faith, teamwork, and patience.

Matthew 17:24-27: A Religio-Political Reading

Rob Haskell

KEYWORDS: *Politics, religion, taxation, temple, sacrifice, Roman empire.*

The question before us is whether the tax discussed in Matthew 17:24-27, usually considered a temple tax, has any political connotations. I will argue that although the passage is indeed about the Jewish temple tax, it was still intended to carry implications about the relationship between the kings of the earth and the members of the kingdom of God. In other words, it ought to be read politically.

I Interpretive Options and their Significance

In Matthew 17:24-27 the collectors of the 'two drachma' tax ask Peter if his teacher pays the tax, and Peter responds that Jesus does indeed pay it. Later, when Peter has returned to where he and Jesus are staying but before he has a chance to mention the interchange, Jesus asks him who the

kings of the earth levy taxes against—their sons or outsiders? Peter affirms that only the subjects pay taxes, not the sons. From this Jesus then deduces that Peter and he are exempt from the two drachma tax that Peter has just affirmed he pays. However, in order not to be the cause of stumbling, adds Jesus, it would be better to pay. At his instigation Peter then goes fishing and finds a coin of the appropriate value to pay the tax for both of them.

This has been a much discussed passage in recent years that has generated a wide array of opinions. Although later in the paper I will question the distinction, it is useful to categorize the different views as political and non-political. In the non-political interpretation the tax is sometimes seen as a symbol of the old covenant, and the exemption is tied to a rationale about the new order brought in by Jesus. For example, some interpreters see a distinction between Christians and non-believing Jews, freedom from the sacrificial system in Christ, or an emphasis on Jesus' status as son and

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Peter's status as adopted.¹ However, this is usually in the background, or sometimes not addressed at all, and the accent consistently falls on avoidance of stumbling as the primary lesson. The assumption is usually that the tax in question was the temple tax—not a Roman tax—and that therefore the passage carries no implications about taxation in general or the relationship of believers to political authority. The scenario is merely a convenient situation in which to make the point that it is sometimes appropriate to give up one's rights for the sake of others. Some understand the avoidance of stumbling to be directed at the tax-gatherers themselves,² whereas others see it as a general lesson in laying aside one's rights.³ Most of these

views take the passage to be a straightforward description of an event during the life of Jesus.

On what we may call the political side, there are several options. Cassidy argues (alone) that the tax in question is not the temple tax at all but a Roman civil tax, but he stops at drawing any conclusions beyond this.⁴ Hill sees in the account a general attitude of early Christians towards any kind of taxation,⁵ and Warren Carter argues that it teaches the post A.D. 70 Matthean community to pay a Roman tax subversively.⁶ Finally, Edward Carter, following a Lutheran reading, sees in the passage the need for both distance from and participation with the political order.⁷

There are two important questions underpinning all these interpretive options which will also make up the main body of this enquiry. First, what is the nature of the tax? Most interpreters agree that the tax in question is

1 Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), p. 512. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), p. 271. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), p. 679.

2 Duncan Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970), p. 257. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 454. Richard Bauckham, 'The Coin in the Fish's Mouth', In *Gospel Perspectives* 6. Edited by D. Wenham and C. L. Blomberg (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1986), pp. 219-52.

3 Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 269. Daniel Carro, José Tomás Poe, Rubén O. Zorzoli, *Mateo*, Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano (El Paso, TX: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 1993), p. 237. Douglas Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation: a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), p. 205.

Hagner, p. 512. W. Davies and Dale Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), p. 749.

4 Richard Cassidy, 'Matthew 17:24-27-A Word on Civil Taxes,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41 (1979).

5 David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), p. 271.

6 Warren Carter, 'Paying the Tax to Rome as Subversive Praxis: Matthew 17.24-27', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 76 (1999), pp 3-4. Hugh Monette also follows this view ('Jesus and the Temple Tax', *New Testament Studies* 10 [1963-64], p. 65).

7 Edward Carter, 'Toll and Tribute: A Political Reading of Matthew 17.24-27', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (2003), pp. 413-431.

the half shekel temple tax which Jews paid in the first century every year, but there are two twists. First, following the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the Romans continued to collect the temple tax, but sent the funds to the temple of Jupiter in Rome. Thus, those who posit a post A.D. 70 date for Matthew tend to see political implications in the passage. Those who date Matthew early tend to see it as having theological (the temple has been surpassed by Christ) and/or spiritual (willingness to avoid scandal) implications,⁸ but the second twist is that a 'temple tax' is not necessarily a non-political tax.

The second important question for the passage is: What exactly leads to the exemption? Jesus does not really work this out, and this is undoubtedly why the need to avoid scandal is often presented as the important lesson—it seems to be the clearest. Jesus merely states, based on what Peter has said, that 'the sons are exempt'. But how does the analogy work out? What kind of sonship is in view? Are they exempt for being individual sons of God? Are they seen as sons of the Kingdom of God? Are they sons of God as the New Israel? Are they sons of God, the king of the earth? There are various possibilities and each one carries different implications about the nature of the exemption.

II The Temple Tax: a Brief History

The temple tax was a well established feature of first century Judaism. It involved the yearly contribution of a half shekel (a value of about two days labour) by all Jewish males which went to fund daily sacrifices in the temple. Payments appear to have come in from all over the ancient world. Many commentators state that this tax was based on Exodus 30:12-16, where God instructed Moses to levy an atonement tax of a half shekel on everyone who was counted in the census. The contributions were then used in the creation of the tabernacle (Ex. 30:16 'for the service of the tent of meeting'). Josephus certainly seems to have thought that the first century temple tax was based on Exodus 30 (*Ant.* 3.194-197), but as it turns out, the connection is only partially accurate.

Liver argues convincingly that the census tax in Exodus was nothing like the second temple era temple tax. It was not for daily sacrifices and it was not yearly.⁹ Neither do the other two passages that are often used as background for the temple tax (2 Chr. 24:6-9 and Neh. 10:32-33) describe anything like it.¹⁰ So then, although people in the first century appear to have legitimized the half shekel tax by appealing to Exodus 30, the connection is a dubious

⁸ Thus, Blomberg sees it as an illustration of the fact that in Christ the temple and the sacrificial system have been surpassed.

⁹ J. Liver, 'The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature', *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), p. 185.

¹⁰ The 2 Chronicles passage was about a collection to repair the temple (pp. 180-181), and that under Nehemiah was a voluntary and temporary collection and 1/3 of a shekel per person (pp. 181-182).

one. The important implication is that we ought not to think of the first century temple tax as a God-ordained collection.

The nearest thing to a description of the origins of the temple tax comes from the scholion on Megillat Taanit, written in A.D. 7,¹¹ which mentions a debate between the Sadducees, who held that individuals ought to pay for the daily temple sacrifices, and the Pharisees, who thought the community as a whole ought to subsidize them, with the Pharisees winning out.¹² Luz places this debate at around 67 B.C.¹³

Josephus mentions two Babylonian cities in the first century that served as storehouses of the temple tax for the Jews who lived in the East (*Ant.* 18.312). According to the Mishnah the tax was collected in Jerusalem beginning in the month of Adar, right before Passover (*m. Sheq.* 1.1 and 3:1-2). It did not appear to be compulsory but Josephus affirms that it was paid by 'everyone, by the custom of our country' (*Ant.* 18.312), and it seems to have been more a matter of Jewish pride than of compulsion.¹⁴ Philo says that the yearly contribution was taken to Jerusalem with cheerfulness, joy and delight (*Spec. leg.* 1.77).

However, not everyone agreed with the temple tax and it seems probable that not everyone paid it.¹⁵ As already mentioned the Sadducees originally opposed it.¹⁶ At Qumran the Exodus census tax was interpreted as a once in a lifetime obligation (*4Q159:6-7*), probably on the premise that in the Pentateuch a census was performed once per generation.¹⁷ It seems reasonable to assume that since the Qumran community was antagonistic towards the temple hierarchy, they would not have paid the yearly temple tax, but it is not clear whether they paid it, or where the funds they might have collected would

¹⁵ According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, 'Rabbinical sources express the idea that [the Roman temple] tax was a punishment put upon the Jews for not having paid the half-shekel during the time of the Temple.' *Jewish Encyclopedia Online*, accessed June 16, 2007: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=183&letter=F&search=Fisci%20Iudaici>. Sarah Mandel ('Who Paid the Temple Tax when the Jews were Under Roman Rule?' *Harvard Theological Review* 77 [1984], pp. 223-32), emphasizing our lack of knowledge on this point, has argued that both Josephus and the Mishnah paint idealized pictures of the temple tax, and that it was paid by only those in the Pharisaical tradition, both before and after AD 70. However, her thesis does not overcome the multiple attestations to the temple tax as a significant feature of second temple Judaism. Luz calls it an exaggerated view (p. 414 fn. 12).

¹⁶ It would be strange to claim that the Sadducees still opposed the tax in the First Century. Clearly, it was well established and must have been managed by them. There is disagreement in the Mishnah as to whether a priest must pay the temple tax (*m. Seq.* 1:4).

¹⁷ Liver, 'The Half-Shekel Offering', p. 196. See pp. 190-198 for a detailed discussion of the Qumran text.

¹¹ Richard Gottheil and Samuel Krauss, *Jewish Encyclopedia Online*, accessed June 16, 2007: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=336&letter=M&search=Megillat%20Taanit>.

¹² See the text in Liver, 'The Half-Shekel Offering', p. 189.

¹³ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 414.

¹⁴ Derrett affirms that the Jews paid it with pride and that it was a sin to neglect payment (p. 248).

have gone. Our passage (Mt. 17:24-27) supports the idea that the tax was optional in that the only reason to pay it was the avoidance of offence—no other consequence is mentioned. Thus, the gatherers of the tax may well have asked Peter their question simply because they were not sure.¹⁸ Jesus was known to have disagreed with the Pharisees and the temple establishment before and he was also associated with John the desert prophet who was probably not a pro-temple figure. There is also a suggestion that Galileans did not all comply with the tax.¹⁹

The temple tax was paid in Tyrian shekels, which were known for their quality and were the preferred currency for temple transactions. Thus if one paid the tax in an equivalent coinage (for example, in the *didrachma*, or 'two-drachma' coin mentioned in our account) he was obliged to pay an exchange surcharge.²⁰ It is probable that this is precisely what the tax collectors were doing when Jesus chased them out of the court of the Gentiles (Mk. 11:15-18; Mt. 21:12-16; Lu. 19:45-47; Jn. 2:13-16). The parallel account of the temple cleansing, therefore, suggests that Jesus either disagreed with the temple tax or with the

surcharge (or both).²¹ Because of this surcharge Derrett speculates that tax payers would have preferred to pay in pairs using a single Tyrian shekel like the one Peter found in the mouth of the fish.²²

After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the temple tax took on a punitive aspect. Gone were the temple and the privileged status that Jewish religion had enjoyed in the past. In place of the Jewish temple, the Romans erected their own temple to Jupiter. Then, Josephus tells us, Vespasian continued to collect the temple tax,²³ but for the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. '[Vespasian] also laid a tribute upon the Jews wheresoever they were and enjoined every one of them to bring two drachmae every year into the Capitol, as they used to pay the same to the Temple at Jerusalem' (*Wars* 7.218). Dio Cassius also makes mention of the change, 'Thus was Jerusalem destroyed on the very day of Saturn, which even now the Jews reverence most. To commemorate the event it was ordered that the conquered, while still preserving their own ancestral customs should annually pay a tribute of two denarii to Capitoline

18 Hagner, *Matthew* 14-28, p. 510.

19 Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, p. 414.

20 Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, p. 25, citing m. Sheq. 1:6.

21 'The money-changers were permitted a discount of one silver *maah*, which was one-sixth of a denar or 16.5 per cent of a half-shekel. The annual profit from the Temple tax alone was considerable. When Jesus overthrew the tables of the money-changers he was attacking a very powerful interest.' Hugh

Montefiore, 'Jesus and the Temple Tax', *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64), p. 63.

22 The term used in Matthew for the coin found in the fish's mouth is 'stater'. However, 'the stater of NT times was the Tyrian tetradrachmon, which was accepted by Jews as a 'shekel of the sanctuary' (Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew* p. 740).

23 This tax was levied on all Jews, as the quotes above show. However, Emperor Nerva later changed the regulation so that only practising Jews would be liable (Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, p. 414).

Jupiter' (*Epitome* 66.7). The ancestral custom, of course, was the temple tax that had until then funded the daily sacrifices of the Jewish temple. In Dio it almost sounds like a concession to the Jews, but in fact it would have been the deepest of insults, a continual reminder of the complete failure of the Jewish hope of political liberation.

III Cassidy: Not the Temple Tax at All

The assumption that this passage is about the temple tax leads us to think about the exemption theologically or spiritually. However, it is worth considering whether the matter is as simple as that.

Cassidy argues that the two-drachma tax referred to in our passage is a civil Roman tax, and not a religious tax, for two reasons. First, because Jesus' teaching in this passage 'is couched in civil terms and bespeaks a civil frame of reference'.²⁴ Jesus speaks of the kings of the earth, and he uses two terms from civil taxation (*telos* and *kensos*). He also argues that the first century temple tax was voluntary and, citing terminology that Josephus uses for it ('votive offerings' 'monies sent as offerings' 'customary gifts' and 'offerings'),²⁵ affirms that it ought not even be called a tax, except later after the destruction of the temple.

His second major argument is to point out that, although little is known about Roman taxation in Judea and

Syria in the first century, there is much information available about taxation in Egypt at the same time. Relying on Sherman Wallace's *Taxation in Egypt from Augustus to Diocletian*, he shows that there were several types of taxes in Egypt that fell under the category of *merismoi* (for dikes, guards, public bath maintenance and a crown tax) which amounted to about 2 drachmas each. Therefore it ought not to surprise us if there were similar taxes in Palestine at the same time. He summarises by stating that 'if Matt 17:24-27 referred to an Egyptian setting, there would be no great difficulty in concluding that the 2 drachmae tax described was a civil tax'.²⁶ He also adds the interesting detail, from Wallace, that Roman tax collectors did go out and locate reluctant tax payers. We need not imply that Jesus was practising tax evasion, (which would be even more controversial than the current question!). One can imagine a situation in which the status of a nomadic preacher might make it unclear whether he owes a particular tax or not.

Cassidy's thesis is intriguing and adds a new set of historical data to the question, which is welcome. The fact that other two-drachma taxes were possible or even likely in first century Palestine ought to caution us against easily arrived at assumptions about Matthew's two drachma tax, and it helps us remember that history is often much more complicated than we assume. The possibility of other contemporary two-drachma taxes brings up an important question: Even if the

²⁴ Cassidy, 'Matthew 17:24-27-A Word on Civil Taxes', p. 573.

²⁵ Cassidy, 'Matthew 17:24-27-A Word on Civil Taxes', p. 573.

²⁶ Cassidy, 'Matthew 17:24-27-A Word on Civil Taxes', p. 578.

tax in our passage is the temple tax as is usually thought, is it possible that Matthew leaves the nature of the tax undefined in the text on purpose—he calls it a two drachma tax rather than a half-shekel tax.²⁷ He does this because he sees in the account a broader principle at work that goes beyond a religious temple tax. The fact that he does not make this important clarification suggests that he is generalizing the principle of the story.

In spite of the fact that his article is often quoted, Cassidy does not appear to have convinced anyone. Davison and Allis' reply to his thesis is that it does not fit the analogy. For them the exemption is based on the fact that this 'is about a tax levied in the name of God....Kings are towards their sons as God is towards his sons.'²⁸ Therefore, they argue, it must be a temple tax which God has in some sense levied: 'clearly the tax in question must be a religious one'.²⁹ To be fair, Cassidy does not even try to explain how his thesis relates to the nature of the exemption. He contents himself with stating that 'due to the sparse narrative, it is difficult to answer the question precisely'.³⁰ And yet by doing this he has left one of the two important questions of the passage unanswered.

IV Sonship and the Nature of the Exemption

The nature of the exemption does seem complicated at first sight. We have an analogy to taxation by the kings of the earth, but the correspondences are not worked out in the analogue. In its most simplified statement, Jesus' argument goes like this: There is a certain category of people who, in the course of normal human affairs, are generally exempt from taxes. We (Jesus and Peter), by analogy, fit that same category and therefore do not have to pay. The following chart illustrates the correspondences in the analogy and the more specific possibilities available in each analogue:

Kings of the earth	God <i>More specific analogues:</i> The king The king of Israel The king of the earth The king of the kingdom of God God of the temple
Custom and poll taxes	2 drachma tax <i>More specific analogues:</i> Temple tax Taxes generally
Sons	Jesus and Peter <i>More specific analogues:</i> Sons of God Jesus as a special Son All Jews Sons of the kingdom Jesus as a corporate embodiment of Israel
Strangers	Jews Roman subjects All who are not part of the people of God

²⁷ In the Mishnah the tax is obviously referred to with the term 'shekel,' from which the tractate itself derives its name (Sheqalim. See especially 1-3).

²⁸ Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, p. 741.

²⁹ Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, p. 741.

³⁰ Cassidy, 'Matthew 17:24-27-A Word on Civil Taxes', p. 575.

Most of the interpretations that take our passage to be about the temple tax fill the analogue like this: The God Israel, who is worshipped in the temple, levied the temple tax on Israelites ('strangers'), but Jesus and his followers, because of their special status as sons, do not have to pay the temple tax. This, continues the interpretation, is just like the case of the kings of the earth. Their children do not pay taxes either, but the outsiders or regular citizens do.

So, for Hagner the exemption is tied to a special privilege for the 'children of the kingdom' and the Jews are the outsiders.³¹ Morris sees Jesus as having a special sonly status which he passes on to those with him, and he exempts himself precisely because of the force of the analogy, by which if he were obligated to pay he would be an outsider.³² For Gundry the sons are the church and the outsiders are non-Christian Jews,³³ and in Luz' interpretation the sons are Christians, who, because of the eschatological atonement of Jesus have entered into a new relationship to God.³⁴ Again, the implication is that the outsiders are the Israelites who are treated as subjects rather than sons.

These examples serve to show the popularity of this perspective. However, the key to understanding what is happening here is to follow Bauckham, who argues that the point of the pas-

sage is that *God does not tax his people at all*. In this interpretation the only really important part of the analogy is the father-son component. Thus, just as the kings of the earth do not tax their sons, so God, the king of Israel, does not tax his sons.

Kings do not treat their sons as liable to taxation, like subjects, but exempt them from taxation, because they are sons. Similarly, because God is a father to his people, as well as a king, he does not tax them. In this matter he treats them as sons rather than as subjects.³⁵

This is an attractive explanation of the pericope, especially because it ties in nicely to the miracle at the end, which becomes an illustration of the thesis: 'Instead of demanding a Temple shekel *from* Peter, God actually *provides* him with one',³⁶ demonstrating that God is not a tax levier, but a provider. It is also intuitive from an exegetical perspective to focus on the term in the analogy that receives the greatest focus in the pericope. The emphasis comes out naturally on sons if nothing else because of repetition of the term ('...from their sons...?' 'Then the sons are exempt'). Thus we could also lay out the lesson out like this:

Jesus says to Peter: 'Do the kings of the earth tax their sons?'

Peter answers: 'No, they do not.'

Jesus responds: 'God is the same

³¹ Hagner, *Matthew* 14:28, p. 512.

³² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 454

³³ Robert Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 357.

³⁴ Luz, *Matthew* 8:20, p. 417.

³⁵ Bauckham, 'The Coin in the Fish's Mouth,' p. 223.

³⁶ Bauckham, 'The Coin in the Fish's Mouth,' p. 224. Emphasis original.

way. He is our king, and since we Jews are also his sons he does not tax us.'

In Bauckham's explanation we do not have to account for all the elements of the analogy. We do not have to suppose that God does tax some people, who are strangers, but not others. The analogy does not apply at this level. Neither is Jesus exempt because of his special sonly status. He is exempt because he is an Israelite and as such a son, just like Peter and the gatherers of the tax themselves. None of them is subject to taxation by God because God does not tax his sons.

This reading sweeps away any basis for seeing the passage as a contrast between old and new (described above) where, for example, since those who are in Christ no longer need the Old Testament sacrificial system, they do not have to pay the temple tax.³⁷ Actually, Jesus is siding with those who disagree with the temple tax. Since the temple tax was not something legitimate under the old covenant, Jesus' delegitimization of it is not a lesson about the passing of the Old Testament sacrificial system in light of his death on the cross. God never taxed his people and therefore temple tax is a human innovation.

We now arrive at the crucial point of my argument, which is that *the fact that the temple tax is not a legitimate tax levied by God, but a human tax, puts it on par with all other human taxes*. The same principle that delegitimizes the temple tax also connects it to other taxes and delegitimizes any tax, especially as this

account spreads into Christian communities that know nothing of the Jewish half shekel temple tax. Christians will understand the analogy that God the Father does not tax his children, but they will understand God, not merely as the king of Israel, but as the king of the whole earth. The kings of the earth have their way of doing things, the lesson says. With them there is a distinction between their immediate family and the 'outsiders,' and the immediate family is in a privileged position. Not so with God, the king of the whole earth. In his case all are sons and thus not subjected to taxation.

One of the reasons that this view may not immediately ring true is that the religious versus political distinction that is often made about this passage resonates with modern premises about the relationship between church and state. If we hear of a tax that is due to the temple, we immediately place it in the 'religious not political' category. But it is highly unlikely that a first century person would have seen it that way. As Bauckham reminds us, to the ordinary person 'the temple theocracy could easily appear as just another level of oppressive government'.³⁸ And, we might add, the two-drachma tax just another tax levied by the powerful.

The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish political power in the land, it was run by the wealthiest and most powerful Jews and it was basically friendly to the Roman superpower. It is not realistic to suggest that there were no political implications to a tax that came from that kind of authority. 'Reli-

37 Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 271.

38 Bauckham, 'The Coin in the Fish's Mouth,' p. 231.

gious matters are not separate from social and political issues in the imperial world. No conflict is 'just' or 'simply' a religious one.³⁹ This notion is aptly confirmed by the way in which the temple tax was subverted by the Romans after A.D. 70. Surely, no one would claim that since the post A.D. 70 tax was redirected to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, it was only a 'religious' tax!

This is why Matthew does not explain to the reader that the account is about temple tax and fails to provide us modern readers with the distinction we would have been sure to make. Matthew understands the lesson to have universal applicability from the start, and therefore he uses terminology that helps universalize it. The universal lesson is that though the kings of the earth may levy taxes on Christian as outsiders, Christians are in fact children of God, the king of the whole earth, and he does not levy any taxes on them. This follows the same pattern of temple tax *sitz im leben* (the temple authorities collected a tax on all Jews, but in fact God, the king of Israel was their father and he did not require any taxes), while at the same time drawing out the broader principles.

The interpretation I have laid out also helps us understand the final details of the story. Jesus' concern not to cause offence to the gatherers of the temple tax is to be placed in the same category as his concern for tax gatherers in general. Whatever the precise

concern was originally,⁴⁰ the universalized concern was that even though Christians are not under any obligation to pay taxes to the kings of the earth, they ought to do it anyway in order to avoid creating stumbling blocks. The exemption from taxes is a technicality. It is important as a reminder to Christians that they are not under legal obligation to the rulers of the kingdoms of the earth. But from a practical standpoint, it is not an area in which Christians ought to claim their rights because it will turn into a cause of stumbling. Rather, Christians ought to meet these standards because God will help them in any event, as the miracle of the fish demonstrates.

V Kingdoms and Rulers in Matthew

The observation that God does not tax any of his 'subjects' because they are actually his sons turns what at first sight appears to be a comparison

⁴⁰ This is a difficult question. As already noted, many commentators do not work out the details precisely and simply affirm the general lesson in avoidance of stumbling, while others connect the stumbling to the tax collectors. The most developed argument comes from Derrett (257), who says Jesus was saving the tax-collectors from the sin of being forced to collect the tax from him, even though he was exempt. Therefore, Jesus was obliged by *Torah* to save them from this situation and pay the tax. Aside from being somewhat farfetched, the theory also suffers from the assumption that the tax was legitimate and that Jesus was exempted within the bounds of its legitimacy. Another possibility is that Jesus wants to pay the tax because Peter has already rather incautiously affirmed that he does; to go back on this statement might seem hypocritical.

³⁹ Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 35. Quoted in Edward Carter, 'Toll and Tribute,' p. 416.

between the kings of the earth into a contrast. The kings of the earth make a distinction between children and subjects, but God does not. The kings of the earth take money from their subjects, whereas God is the gracious provider to his children (cf. Matt 6:25-34 and 7:7-11).

The phrase 'the kings of the earth' is found in Psalm 2:2,⁴¹ an important messianic passage, in which the kings are unambiguously opposed to the God and his anointed one. Psalm 2 controls the other uses in the New Testament. In Acts 4:25-26 it is quoted as a prophecy of what happened at the crucifixion when 'both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel' gathered against God and his anointed. In six of the seven uses of the phrase in Revelation (6:15; 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:19; 21:24) 'kings of the earth' are completely antagonistic to God, and in the final mention they bring their tribute to the new Jerusalem as a sign of submission. The phrase, Davies and Allison remind us, 'is an old expression with pejorative connotations. It is antithetical to "the king of heaven"'.⁴² It does not occur literally again in Matthew, but the disciples can expect to be brought before kings to testify about Jesus (10:11) and John the Baptist is contrasted to kings in their palaces (11:8).⁴³

Two other Matthean passages

speak significantly to the categories, even though they use different terminology. In 20:25 there is a contrast between the rulers of the Gentiles, who lord their power over their subjects, but greatness as defined by Jesus is service of one another. Matthew also combines Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9 to describe Jesus, as he enters Jerusalem mounted on a donkey as the gentle, or humble king.

So there does appear to be a consistent contrast between God's ways and the ways of the kings of the earth in Matthew. This claim gains considerable weight if we look at the contrast between earthly kingdoms and the reign of God as found in the first two chapters of Matthew where, as Daniel Steffen has argued, there is a 'conflict between the false king, Herod the Great, and the recently born King-Messiah of all nations'.⁴⁴ The genealogy presents Jesus as the legitimate heir of the Davidic throne and therefore heir to the messianic promises that will bless all the nations.

The magi understand this, but Herod resists and becomes a representative of the anti-kingdom. As such he

ever, these are found in parables about God and are therefore idealized kings, not to be connected to the actual kings of the earth.

44 Daniel S. Steffen, 'The Kingdom of God and the Kings of the heart: A Literary and Latin-American contextualized Study of Matthew 1-2', delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society 2005, 2. This paper is a partial reproduction of Steffen's 'El Reino de Dios y los reyes de la tierra: Hacia una contextualización de Mateo 1-2,' in *Teología evangélica para el contexto latinoamericano: Ensayos en honor al Dr. Emilio A. Nuñez*, ed. Oscar Campos (Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2004), pp. 171-205.

41 It also appears four other times in the LXX (Josh. 12:1, 2 Chr. 9:23, Ps. 101:16, Ps. 137:4), where the reign of the kings of the earth is always contrasted to God's reign.

42 Davies and Allison, *Saint Matthew*, p. 744.

43 There are several references to hypothetical kings in Matthew and these are all positive (14:9; 18:23; 22:2,7,11,13; 25:34, 40). How-

symbolizes any political, social, or economic system or individual or situation in which abusive power is exercised over human beings. In other words, a situation in which the values of the kingdoms of God are not active. Herod in his capacity as representative of the anti-kingdom, persecutes the Messiah as a fulfilment of Psalm 2⁴⁵ and kills the children of Bethlehem in an act of ultimate violence against God and his fellowman.

If we read Matthew's use of 'kings of the earth' in Matthew 17:24-27 in the light of the other uses of the phrase in the biblical text, it confirms that the temple tax pericope is a contrast between the gracious rule of God the father, as opposed to the human powers and authorities which rule over their subjects oppressively. This also helps confirm the notion that though the event underlying the passage is most likely about the payment of taxes to the temple in Jerusalem, its application is intended to be universal. It fits as part of Matthew's very real polemic against the methods and rule of the kings of the earth in contrast to the gracious rule of God.

VI Conclusion

I have argued that although the tax in this pericope is probably the temple tax it still has political implications. Other taxes of the same value must have been in existence at the time in Palestine,

but Matthew does not clarify which one is in view in the pericope because he sees it has having a broad applicability. In any event, Jesus rejects the legitimacy of the temple tax, and it is therefore no different in principle from the taxes of the 'kings of the earth'. They collect taxes from their subjects (but not their sons), whereas God, the sovereign ruler of the whole world, does not collect taxes from anyone.

In light of this, our passage makes a claim that is both great and small. The great claim is that sons of God do not have any obligation to pay taxes to the kings of the earth because they are under the gracious jurisdiction of God the father, the king of the whole earth, who does not tax his subjects. What makes such a great claim small is that it is a technicality. The kings of the earth do impose taxes and in keeping with the gracious nature of God's rule it is consistent to pay taxes to them in order to avoid stumbling.

The teaching of this passage also raises some important questions. If the allegiance to the kingdoms of this world is merely a practical measure (a technicality) it would seem to follow that as soon as other issues trump the need for avoidance of stumbling, allegiance to the kings of the earth may legitimately be set aside by followers of Jesus. It also promotes a view of conflict between the kingdoms of the world and the gracious rule of God. This is a perspective that is worth consideration at a time when Christians are a powerful influence in some of the most powerful nations of the world.

45 Steffen, 'The Kingdom of God and the Kings of the heart', p. 19.

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Reviewed by Mark L. Russell

Ken Eldred

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Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation

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Book Reviews

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God is at Work: Transforming People and Nations Through Business

Ken Eldred

Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005

ISBN: 978-0-8307-3806-9

Cloth, 336 pp.

Reviewed by Mark L. Russell, Asbury Theological Seminary, Ky USA.

God is at Work is a well-researched and mature book by an accomplished businessperson. Ken Eldred (M.B.A. Stanford) was founder of Inmac Technologies, a publicly traded business and has been

Lowder Executive in Residence at Auburn University School of Business and Visiting Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution. *God is at Work* is an excellent and very readable introduction to the Business as Mission (BAM) movement.

Eldred's father was number three at Hewlett-Packard behind the founders. Ken founded Inmac, a company that specialized in connecting computers with peripherals manufactured by different companies. The company had 1500 employees in 10 countries and \$400 million in annual revenues when he sold it in 1996. He profited tremendously from another startup, Ariba, but it later declined after he divested when the dot-

com bubble burst. In 1999 he co-founded a call centre in India. He tells how he went from the paradigm that equated mature Christianity with vocational ministry to having a fully integrated concept of partnering with God in running a business for kingdom purposes. This is what he calls Kingdom Business (KB).

But this book is much more than an anecdotal journey of one man's personal experiences. He makes a strong case for KB to be an integral part of Christian mission. He argues that KB is a model for self-sustainable missions, brings much needed expertise, technology and capital, creates jobs, builds the local economy, provides access to locations that would otherwise be closed, presents the gospel by word and deed, enables local funding of the church, can be a valuable partner for other missions efforts, and taps into an underutilized but highly capable resource in the church.

Eldred defines KB as 'for-profit commercial enterprises in the mission field of the developing world through which Christian business professionals are seeking to meet spiritual, social and economic needs' (p. 61). He helpfully explains that KB is business as mission (BAM) as opposed to business for mission (BFM) or business and mission. BFM means that business is used to generate funds for separate ministry activities. Business and mission means that the business is used to justify physical presence in a closed country but ministry is done separately from the business. KB sees business as an integral part of God's work in the world. Business is important in its own right and is an instrument for sustainable transformation.

Eldred addresses capitalism and its relationship to biblical principles. He discusses three connected systems, the economic, political and moral-cultural. He help-

fully distinguishes between secular capitalism and successful capitalism. He notes that successful capitalism is infused with scriptural values and therefore, restrains the abuse of secular capitalism. He draws appropriate attention to the interrelationship of a successful economy and right living.

Overall the book is a tremendous resource and is a great introduction for those interested in how business can be used to meet economical, social and spiritual needs. His emphasis on a holistic framework focused on personal and social transformation is well defended and convincingly articulated. He has a discussion on the influence of culture that could be developed further. More detailed analysis and explanations at this juncture would have been helpful. In his section on three connected systems, he lists moral-cultural as one system, but I would have divided the moral and the cultural for although they are intricately related, they are distinct. A few readers have commented to me that this section sounded like a promotion for the North American way of doing business. I do not think it was but the brevity of discussion in this area could cause some to reach this conclusion.

I do recommend this book for those who are interested in learning more about Kingdom Business. This is one of the best books currently on the market for getting up to date on the discussion.

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**Recalling the Hope of Glory:
Biblical Worship from the Garden
to the New Creation**

Allen P. Ross

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006
ISBN: 978-0-8254-3578-2

Hb, 591 pp. Bibliog., Indexes

*Reviewed by Walter McConnell, Singapore
Bible College, Singapore.*

While many books on worship focus on modern practices (often from a 'how-to' perspective) or examine historical forms or denominational distinctives, *Recalling the Hope of Glory* sets out to build a biblical theology that will provide a solid foundations upon which Christians from different traditions can build their worship of God. As suggested in the subtitle, the book traces the theme of worship from its beginnings in the Garden of Eden to its completeness in the New Jerusalem, the Garden-City of the eschatological age. All the way through, Ross demonstrates that the holy God is the one object of worship who should be feared, confessed, praised, celebrated, and served by his covenant people who properly respond to his self-revelation and await the fulfilment of his promises in glory.

The 28 chapters of the book provide abundant illustrations of the many ways in which God has revealed himself to his people in history and how they responded to him. The worship of the man and woman in the garden, Abraham and the Patriarchs in Canaan, Israel in Egypt, at Sinai, and in the Wilderness, are all recalled. In addition, Ross examines the nature and purpose of the tabernacle, the holy place built according to the heavenly pattern, the sacrificial rituals that were held there, and the individuals who were assigned to lead in that worship. Days and seasons of wor-

ship, music and musicians involved in worship, and the sacrifice of praise that is due to the Lord are also given their place. An Old Testament scholar, Ross devotes 22 of his chapters to worship before the advent of Christ. Readers are thus introduced to ideas about the topic that they will find in few other books. They are also shown that the practices of ancient Israel (as well as the early church) are still of theological and practical importance to people today who worship the God of creation and redemption and who look forward to the new creation.

In his exposition of New Testament texts, Ross rightly identifies Jesus as the new centre of worship who is to be worshipped along with the Father in truth and as the truth. Other New Testament practices such as the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper, times and places for worship, the reading and teaching of God's word, and the response of his people are all discussed, as is the present and future worship of God by his saints and angels in the new creation.

While the scope of the study is broad, readers are provided with a readable and balanced introduction to biblical worship and shown how it should influence their congregational and private lives. The author's background, connecting him to several denominational traditions, allows him to respect worship distinctives while desiring that all display a more biblical approach. Thus, without entangling himself in any of the contemporary worship wars, he makes it clear that they are often driven by a lack of a biblical understanding of the subject. As he clearly states, 'For any significant change to occur in our worship activities, we have to get behind forms and methods and changes in style and focus on the biblical theology that informs worship, because one of the reasons, if not the main rea-

son, for the lack of proper attention given to worship is the lack of a biblical, theological understanding'. This book will help alleviate that lack of understanding. The book is intended for a wide Christian audience that includes pastors, worship leaders, professors, students and educated lay people. Although I would heartily recommend it to these groups, I need to add that in some places the book reads as though the audience was never identified clearly enough, as some sections appear to have originated in simple homilies to a congregation while others read like revised academic articles. There are also a fair number of places where the author, in order to provide a contemporary application of the biblical principles, draws conclusions that, while good, are not actually based upon his exegesis of the text. Even so, with its foundation laid solidly upon Scripture, its interaction with a wide range of literature, and its extensive bibliography, Ross's book is a welcome addition to the literature on worship that will help Christians better know and worship the Lord.

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From the Ground Up: New Testament Foundations for the 21st Century Church

J. Scott Horrell

Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004

ISBN 978-0-8254-2891-3

Pb 109pp

Reviewed by Steve Chang, Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, Seoul, Korea

J. Scott Horrell, a professor of theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, critiques the contemporary church in this short but thought-provoking book. Today's churches in the 'North Atlantic countries' suffer from

stagnancy because of a defective ecclesiology that has lost the New Testament idea of *ekklesia* as the body of Christ. Horrell prophetically calls for the church to return to its New Testament foundations.

Horrell analyses the church from extensive experience, much of it outside North America in Brazil. His evaluation is probably on the mark for a great many churches, even non-western ones. I found myself resonating with Horrell's evaluation from my own experience of Korean churches both in Korea and in North America. In his criticism, he names four common misconceptions about what it means 'to be a church'—a building or temple, Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, a worship service, and a full-time pastor—none of which arises from the New Testament. Horrell suggests, 'In actuality... our thinking about the church often reflects, surprisingly, more of the Old Testament than the New Testament' (p. 15).

In the first three chapters after the introduction, Horrell sets out a New Testament theology of church. At the heart of Horrell's description is how the New Testament uses the word *ekklesia*, which is never used of buildings or denominations, the two most common references of the term *church* today. Rather, the New Testament *ekklesia* means the universal church as the body of Christ, distinct from Israel in the Old Testament. While he allows for some continuity, Horrell contrasts the 'centralized kingdom' of Israel with the 'decentralized kingdom' of the church. Israel's kingdom focused on the temple at the centre while the New Testament vision of the decentralized church radiates outward from Jerusalem into the world, beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2. Horrell argues that the concept of the decentralized church directly challenges the four common misconceptions of church.

In a short ambitious chapter, Horrell seeks to answer the question of why the church is so centralized today if the New Testament teaches otherwise? Horrell tells how the decentralized church of the New Testament was overshadowed by centralized concepts of church from Origen's allegorical Israel as applied to the church to the Protestant Reformation that largely failed to reform the centralized ecclesiology of Roman Catholicism. A short section on 'postliberalism' is engaging, but does not seem to fit all that well.

In the next three chapters, Horrell treats the local church, the essential functions of the church, and the priority of functions over the forms of church. He sets out seven basic aspects of the local church: professing believers, doctrine, water baptism, the Lord's Supper, standards of membership, organization, and the will of God as the purpose of the local church. This last aspect, to do the will of God, is to function as a church, as measured by four 'vital' activities that the New Testament sanctions: worship, learning, fellowship, and mission. The functions are important and fixed, but the forms must vary and transform according to context and times. Horrell concludes that the New Testament vision of church allows for much freedom in form, even as the message, doctrine, and essential functions of the church do not change.

Not all evangelicals will agree with Horrell's distinction between Israel and the church that forms a foundational hermeneutic for his understanding of church in the New Testament. Students who are not aware of dispensationalism and the Israel-Church debate may refer to C. Blaising and D. Bock, eds.

Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). But taken at face value, Horrell has made an honest effort to allow the New Testament

primarily to shape the idea and practice of church. I welcome such an effort even as I acknowledge that the New Testament cannot be read in a vacuum, without the aid of theological perspectives or in the light of the Old Testament. Giving the New Testament priority for our understanding of church, as Horrell has done, is refreshing.

In my judgment, the message of the book is timely and relevant to various segments of global Christianity. On the one hand, established churches will benefit from its call to return to the foundations of New Testament ecclesiology and a new generation of believers will welcome the freedom from irrelevant and hollow forms of church. On the other hand, church planters in 'unreached' regions will equally benefit from the book's call to start from the right place, namely the function ecclesiology that the New Testament itself lays down rather than transported forms of church often from distant contexts. Pastors, seminary students, church planters, and denominational leaders would do well to read this book.

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Calvin's Preaching on the Prophet Micah. The 1550-51 Sermons in Geneva

Michael Parsons

Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mullen Press, 2006.

ISBN 978-0-7734-5804-8

Hb pp 338+vi bibliog. index

Reviewed by Ken R Manely, Whitley College, Melbourne Australia

Dr Michael Parsons, Head of the Department of Christian Thought at the Baptist Theological College in Perth, Western Australia, adds to his growing

volume of Reformation studies with this valuable and fascinating study of Calvin's preaching on the prophet Micah in Geneva during 1550-51. Attention to developing a clearer understanding of Calvin's thought and practice as a reformer by drawing on writings other than his monumental *Institutes* has advanced steadily and this latest work clearly demonstrates the value of analysing his preaching in particular. Calvin preached on Micah for two months in twenty-eight sermons and recent English translations by B. Reynolds (1990) and B.W. Farley (2003) demonstrate the continuing fascination with these sermons. Calvin's work as a pastor, preacher and reformer are illuminated by Parsons' meticulous and readable analysis of how the reformer related the biblical prophet's message to Christians generally and to Genevans in particular.

This work does not offer a simple summary of the sermons but rather is intended to trace how Calvin's preaching illuminates his primary theological objectives. A helpful introduction places his sermons in context and underlines the importance of preaching in Calvin's reform. The author's 'primary purpose' is 'to listen to Calvin' in order to illuminate how Calvin fulfilled his pastoral responsibility to those in Geneva during the significant years of 1550-51 when the Reformation was still being established in the city. In particular 'the soteriological and pastoral' aspects of Calvin's teaching are the focus of discussion through eight doctrinal themes.

As such, it should be stressed, what we are here offered is a stimulating and comprehensive introduction to contemporary scholarly conclusions on several basic themes of Calvin scholarship. Certainly the discussion is restricted to the nominated themes as covered in the Micah sermons—and there are numerous rele-

vant quotations from those homilies—but in many ways this book is an excellent theological introduction to Calvin since the nominated subjects are so central to Calvin's ministry. There is a running dialogue with the work of other scholars—at times this can be a distraction to the overall argument of the book—but both Calvin scholars and other interested readers will benefit from the overview, for example, of Calvin's teaching on humanity's sinful nature (applied with regular and detailed specificity to his Genevan hearers) and the nature of God as Enemy and Judge as well as Father. Parsons' review of Geneva the city draws on scholarly discussion of the Reformation as an urban phenomenon and shows how Calvin saw the city as blessed by God through the Reformation but at the same time in many ways a failure and exposed to the judgment of God. Geneva is not only the 'most perfect school of Christ', as John Knox saw it but, Calvin insisted, could through its impiety become 'the gateway of hell'.

Another theme developed by Parsons is the link between the calling of a prophet and that of a reformer. Micah spoke directly to Geneva through Calvin as the preacher repeatedly stressed. Calvin also believed, however, that both preachers and magistrates were necessary: they were 'like the eyes of the body' and both were needed for a full vision of God's purposes. Naturally the role of the prophetic preachers is emphasized in the sermons. Calvin's own times and vocation are closely linked with Micah's.

This reviewer found special interest in chapter six which explores Calvin's understanding of the gospel and mission. Recent reading on Calvin's theology of mission is enhanced by these studies of Calvin's preaching. Drawing in part on the recent work of Scott Hendrix, Parsons

argues that the reformer did see himself as having a mission to preach the gospel to all but also called on his hearers to play their part. Calvin told his congregation: 'It is our Christian duty to care about our neighbours and lead them to a knowledge of their salvation.' Calvin develops a remnant theology in his understanding of mission and in this way the message can

be 'spread across the entire world'.

This fine study prompted this reader to look again at the book of Micah, then to browse through some of Calvin's sermons on Micah and to ponder the challenge of preaching on that same book in our modern world. Perhaps that is the best tribute that Michael Parsons would seek from all his readers.

Joseph Cardamone: *Moving your Church into Global Ministry: A study of the evangelistic missionary preaching of Jesus Christ and the Apostles* (Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2006) ISBN 978-1-4241-5797-6

In this book, Joseph Cardamone shares his passion for the benefits which a church, its leaders and people gain by being directly involved in missionary work through short term ministry visits to mission areas, rather than by the traditional avenues of financial and prayer support and sending personnel for training and work with denominational or independent mission boards. There is also the benefit to be gained by those in missionary areas who work with the visiting 'missionaries' as they are drawn into the process of evangelism and church planting.

Drawing upon his experiences, especially with the organization e3partners (Equip, Evangelize, Establish), he gives details of the nature and importance of this scheme, and then backs it up with a series of chapters consisting of biblical material relating to the ministry of Jesus and the early church, emphasizing the way in which Christians are to be personally involved in mission. In particular, he draws a strong distinction between the general work of preaching the gospel (*euangelizo*) which applies to all Christians, and the specific work of 'heralding' (*kerusso*) the gospel which is the role of authorized leaders, with sections dealing with the nature of preaching and the preacher. Other chapters give summaries of biblical teaching on such topics as the gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the church, thus providing a solid understanding for those who participate in the process of 'mobilizing leaders and laity' (as the subtitle has it) for global mission.

This practical manual (complete with study guide) is clearly presented, with adequate reinforcement of the central issues and a lengthy bibliography, thereby arguing strongly for the idea that local churches need to be directly involved in mission through the 'e3' method. However, there is nothing about the logistical requirements (at home or at the receiving end) in setting up such a scheme, or the wider implications it might have for churches, mission boards and the receiving churches.

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

Kent A. Van Til: *Less Than Two Dollars a Day: A Christian View of World Poverty and the Free Market* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006)
ISBN 978-0-8028-1767-9 Pb, pp180, Bibliog. Indexes

By combining a study of economics and theology, Dr. Kent Van Til, of Hope College, Michigan, aims to show that the problem of world poverty is a moral one—'we have sim-

ply not chosen to distribute goods in such a way that the basic needs of all human beings are met.' He examines free market capitalism from Adam Smith onwards to conclude that, while very efficient and useful in many ways, this now dominant system cannot help the poor because it works only with those who can contribute economically to it, not those whose call upon it is based on need. On the other hand, his study of biblical teaching shows that all people, being created by God, have a right to basic sustenance.

In searching for a system that encompasses both efficient distribution and integrated support for the poor, he discusses Roman Catholic, Liberation Theology and Reformed proposals before settling on Abraham Kuyper's idea of 'spheres', in conjunction with more recent work by Michael Walzer and David Miller. The conclusion, he suggests, is the possibility of a system of 'distributive justice' where 'all members of humanity receive their basic needs, when citizens receive equal treatment, and when producers receive proportional reward on the basis of their contribution'.

To round off a finely focused, well structured and lucidly argued case (with a strong bibliography), he makes practical suggestions about how his insights can be implemented. He points out that solutions to world poverty need not be expensive—only \$100 or \$200 a year per adult (less than \$2 a day), or 0.14 percent of global Gross National Product, would make a complete difference. But because of its very nature, it is impossible to expect the capitalist system as it stands to deliver these results. The author is donating all royalties from the book to Christian relief and development work.

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

Mark Wilson: *Charts on the Book of Revelation: literary, historical and theological perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007)
ISBN 978-0-8254-3939-1 Pb, pp134, bibliog.

The author, who is director of the Asia Minor Research Centre, Izmir, Turkey, has produced a valuable resource on the last book of the Bible, which is not so much a set of charts as of lists—79 entries altogether, including a few maps. The lists cover an exceptionally wide range of topics, including OT references, a comparison of the seven seals with the apocalypses of the Synoptic Gospels, the structure of the seven letters, suggested structures for the book, the theme of victory, thematic parallels with other books, divine names and names for believers, and so on. Only very few are the expected ones like theories of interpretation, literary genres, the number of the beast, or millennial interpretations. Others should prove extremely useful, such as lists of numbers, colours, senses, gems, symbols, hymns, figures of speech and words occurring only once in the Greek text. Similarly, the time lines of the church and the Roman empire, a comparison with a Roman edict and with Jewish literature and a listing of the rhetorical situation should all help in setting the book in its context and thus providing important keys to its understanding. There is some material on the textual and canonical history of the book, as well as information on the seven churches today which will contribute to a good perspective for the student. Simply laid out on large size pages, the book is easy to access, although it could have gone much further with the inclusion of graphics and other visual material. The reader is given plenty of leads for further research with notes on the sources for each of the 'charts' and a decent bibliography.

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

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