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**BRITISH EVANGELICAL COUNCIL**

General Secretary: Rev Alan Gibson BD, 113 Victoria Street, St Albans, Herts, AL1 3TJ Tel: 0727 55655

Preaching with Application

The Barren Fig Tree

Evangelicals and World Mission

Salvation without Evangelism?

New Age Movement

Social Ethics Reading List

Anglican Evangelical Vision

**F O U N D -**  
**A T I O N S**



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# Editorial

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I am happy to commend to you the first issue of our new format for FOUNDATIONS and to welcome both new and old readers; it is more advantageous for you to subscribe for issues 26-31 and we encourage you all to take advantage of our offer.

**Scratching Where Christians Itch!** is the title of our first article by John Legg. The subject is application, or preaching in such a way as to be relevant to believers. Our **Exegesis** article is provided by Gary Brady and the focus is on the incident in Mark 12:12-14 relating to the Barren Fig Tree.

The recent WCC Conference in San Antonio and Lausanne II Congress in Manila have been variously assessed even by evangelicals; however, there is agreement that they were both significant conferences yet with inherent weaknesses. **World Missions following San Antonio and Manila** is a statement on these two conferences by the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships and is a helpful assessment of both. In his review article, **Salvation without Evangelism?**, Daniel Webber then looks in some detail at Peter Cotterell's new book, MISSION AND MEANINGLESSNESS. This is said to be 'the first book by a leading British Evangelical to recognise God's saving activity among those who live without the Church. It holds out a special challenge to traditional Evangelicalism ...'

We return in this issue to the **New Age Movement** and Simon Chase offers a description and appraisal of this influential movement. Alan Gibson has prepared a useful **Social Ethics Reading List** which readers will find to be an indispensable guide in grappling with a vast and complex subject.

Another review article is by Neil Richards entitled **The Lost Vision**; this is a frank but fair review of RESTORING THE VISION - 'Anglican Evangelicals speak out'. To complete this issue of FOUNDATIONS we also include a selection of briefer book reviews.

## Special Offer

*FOUNDATIONS is sold singly at £1.50 post free. The six Issues Nos 26-31, covering the three years 1991-3 are available on Special Offer when ordered together at £8 in the UK and £9 overseas, both post free.*

*Anyone purchasing this Issue as a single copy who wishes to order the remaining five may still take advantage of the Special Offer. UK readers, please send £6.50 and Overseas readers £7.50 (in sterling only).*

*Former readers who have not yet renewed are being sent this Issue. Most have probably overlooked our first Reminder and a further Renewal Form is enclosed for their use.*

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# Scratching where Christians itch!

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*John Legg*

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I take no responsibility for the title, which was given me; nevertheless it does express very well the topic we are to consider: **application, or preaching in such a way as to be relevant to believers**. We are not concerned on this occasion with evangelistic preaching, although much of the material would apply to that also. Nor are we talking about pandering to those with 'itching ears', 2 Timothy 4:3, just saying what they want to hear. Our subject is telling our hearers what they need to hear - meeting them where they are. Colossians 4:6 exhorts Christians in their witness to have their speech 'seasoned with salt', ie suited to the taste of the unbeliever, not to satisfy his carnal appetite, but 'so that you may know how to answer everyone', ie varying our approach and methods according to our hearers. This title refers to the same principle in the case of believing hearers.

This is a vital topic, too often neglected. It is not good enough to leave this entirely to the spur of the moment, although that element cannot be completely discounted. We must agree with Calvin who said,

If I should enter the pulpit without deigning to glance at a book, and should frivolously think to myself, "Oh well, when I preach, God will give me enough to say", and come here without troubling to read or thinking what I ought to declare, and do not carefully consider how I must apply Holy Scripture to the edification of the people, then I should be an arrogant upstart.<sup>1</sup>

God forbid that we should be 'arrogant upstarts' in our day.

Let us then consider application under three headings: **meaning, content** and **technique** - or the what, where and how of applying the truth.

## The meaning of application

**1 Application means bringing the truth to bear upon the hearer and his situation.** On a related topic Andrew Swanson wrote,

Exposition is the work of bringing to bear the authority of the Word of God on the totality of a man's being.<sup>2</sup>

We use the word 'application' of putting on a bandage or a coat of paint. The bandage or paint is brought into contact with the surface; it is no longer separate. In the same way, the truth has to be brought into contact with people; it is no longer *merely* the objective truth.

In one sense this is done for us, for all Scripture applies to us anyway. In 1|Corinthians 9:8-10|the apostle Paul points out that even an obscure verse in Deuteronomy about muzzling an ox applies to the Christian reader: 'Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes this was written for us.' Chapter 10, verse 11 adds, 'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as

warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come', while Romans 15:4 sums it up: 'For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us'. Our task, then, is no less than to point this out - to apply the timeless bandage to the modern wound.

This is not a superfluous work, for times have changed and the fact that 'the fulfilment of the ages' has come on us means that an understanding and use of biblical theology - the development and progress of God's revelation over the biblical centuries - is necessary, if we are to apply the historic truth properly. Paul applied the muzzling of the ox to preachers not to oxen, because he understood the nature and significance of the New Covenant's arrival. Also, culture has changed and it is our task to make allowances for this alteration in the surface as we apply the paint. The paint has not changed, but the surface has; we do not throw away the paint, but we must use the brush differently.

Dr Packer writes,

Application means seeking to answer these questions: If God said and did in the circumstances recorded what the text tells us He said and did, what does He say and what is He doing and what will He do to us in our circumstances?<sup>3</sup>

This sounds difficult and it is. There is no room for laziness or casualness. However, Dr Packer has encouragement for us as well:

Because correct application is a strictly rational process, most evangelical text-books on interpreting Scripture say little about the Holy Spirit, Scripture's ultimate author ... who by leading and enlightening us in the work of exegesis, synthesis and application, actually interprets that Word in our minds and to our hearts. <sup>4</sup>

Faith in his work is possibly our greatest need.

**2 Application means preaching to effect change.** There is a right and proper 'preaching for effect', which is usually hindered by the improper kind! That effect is **edification**, as indicated in the quotation from Calvin above and in the following words from Jay Adams:

The purpose of preaching, then, is to effect changes among the members of God's church that build them up individually and that build up the body as a whole. <sup>5</sup>

Anything less than this is not good enough. Our sermons must have an effect; we must look not just for approval and agreement, but for change in the thinking, attitude and life of our hearers. (Similarly, our hearers must realize that this change is expected of them - that we are disappointed if they agree with what we say but never change their minds or their lives.)

We must not, however, limit application, as we tend to do, to the 'practical' aspects of our Christian living. There is a much wider range of applications than we sometimes think. As Andrew Swanson wrote, in the article already quoted,

The aim of exposition is to make man understand what God wants him to understand, feel as God wants him to feel, and do as God wants him to do. <sup>6</sup>

As well, then, as the obviously practical subjects, like behaviour and practice, we

are also instructed, so that we do not go astray doctrinally and so that we may worship, adore and love God as we should. If a sermon leads us to give glory to God for his great salvation, to honour Christ for his gracious work, then it has not been lacking in application, even though we may not have any new thing to go and do.

Two warnings may be appropriate here. First, **do not confuse application with scolding** - a common fault of young preachers, but not of them alone - especially of those members of the congregation who are not present! There may be much criticism and letting off steam by the preacher without in any way conveying the actual application of the Scripture. Secondly, **do not forget the Holy Spirit and, therefore, prayer**. Only he can change men and women, and we must work on this assumption in all our application. There is nothing automatic about it, however well we may have done our homework.

**3 Application means giving practical help.** There are many Biblical examples of this. When Christ had made his point about his relationship to the law in Matthew 5, he did not just leave it at that and let them work it all out for themselves. He gave specific examples to illustrate what he meant: murder and anger, adultery, lust and divorce, swearing oaths and taking revenge. Of course, we cannot cover every eventuality. Nevertheless, it is helpful to indicate how the principles can be applied in detail.

The danger comes not from going into detail but from a failure to distinguish between this detailed application, which is in the last analysis merely the guidance or advice of our own opinion and the Word of God, which must be obeyed. There is a danger of legalism - 'heavy shepherding' in preaching - and we must beware. This does not mean that we should not go into detail at all, just that we should make clear what we are doing. 'How-to' advice must be distinguished from the Word of God. Once again the safeguard is the Holy Spirit. Do we really believe he works in the congregation as well as in us? Do we accept that they can apply the Word in detail where we have provided the principles?

## **The content of application**

**1 How do you decide where Christians itch?** Clearly this necessitates an awareness of people and their needs. At this point the pastor appears to have an advantage over the 'lay preacher', although it can sometimes turn the other way, as he is suspected of 'getting at' individuals. Similarly, he can preach through whole books, so that all the relevant topics are dealt with in time. However, the occasional preacher is not completely at a loss. He can have faith in the providence of the God who has sent him to preach. Paul probably knew the details of Felix's injustice and lust when he preached before him on 'righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come' Acts 24:25, but the same personal application can be made by the Holy Spirit when the preacher has absolutely no idea of the specific sins in the members of the congregation. This is illustrated by events in the Lewis revival of 1827, when the preacher was a visiting minister:

Many afterwards came to the minister and asked who had spied on them, as the secrets of their hearts were revealed from the pulpit, but they soon discovered that the revelation came not from men but from the Lord. <sup>7</sup>

In addition to this trust in the sovereign working of God there are general trends and tendencies, which occur everywhere. In discerning these we have two particular aids - Scripture and experience.

**2 From Scripture we may discern not only the teaching but the original application.** Remember that it was intended to apply in every age and that men and women have not changed essentially, however much they differ externally and superficially. The same general points are true now as when the Bible was written.

We can learn also from the Scriptural method - the way the biblical writers cover a variety of categories. Paul constantly applies his teaching to Jews and Gentiles, and, in the so-called 'house-tables' to be found in Ephesians 5:22ff etc, to husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and their masters. With wisdom we can produce our own range of categories to which we may relate the doctrine.

Even more important is the principle expressed by Andrew Swanson:

The expositor's first concern in preparing his exposition must be to find out the purpose for which the Holy Spirit has given the passage which is before him. The expositor must then 'preach from that passage to achieve that purpose and *that purpose alone*' (quoting Jay Adams: *Journal of Pastoral Practice*). <sup>8</sup>

You will probably choose your text or passage with an idea of what it says and how you want to use it. As you study it in more detail, you must refine your application (or possibly reject it, because it does not really mean what you thought it did!) and so ensure that you are saying exactly what the Spirit originally intended. (You may, of course, quite legitimately deal with only part of this.) Only thus can you speak with the real authority of Scripture. I personally find that unless the exegesis is accurate, the preacher's message carries little weight with me. Even though it may be perfectly true in itself, it does not come to me with the convicting power of God's authority in his Word.

Another way to use Scripture is to determine the writer's intention when he gave certain teaching. The context is of great help here. For instance, you may decide to preach on the grace of God, as described in 2 Timothy 1:8-12. How should you apply this? The context will instruct you that Paul was leading up to his exhortation in chapter 2, verse 1, to 'be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' and your line of application will become clear. Ask your text, 'Why?' For instance, why did Paul refer to the Lord as 'my' God in Philippians 4:19? The answer will provide a wealth of application derived from the Scripture itself.

**3 Experience will help us to find the modern equivalent.** Our experience comes in two forms. First, we have our personal experience. We can learn much from our own needs, as we apply the text to ourselves first of all. Joel Nederhood described the effect having cancer had on his preaching:



I look at people differently now. Before, my ministry was always oriented to strength. I worked hard, and I looked at my audience as people of strength who worked hard and needed encouragement. Now I look at people as pretty broken; it has made me understand how absolutely mortal and weak we human beings are.<sup>9</sup>

Then we can learn from the church to which we belong. This is particularly helpful when preaching 'away' - the usual situation of the occasional preacher. You may decide to preach on Philippians 4:6-7 and want to enumerate the kinds of anxiety that may beset your hearers. You will probably find that you can produce such a list, anonymous of course in this setting, from the members of your own congregation: illness, sorrow, redundancy, unconverted children or parents, etc.

## The technique of application

**1 Begin with your application.** Decide first of all what you want to achieve, what your aim is. Strangely to some, the introduction is prepared last! In fact, this is quite obvious and natural. You cannot introduce unless and until you know what you are introducing. The chairman must know who the speaker is before he can introduce him to the audience. So, work out what you want to say and then let this control everything: content, illustrations etc. Too much preparation is undisciplined, with material included which distracts from the main point, illustrations used merely because they are 'good stories', but which only divert attention from what you want your hearers to do. The purpose must always be kept in mind, and stringent and ruthless steps must be taken to keep on the straight and narrow way of your aim in the sermon. So this has to be settled first.

This is, to me, the one most important aspect of sermon preparation, after truth itself: **know precisely what you are trying to do.** Jay Adams puts it in characteristic fashion:

This matter of purpose is such an important consideration in preaching that if your wife were to awaken you on Sunday morning at 4 o'clock and ask, "What is the purpose of this morning's message?" you ought to be able to rattle it off *in one crisp sentence*, roll over and go to sleep again, all without missing a single stroke in your snoring!<sup>10</sup>

**2 Let this govern your whole approach.** Do not lecture *about* the original readers; talk *to* your own hearers.

Let the whole be application. False deductions are made from Paul's use of 'therefore', as if he left all his application to the second half of his letters. Consider the 'therefore' in Philippians 2:12, but then realize that there are exhortations already in 1:27 and 2:2. In fact, the purpose of his letters is always present and controlling his material, even in the introduction. Thus in Galatians the basic issues of apostleship and salvation are assumed as true in verses 1-5, before he even begins his argument and, incidentally, before his readers are on their guard! We honour the depth of Puritan teaching and pastoral understand-

ing. However, their system of simply adding on a lengthy set of 'uses' at the end, when the hearers are tired, is not appropriate today, if indeed it ever was. I was horrified to read of Jonathan Edwards' practice in the matter of application.

But even with the long hours which Edwards gave to preparation for the pulpit there are occasional indications that he was not always able to command the amount of time which he required. In the manuscript of one sermon, for example, having written on 'the text' and 'the doctrine', for the 'application' he simply detached some pages which had been part of an earlier sermon. This expedient of removing pages from one sermon to another seems to have been employed at various times.<sup>11</sup>

How can it be argued that the doctrine backs up and gives authority to the uses, or leads inevitably to them, when the application was in fact drawn from a different set of premises? Perhaps Edwards was so great that he could get away with this; or perhaps he would have been even greater had he avoided it! Certainly, our sermons must be units.

Another aspect of method is to use commands and exhortations, or questions directed to the hearers, rather than statements about the Bible or the doctrine. This is particularly important in headings. For instance, the headings in this section are (deliberately) couched like this and, I believe, are more effective for it. This partakes more of the nature of a lecture than a sermon, so the main headings are mere phrases. For a sermon it would be more pointed if they were changed to:

- I Be clear what you are aiming to achieve.
- II Learn from Scripture and experience.
- III Let your aim control both study and structure.

This can, of course, be overdone and may become a boring stylistic feature. The same applies to the oft-repeated idea that we(!) should use 'you' rather than 'we' when preaching. Certainly 'you' stresses the need for a response from the congregation, but it can also become a mark of arrogance. Calvin said,

I so speak to the congregation that the teaching must first be addressed to myself.

Parker comments on this,

The way he treats himself as a member of the congregation is shown by his customary use of 'we' and not 'you'.<sup>12</sup>

Both points are valid; perhaps a variety is best.

**3 Work at this as much as at your exegesis.** Refine your application so that it hits the target exactly and precisely. Drive your hearers into a corner by removing wrong ideas and excuses, which might enable them to avoid the issue. Refuse to let them off the hook by clumsy handling of the application. So direct everything that they have no alternative but to do what you want or be in clear disobedience to the Word of God.

From our Lord we can learn to use what I would call 'crunch' issues. Some of the difficulties in interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, come from a

failure to realize what he was doing. His command to turn the other cheek is not to be exegeted out of existence, but seen as the ultimate demand. If it came to the crunch, when called for by our circumstances, would we be willing to do even that rather than take revenge? Similarly, we are not all commanded to sell all and give to the poor in order to follow Christ. But, if it came to that, would you be prepared to do it? It did come to that with the rich young ruler. Different challenges apply to different people, but all must be pressed in this way to face up to the implications of your message.

Although we should not save up our application to the end, it is good to finish with a real conclusion, like an arrow-point, that will fix the application in the mind and conscience of the hearer as he leaves - the same point that you have been making all along.

## Conclusion

May I follow my own injunctions in two ways. First, some 'how-to' advice. Examine your old sermon notes and write out your aim in 'one crisp sentence', if you can. If you cannot, examine why. Then check your headings and convert them into hearer-oriented form, ie exhortations or commands. Finally, examine whether your structure and content were controlled by your aim at all times.

Secondly, hear Calvin's words to the preacher:

It would be better for him to break his neck going up into the pulpit, if he does not take pains to be the first to follow God.

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*Rev John Legg BD is pastor of Shrewsbury Evangelical Church. This article is the substance of a paper first delivered to the Evangelical Preachers' Fellowship in Wrexham, where most of those attending were occasional preachers not in full - time ministry.*

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# Exegesis 11: The Barren Fig Tree

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*Gary Brady*

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The one thing that all the commentators do agree about regarding Mark 11:12-14 is that it is difficult. 'This narrative bristles with difficulties', says Cranfield.<sup>1</sup> 'One of the most perplexing in the Gospels', wrote A M Hunter.<sup>2</sup>

For many exegetes problems arise from their approach to Scripture. For Hunter and others like him the story is 'frankly incredible'.<sup>3</sup> They have two main problems with the incident. They find it both 'irrational and revolting'.<sup>4</sup> Revolting, because the story 'does not ring true'<sup>5</sup> with their ideas on Jesus' character. Barclay speaks of his 'petulance' and J B Phillips of Jesus 'venting his feeling of frustration and despair upon the fig tree'.<sup>6</sup> But there is need neither to accuse Jesus of sin nor to see the story as a 'legendary concretising' of Luke 13:6-9 for aetiological purposes.<sup>7</sup> As Bengel asserts 'Whatever does not serve Jesus Christ is unworthy to serve any one of mortals'.<sup>8</sup>

Then there is verse 13 which, for some, makes Jesus' behaviour irrational. Certainly there is a problem. 'The juxtaposition of the two seemingly contradicting assertions heightens the difficulties, for the explicit statement that it was not the season for figs appears to make Jesus' action arbitrary and meaningless'.<sup>9</sup> Of course, some are willing to cut the Gordian knot and simply remove verse 13, even though it is typical of Mark's asides.<sup>10</sup> Surely the better path is to take comfort in the belief that the problem is one 'which evidently the Evangelist did not feel as he deliberately makes it for us'.<sup>11</sup> But what *is* the solution to this apparent difficulty?

A number of evangelical commentators want to find the solution in the possibility of very late or very early figs.<sup>12</sup> However, the idea that Jesus would not have looked for figs without some hope of there being any 'assumes too much'. Vincent Taylor is scathing about such a line of argument and says it has 'nothing to commend it'.<sup>13</sup> Bengel's idea that Jesus may have been looking for *inedible* figs to miraculously transform is fanciful and bizarre.<sup>14</sup>

In order to do true justice to the passage one has to accept the following three propositions:

**1 It was not possible for edible fruit to be on the tree regardless of how much foliage it had put forth.**

There are two crops for the fig tree, one early, one late. The first is in May or June and the second is in August or later still.<sup>15</sup> The incident occurs, of course, in April or even March, when, as Mark points out, 'it was not the season for figs'. It was too soon for the early crop to be ready and too late for anything edible to be remaining from the previous year. 'There was then no reason to expect fruit upon this tree beyond the promise of its leaves'.<sup>16</sup>

## 2 Jesus knew that this was the case.

Wuest suggests that Jesus 'at least hoped to find figs on the tree' and stresses the 'self-imposed human limitations' of the incarnation, while warning against any denial of Christ's basic omniscience.<sup>17</sup> However, here common sense, a knowledge of his own land, would have been enough to convince Jesus that, regardless of appearances, there could be no fruit on the tree. Gould says *ara* is *illative* here (ie denoting motion into)<sup>18</sup> and R Alan Cole states 'The Greek particle *ara* suggests that the finding of figs was an unlikely possibility contemplated by the Lord; he was thus in no sense surprised by the tree's unfruitfulness, as he would have, had it been the time of the regular fruit crop'.<sup>19</sup>

## 3 Jesus' hunger was nevertheless real.

J A Alexander fulminates, 'That this was a simulated hunger, is not only unworthy and irreverent but a perfectly gratuitous assumption as our Lord, by his incarnation, shared in all the innocent infirmities of human nature'.<sup>20</sup> This is where the Lord's humanity appears, in his hunger not in his supposed ignorance.

An important Scripture for unravelling the remaining difficulties is one apparently ignored by everyone except Calvin.<sup>21</sup> That is John 4:31-34. On that occasion Jesus dealt with his hunger by doing the work of God. It is the same here.

After spending the night in Bethany Jesus and his disciples set off for Jerusalem early in the morning. Had he skipped breakfast as Henry suggests?<sup>22</sup> Being an area rich in figs, dates and olives it was reasonable for him to think of getting something on the way.

Jesus then looks up and sees a leafy fig tree in the distance, 'a derelict perhaps of some old garden or vineyard'.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps it was in some sheltered hollow and so was more leafy, more *precocious*.<sup>24</sup> Jesus is aware, however, that it is not the season for figs. Immediately **his mind is turned from the natural to the spiritual**. A number of Scriptures may have come into his mind. Micah 7:1,2 seems the most likely suggestion,<sup>25</sup>

"What misery is mine!

I am like one who gathers summer fruit

at the gleaning of the vineyard;

there is no cluster of grapes to eat,

none of the early figs that I crave.

The godly have been swept from the land,

not one upright man remains.

All men lie in wait to shed blood;

each hunts his brother with a net."

Christ weeping over Jerusalem is vividly brought to mind (Mt 23:37, Lk 13:34). Seeing the beautiful foliage and knowing it all means nothing reminds him of the

judgment about to fall on his own people. Cranfield is one of many who notice the careful way Mark has woven the clearing of the Temple into the narrative, 'The best commentary on vv 12-14 and 20 f is found in the narrative these verses enframe'.<sup>26</sup>

Many other Old Testament references identify God's people with the fig tree.<sup>27</sup> Hosea 9, and especially verses 10 and 16, echoes the sentiments found here. Israel was not short of 'foliage' - the Temple and its ritual, outward and legalistic acts of virtue, a form of godliness. But what was lacking was actual fruit, the fruit of righteousness. Like the fig tree they were 'louder than all the rest in profession, yet behind in performance'.<sup>28</sup> This was the very thing that John the Baptist had warned about (Mt 3:7-10) and that Jesus too had spoken of (Mk 7:6). **Israel's sin was not just the sin of barrenness but of barrenness with an appearance of fruitfulness.**

The warning of this enacted parable, for such it was, is still needed today. Ryle, in his 'Expository Thoughts on the Gospels' applies it admirably.

There was a voice in the fig tree for all the branches of Christ's visible Church, in every age and every part of the world. There was a warning against an empty profession of Christianity, unaccompanied by sound doctrine and holy living, which some of those branches would have done well to lay to heart. But above all there was a voice in that withered fig tree for all carnal, hypocritical, and false-hearted Christians. Well would it be for all who are content with a name to live while in reality they are dead, if they would only see their own faces in the glass of this passage.

Let us take care that we each individually learn the lesson that this fig tree conveys. Let us always remember that baptism, and church-membership, and reception of the Lord's supper, and diligent use of the outward forms of Christianity, are not sufficient to save our souls. They are leaves, nothing but leaves, and without fruit will add to our condemnation. Like the fig leaves of which Adam and Eve made themselves garments, they will not hide the nakedness of our souls from the eye of an all-seeing God, or give us boldness when we stand before Him at the last day. No: we must bear fruit, or be lost for ever! There must be fruit in our lives, - the fruit of repentance toward our Lord Jesus Christ, - and true holiness in our conversation. Without such fruits as these, a profession of Christianity will only sink us lower into hell.<sup>29</sup>

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- 25 See Lane pp 401,402. Following Bird he argues that the final clause of v 13 should translate, 'and the significant thing about this is that it was not the season for figs'. Such passages come where 'Jesus alludes to the Scriptures without explicitly quoting them'.
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*Pastor Gary Brady BA is the minister of Childs Hill Baptist Church, London*

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*The cursing of the fig tree is not so far out of character for Jesus as some would have us believe. The same Jesus exorcised demons so that two thousand pigs were drowned. Perhaps the fact that his two punitive miracles - the swine and the fig tree - are not directed against men should teach us something of Jesus' compassion. He who is to save his people from their sin and its consequences resorts to prophetic actions not directed against his people, in order to warn them of the binding power of the devil (the destruction of the swine) and of God's enmity against all hypocritical piety (the cursing of the fig tree).*

*D A Carson on Mt 21:18-19*

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# World Missions Following San Antonio and Manila

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*Statement of the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships at its meeting in Frankfurt, March 1990*

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## Introduction

Twenty years ago, on March 4, 1970, the Theological Convention of Confessing Fellowships published its widely acclaimed "Frankfurt Declaration on the Fundamental Crisis of Missions". At its 44th meeting, March 6-8, 1990, the Theological Convention addressed itself anew to a theological understanding of Christian world-mission in the modern age, for the following three reasons:

First of all, the Convention wanted to reflect upon and to reconsider that earlier event and what lay behind it. Secondly, it appeared necessary to the Convention to clarify the concept of mission in the light of various projects for increased missionary endeavour at the approach of the third millennium. Thirdly, the Convention was spurred on by two international conferences which have given new impetus to world mission in the past year. The first of these was the World Missions Conference sponsored by the **World Council of Churches**, held in **San Antonio**, Texas, May 21-31; the other was the Second International Congress for World Evangelization, convened by the evangelical **Lausanne Movement** and held in **Manila** (Philippines) July 11-20.

In reflecting upon these conferences, we were guided especially by the question whether the fundamental crisis of world Mission, as indicated by us in 1970, had in the meantime been resolved. Is there perhaps a growing theological consensus between the two mission movements, at that time so divergent, a consensus which may promise future cooperation and eventual unification? In response to this key question the European Convention of Confessing Fellowships was led to present the following statement of its position.

## I The Results from San Antonio

### A What awakened evangelical hopes

1 Not since the Willingen Conference of 1952 had biblically-minded participants of such a congress been able to bring in significant scriptural statements about the content and goal of mission, and that even in the first of the four sectional reports ("Turning to the Living God"). Particularly important here are the references to the Triune God as the Author and Sustainer of the mission of the Church, to God's merciful disposition to us in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord and Saviour, as well as to the commission of the Church to present a united witness to God's reconciling love in Him.

2 That the biblical understanding of salvation was able to get a hearing at this juncture was primarily due to the fact that the drafting of this Sectional Report was done by an evangelical theologian, Professor David Bosch. Numerous



representatives of the Orthodox Churches, especially the Greek missiologist Bishop Anastasios of Androussa,<sup>1</sup> exhibited the same spirit.

3 The attention drawn by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin to the special challenge which the secularization of the modern world poses to Christian mission - a point not included in the official agenda - was specially welcomed by evangelical participants as a necessary admonition to the Geneva Ecumenical Movement that it should address anew the question, "How can the West be converted?"

## **B What still challenges us to be on our guard**

1 In San Antonio the former director of the WCC Division for World Mission and Evangelism, Dr Eugene Stockwell, and his successor, Dr Christopher Duraisingh, clearly displayed their openness to a new understanding of salvation in social and political terms and to Utopian ideas of a renewed world-order.<sup>2</sup>

2 Above all they posited an alleged saving revelation of God in the non-Christian religions as well. They arrived there by such offensive statements as "Jesus is the only way by which most of us have found the way to God ... But in our encounters with people of other faiths we cannot deny that many of them have a profound relationship with God."<sup>3</sup> This is a direct contradiction of the statement of Jesus in John 14:6, "No one comes to the Father, but by me", as well as of the basic apostolic message in Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else ..."

3 The report of Section II (Participating in Suffering and Struggle), set alongside the Section I report as having equal importance, brings to light a massive social-revolutionary reversal of the message of Christ. Derived from this is a political commission to the disciples of Jesus "to join with the oppressed in the struggle for the transformation of society".<sup>4</sup> The commission of Jesus, according to Mt 28:18-20, stands fundamentally opposed to this.

4 In the same Section the "Intifada", the Arab revolt against Israeli sovereignty, is described uncritically as "an authentic manifestation of the creative power" (of the church).<sup>5</sup> In contrast to this partisanship for the Palestinians, the key significance of Israel in the saving purpose of God (Rom 9-11) was not mentioned at all.

5 The Section I report commends the "Conciliar Process" which like the New Age Movement, has as its goal a world which is politically, economically and religiously unified.<sup>6</sup>

6 For the first time at an ecumenical conference on mission, representatives of other religions were invited to San Antonio, not just as observers, but also as consultants. In the sections and in the plenary sessions they participated fully in the conversation.

7 We recognize that there were in San Antonio some good insights and worthy individual contributions. But to our sorrow, because of the points we have listed above, we are not able to identify any change of direction in the Geneva Department for World Mission and Evangelism. Those in charge are obviously continuing to follow the course set since Uppsala (1968), with which we first took issue in our Frankfurt Declaration of 1970.

## **C The “bridge-building” of some Evangelicals was premature**

1 In an attempt at bridge-building a group of about 160 participants at the San Antonio Conference “representing evangelical concerns” signed an Open Letter to the impending Lausanne Congress in Manila.<sup>7</sup> The letter contains a report of their “many good experiences” at the ecumenical conference. It also makes a plea for an acknowledgement of the social and political involvement of the World Council of Churches, and recommends, on the basis of an alleged “consensus” between “Ecumenicals” and “Evangelicals”, that the Geneva Commission on World Mission and the Lausanne Movement hold their next world conferences in partial cooperation, at the same time and in the same place.

2 In the light of the results from San Antonio the European Conference of Confessing Fellowships is not able to share the concerns and the viewpoint of this Letter. For this reason it expresses its appreciation to the Lausanne Executive Committee for not having adopted its proposal. Because of the existing theological attitudes such a coming together of the two movements would lead to unhealthy confusion. Indeed, on the evangelical side it could mean a disastrous distortion of world mission today.

## **II The Significance of the Manila Congress**

### **A A good continuation of Lausanne I**

Taken as a whole we find the course and the results of the Second International Congress for World Evangelization to be a cause for great thanksgiving. The “Manila Manifesto” provides hope for us that the evangelical movement will remain true to its stated programme in the “Lausanne Covenant” of 1974. We welcome especially the following aspects of the Manila Congress:

1 Lausanne II upheld with the utmost clarity the biblically-revealed uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father for all mankind. Thus the Geneva understanding of mission and dialogue was clearly rejected.

2 The assembly emphasised strongly the urgency of witnessing to Christ among people who have not yet been reached with the Gospel. In keeping with the Lausanne Covenant Para 6, the assembly thus held firmly to the propriety of proclamation in the overall task of mission.

3 Underscored at the same time was the special responsibility of Christian witnesses toward the physical and social needs of the recipients of the message. The millions of handicapped persons were identified as a frequently overlooked mission-field.

4 The Church of Jesus Christ as a whole was viewed as the mediator of the evangelistic witness, and the responsibility of the local congregation was emphasised.

5 More clearly than in earlier times the Lausanne Movement in Manila took its stand with brothers and sisters suffering persecution for Jesus’ sake.

6 The Lausanne Executive Committee, following the appeal from Os Guinness, adopted the slogan “Mission in the modern world without worldliness in

mission” to express the central challenge of the years to come.

## **B Weaknesses appearing at the Congress**

Despite our appreciation of Lausanne II in Manila we do not overlook the theological vagueness which the Congress occasionally showed. In particular the following questions were not satisfactorily answered:

1 Does the biblical order of things, with its greater emphasis on salvation than on physical well-being (Mk 1:34-38; 2:5) remain intact if, in the framework of Manila’s “integrated” understanding of mission, the physical need of the person carries the same weight as his/her spiritual need?

2 Which theological understanding of “the poor” is presupposed, where the poor are especially declared to be the recipients of the message about Christ? What constitutes that poverty which the Bible addresses?

3 What theological understanding of “fulness of the Spirit” applies when this appears as the prerequisite for empowered evangelism? Moreover, what is the relationship of “signs and wonders” to the missionary message, when the Scriptures often associate these with the deception which will occur in the last days (Mt 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:4f; Rev 13:13)?

4 What is the relationship between the Kingdom of God, in its present and future form, and the Church of Jesus Christ?

5 By what right does the Congress apply the term “incarnational” - a term which stems from the doctrine of the Son of God becoming flesh - to the requirement for mission to adapt itself to the social and cultural environment?

6 In the perspective of the Bible and of the Reformation, what interpretation do the non-Christian religions receive, particularly as touching their demonic side (1 Cor 10:20f; 2 Cor 6:14-16) - an aspect which is frequently overlooked?

7 What is the significance of biblical eschatological prophecy for the orientation and form of evangelism? It is precisely at this point that the Congress fell short of giving full answers to the theme which it set for itself, “Proclaim Christ until he comes!”

## **C Signs of threatening influences**

Along with a certain theological weakness the Manila Congress also brought to light some alien influences affecting the Lausanne Movement. These could, if they remain unchecked, pose a serious threat to the further course of the Movement as a healthy institution. There are in particular three sources of danger which we see here:

1 The first is the steady advance of the “Charismatic Movement”, which sees itself as a spiritual renewal movement. Especially in its “third wave” it lays claim to being the decisive force for the renewal of Christendom as a whole, and as an eschatological empowering for its mission. Apart from this rather presumptuous self-assessment in comparison with other renewal movements and traditions, the Charismatic Movement directly endangers the biblical understanding of mission. For there is a shift here in the central proclamation, away from Christ Crucified

(1 Cor 1:22-23; 2:2) toward the manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This leads to a certain loss of spiritual reality and balance. The practical danger to mission begins where, with this new quest for the Spirit - who according to the Johannine witness is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 15:20) - there is no consequential enquiry into biblical truth and sound doctrine (1 Tim 1:3; 4:1,16), nor a compliance with the command to discern the spirits (2 Cor 11:4; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

2 Second, and of equal note, is the no less determined effort of the so-called "radical evangelicals" to set up a "Kingdom Theology", which arises out of an "integrated" understanding of salvation and mission (see above, II B 1). What is dangerous here is the levelling-out of the divinely-ordained eras in salvation history which have to do with the final realization of God's saving purpose. For the most passionate advocates of this theology the corresponding view of mission is very close to that of the social revolutionaries in the Geneva Ecumenical Movement. This further encourages attempts at "bridge-building".

3 Finally, questionable influences are also present where individuals and organizations attempt to calculate and contrive in advance their missionary results according to their own set goals ("AD 2000"). They rely on carefully calculated statistics and the use of modern strategies and technologies. What is dangerous here is an excessive trust in human ability to achieve something which God alone can grant, and a resulting perversion of God's mission into a human mission.

### **III Towards a biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" view of Mission**

Our position as so far explained has shown, on the one hand, our concern for the direction of the Geneva Division of Missions, in which it has calmly estranged itself from the biblical view by locking mission into a "here and now" exhibition of salvation and unity. On the other hand, regarding the Lausanne Movement, we have expressed our appreciation, while at the same time addressing the theological weaknesses and external influences which could endanger its scriptural basis.

Therefore the future of efforts toward international mission appears promising to us only in so far as both streams, by rejecting any anti-biblical spirit and resisting all alien influences, come to a renewed and deepened consciousness of the biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" ie salvation-history view of mission. This present statement is to be understood as an earnest call to such a consciousness, in thankful indebtedness to a heritage which was grounded in the missiology of the Reformation and of classical Pietism. We are reminded of the fact that representatives of this heritage - men such as Karl Heim, Karl Hartenstein and Walter Freytag - once desired to integrate this in a helpful and corrective way into the ecumenical theology of mission. In the present discussion about the commission of the Church of Jesus Christ in this world there are above all ten key affirmations concerning the biblical "heilsgeschichtlich" thought about mission, which appear to us to be crucial:

## **1 The Source, Content and Goal of Mission**

Mission arises out of the biblically-revealed plan of salvation of the Triune God (Jn 3:16; Eph 1:9-10; 1 Tim 2:4), and proclaims the good news that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19-21). Through this established work of reconciliation people are rescued out of their sinful and lost condition, brought under the merciful rule of Christ (Col 1:12-14; 1 Pet 2:9), and prepared for the coming glorious Kingdom of God (Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 15:24-28). The ultimate goal is “that God may be all in all”. Mission, then, is to concern itself, first and last, with giving glory to the holy God!

## **2 Mission’s Message of Hope**

Mission addresses a message of true hope to a humanity which has fallen prey to spiritual ruin and, as a result, is also increasingly threatened by external disaster (Acts 2:40; Gal 3:15; Eph 2:1ff; 1 Tim 4:10; Tit 1:2). The “poor in spirit”, that is, those who realize their full helplessness and humbly acknowledge that they can make no demands upon God (Mt 5:3; Is 57:15), are the ones who accept the gospel and experience its joy. Having been reconciled to God through Christ, our persistent trust in Him allows us to bear patiently the sufferings of the present age (Rom 5:1-5; 8:17-25) and encourages us at the same time to alleviate or to prevent the suffering of our fellow human beings (Lk 12:35-48; Gal 6:9f; Jas 2:14-17).

## **3 The Empowering for Mission**

Mission is only possible through reliance upon the personal presence of the exalted Son of God, promised to his messengers (Mt 28:20), and upon the help of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the effective delivery of the message (Jn 16:8-11; Acts 1:8). Since the task of mission can only be accomplished in the closest possible fellowship with the Triune God, a firm steadfastness in Him and in His Word and Sacrament (Jn 6:53-58; 15:1-8; 1 Cor 11:26) is the basic prerequisite for all missionary activity. In addition to this the prayers of the missionary church are extremely important (Eph 6:18-20).

## **4 The Battlefield of Mission**

Just as the Son of God came into the world to free it from its demonic occupying forces through his own obedience unto death (Jn 12:31; 1 Jn 3:8b), so also does Jesus send his disciples (Jn 20:21) into the world as sheep among wolves (Mt 10:1,16). Christian mission bears in mind the fact that the people of this fallen world, in every area of their lives, their religions and their cultures, all stand within the devil’s sphere of influence (Lu 4:6; Jn 14:30; 1 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; Rev 12:9). Only by accepting for themselves the victory won at Golgotha (Rev 12:11) is it possible for those who come to faith to be saved from this perilous situation (Acts 14:15; Heb 2:14). This missionary battle against the cunning spiritual powers of darkness must not be confused with political battles; it can only be fought with spiritual weapons (Eph 6:10-18). Already during this period of evangelization the redemption of the world to its Creator is occurring by stages (Mt 22:44; Lu 10:18; Jn 12:31; 1 Cor 15:24-28; Rev 12:8f), so that various cultures

may enjoy its benefits (Phil 4:8; Rev 21:24). The ultimate overthrow of the devil will not, however, take place until the Lord returns with his heavenly host (Rev 12:12; 19:11-20; 21:24). At that time the Lord will separate for ever the saved from the disobedient (Mt 24:31-46).

### **5 Mission, the Holy Spirit, and the Discerning of Spirits**

Mission follows the biblical admonition to discern the spirits (1 Jn 4:1-3), for Satan is able to masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:3-4,14). The Holy Spirit does not seek personal glory, but rather glorifies Christ (Jn 16:13f). With a positive watchfulness we must distinguish the Holy Spirit from the human spirit, as from all living and deceitful spirits of demons (Acts 16:16-18), which, with all their many manifestations, are forerunners of the coming Antichrist (2 Thess 2:7-12; 1 Jn 4:3).

Since the Holy Spirit, by whom all born-again Christians are baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13), apportions gifts to each member of the body as He wills (v11), we have no right to strain after a supposed "fulness of the Spirit" which necessarily shows itself in the reappearance of all the early Christian miracles. The authorization which Jesus promised his disciples for their mission is much more to be seen in the continual assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will fill us and guide us (Gal 5:18; Eph 5:18), so as to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13; 14:26), and through our witness convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement to come (Jn 16:7-11). To those authorized by Christ the Spirit gives power for the preaching of the Word, so that all who believe can make their own the priceless gift which Christ himself purchased for us on the cross, namely the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20:22f).

### **6 The Prospects for Mission**

It is sufficient for the messengers of the Lord to know that while spiritual fruit is indeed promised for their faithful service there can be no guarantee of full success within the present order (Jn 15:16). Rather we have to be prepared to meet increased spiritual struggles and persecutions as well as to suffer rejection (Mt 10:16-25; Jn 15:18-21). According to Jesus' prophecy, his return - which we are not able to calculate - will not be preceded by a Christianization of the world but by a great falling-away (Mt 24:9-13). Therefore a readiness for sacrifice and martyrdom, together with an active brotherly sympathy for those who suffer because of their witness to Christ, will be positive proof of our own faithfulness (1 Pet 5:8; Rev 2:10; 12:11).

### **7 Church of Christ, Kingdom of God and Mission**

By mediating the Lord's own Gospel of the Kingdom (Mk 1:15) mission prepares the way for God's sovereign rule which he will set up when he returns in glory (Mt 24:31). His church gathered together throughout the world represents the new humanity (Rom 5:14; 2 Cor 5:17f; Eph 2:14-16) and already constitutes in this passing age the merciful dawning of that kingdom of Christ. As a truly alternative fellowship - that is, a fellowship which has been renewed by the Holy Spirit - the Church provides a foretaste of the coming kingdom of peace (Is

2:2-4) through its activity of love (Rom 13:8-10; 2 Pet 1:7) and justice. In this way, by the power of God's act of reconciliation in Christ, the church contributes to change in the world and in society from within (Mt 13:33; Philemon; 1 Pet 2:9f; Jas 2:14-17).

## **8 The Temporary Nature of the Social Achievements of Mission**

In respect of the role that we as Christians are commanded to fill in the bringing about of more human standards of living (Jer 29:7; Mt 5:13-16), mission soberly recognizes the limited and temporary nature of all efforts which have as their goal the preserving and reorganizing of conditions in the world (Mt 26:11). Mission is aware of the inevitable end of the first creation, as a result of sin and the power of death which have invaded it (2 Pet 3:7-10). The promise of a "holistic salvation" will not be realized until the future redemption of our bodies (Phil 3:20f), in connection with the eschatological renewal of the entire creation which "groans until now" (Rom 8:18-25). For this reason a "holistic salvation" cannot merely form the content of a "holistic programme of mission".

In the same way, the solidarity which mission ought to display with suffering humanity must not be allowed to lead us into involvement with selfish power-struggles. It is for this very reason that we are not able to call such solidarity "incarnational", for Christ's own incarnation took the exact opposite direction, namely the renunciation of power (Phil 2:5-8)!

## **9 The Urgency of Mission**

Mission is spurred on by a sense of holy urgency precisely because it awaits the complete fulfilment of the biblical promises of salvation at the return of Christ (Heb 9:28b). Jesus linked his second coming, for the completion of his redemptive work, with a preceding testimony to his Gospel among all peoples, including Israel (Mt 24:14; Acts 1:6-8; Rom 11:25-27; 1 Cor 9:16). At the same time mission is carried out in the awareness of the seasons of salvation history - "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24b; Acts 16:9f) - which God has personally set for the proclamation of the Gospel and for its saving effects in those who receive it. At the time when the full number of the Gentiles have entered into salvation, then all Israel will be saved and God's purpose will have reached its triumphant goal (Rom 11:11-15; 25-36).

## **10 The Confidence of Mission**

Mission takes place in the joyful confidence that Jesus Christ, on the basis of the victory he has already won (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-16) and of his approaching final victory at the Consummation (1 Cor 15:25f; Rev 19), will guide the work of his commissioned messengers step by step toward the fulfilment that God has prepared (Phil 1:6). There is no human or superhuman adversary who can thwart this victory (Is 46:9f; 55:8-13; 1 Cor 15:57f)!

## **The Outlook**

We came together in Frankfurt at a time when striking events seem to be on the increase, not only in the political history of nations - as witness the break-up of the former "Eastern Bloc" - but also in the natural order and in the life of the

churches. The fact that at the same moment in Seoul, South Korea, the "World Convocation for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" was meeting gave us pause for reflection. For at that conference the "Conciliar Process", given its initial impulse in Germany, attained for the first time a global ecumenical dimension. In our judgement the Conciliar Process presents a threat to the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ, in the form of a radical concentration on worldly issues which leads to a perversion of the Church's redemptive commission.

More important for us, however, was the gratifying news of newly opening doors to areas in which the gospel could not be freely proclaimed up to now.

Such a combination of circumstances at this time holds for us the force of a divine admonition, to respond all the more carefully and obediently to the mandate of Jesus for mission and evangelism. Indeed, Jesus himself urged us to discern the signs of the times (Mt 24:32-33; Jn 21:7-31). We are aware that only God the Father knows the final hour of history (Mk 13:32), but we are commanded to be always ready (Lu 12:39f) and to prove ourselves to be faithful servants in the carrying out of Christ's commission, calmly and soberly, until He comes again. Jesus Christ has promised, "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing" (Lk 12:43).

Therefore we unanimously uphold the theme of the Lausanne II Congress: "Proclaim Christ until he comes!"

## References

- 1 As the conference moderator he gave a keynote address to San Antonio - which unfortunately was hardly discussed by the Conference - printed in the Conference Report: *International Review of Mission*, Vol LXVIII, Nos 311/312 (July/October 1989): pp 311-328
- 2 Cf the papers by Dr E Stockwell ("Mission Issues for Today and Tomorrow", *ibid*, pp 303-315) and Ch Duraisingh ("San Antonio and some Continuing Concerns of the CWMA", *ibid*, pp 400-408)
- 3 E Stockwell, *ibid*, p 343
- 4 *Ibid*, p 357
- 5 *Ibid*, p 365
- 6 *Ibid*, p 356 Cf P Beyerhaus/L E.v. Padberg (editors): *Der konziliare Prozess - Realität und Utopie*, Asslar 1990
- 7 *IRM* (July/October 1982): pp 431-435

*This statement was accepted unanimously by the participants of the EUROPEAN CONVENTION OF CONFESSING FELLOWSHIPS and signed on behalf of the INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN NETWORK by the Rt Rev Oskar Sakrausky (Honorary President) and Professor Dr Peter Beyerhaus (President).*

*Additional copies can be obtained from ICN Office, Stiffurtstrasse 5, D- 7400 Tübingen, Germany.*



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# Salvation without Evangelism

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*Daniel Webber*

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*A review article on MISSION AND MEANINGLESSNESS, by Peter Cotterell, SPCK, 1990, 332 pp, £12.95.*

Subtitled, 'The Good News in a World of Suffering and Disorder' this is an important work from the new Principal of the London Bible College. It claims to be 'the first book by a leading British Evangelical to recognise God's saving activity among those who live without the Church. It holds out a special challenge to traditional Evangelicalism, while also having much to say which Christians of all persuasions will find stimulating and refreshing.'

## **The contents of the book**

The book itself is divided into four parts. Under the heading, 'Religion, Religions, and the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life', **the first part** seeks to draw attention to the fact that between the two apparent boundaries set to human existence, birth and death, life seems to make no sense. All religions, we are told, recognise this problem and seek to explain it. Man-made religions, however, not only fail to provide an adequate explanation of '*dukkha*' (Buddhism's word for the general unsatisfactoriness of life), but are hopelessly contradictory in the explanations they offer.

Having subjected the pluralism of John Hick and the inclusivisms of Karl Rahner and Hans Kueng to rigorous examination Dr Cotterell turns to the exclusivism of the Bible. This he finds confirmed by the teaching of both its Testaments but, in view of the fact that many live and die without overtly hearing the gospel of Christ, he wonders whether there is biblical warrant for 'some more general revelation available to all, irrespective of the special revelation through Scripture and the incarnation' (p 60) which could be regarded as salvific.

Acknowledging that there is some support for a general revelation in the New Testament (eg Jn 1:9; Rom 1:18ff) he refrains, however, from drawing the conclusion that these passages describe this revelation as salvific. Instead, he finds hope for such a conviction in Acts 17:24-27.

Criticism is then focused on some of those whom he describes as holding to 'The Historic Conservative Position of General Revelation', while at the same time taking some encouragement from what he deems to be the current views of Sir Norman Anderson and John Stott. Even Charles Hodge is enlisted in support of the view to which he is moving! Following this he goes on to consider two other contentious, but related issues: conditional immortality and annihilationism. This first section then concludes with 'Ten Theses' which are his attempt to state a biblical answer to the dilemma posed by the exclusivist claims of Christianity and the fact that many face an eternity without having heard the gospel.

**Part two** is concerned with 'Mission as Response to the Apparent Meaninglessness of Life'. In addition to providing an exegetical response to the problem posed, Dr Cotterell seeks to formulate a Christian response in terms of mission. This, we are informed, requires an understanding of the nature of the Church, the human predicament she is to confront and the content of her mission.

In Matthew's Gospel we are invited to see our Lord's own identification with *dukkha*; one that will culminate in his passion. In the combination of his words and deeds we find an understanding of human disorder and the promise of its ultimate reversal. His dual mission is but a foreshadowing of that to be taken up by the Church. 'Mission is in essence', he says, 'the Church's struggle to resolve the apparent meaninglessness of life, through its proclamation of Good News, and through its compassionate ministry of sharing its resources, and through its programme of confronting all oppressive powers, secular and spiritual, in the power of the Spirit and in the name of Christ' (p 136).

In his discussion of the relationship between calling and election he clearly shows a preference for Barth's view that 'in Christ we are all potentially elected' (p 140). But should man choose darkness rather than light, then the only alternative to grace is wrath. However, if the choice is light, then this must involve imitating Christ, and part of the Church's genius is that through her life and witness something of eternity is seen to be breaking into this present world.

**The third section** examines 'Alternative Response to Meaninglessness: Islam, Marxism and Liberation Theology'. This is a short but useful section providing surveys of each response and identifying the various ways in which groups and individuals have reinterpreted their founders views. There is also an assessment made of the inadequacies of each of these responses to the problem of meaninglessness.

**The final part** takes on the book's overall title, 'Mission and Meaninglessness'. Here Dr Cotterell concludes that the Christian mission is to include a holistic response to the human condition. Christian mission has something to say and, importantly, action to take in respect of every occasion of meaninglessness. Although the Church is not able to explain every experience of *dukkha*, she is able to assure people that justice will prevail in the end and our own sufferings will help us to understand those of others. In terms of action, the Church is to identify with the oppressed even to the point of disobeying unjust laws (providing we are willing to submit to the consequence of our disobedience), oppose unholy alliances and demonstrate by her own community practice her belief that there should be no needy people in the world. 'Mission', he concludes in his postscript, 'is more than the multiplying of missionaries or even churches. It is rather the confrontation of the human condition, of human meaninglessness, and in the name of God so resolving it that God's Kingdom comes' (p 278).

## **Strengths and weaknesses**

Whatever may be said in terms of the weaknesses of this book, it needs to be acknowledged that **there is also much of value here**. For example, one of its

real strengths is to be found in the way the author brings together a wide range of useful information and analysis. His treatment of Islam, Marxism and Liberation Theology is most helpful, as is his treatment of pluralism and inclusivism. His opposition to prosperity theology is quite devastating and his assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the Church Growth movement seem fair. He correctly identifies many of the ills of modern Europe and is to be commended for seeking to keep on the agenda of our all too often indifferent hearts the appalling suffering experienced by many in our modern world.

And yet despite all this - and in addition to the major problem of the so-called 'special challenge to traditional evangelicalism' - **there are some important weaknesses** that need to be considered. For example, we think that there are times when he comes perilously close to undermining the perspicuity of Scripture (p 167) and it is certainly unhelpful to suggest that inerrancy should be relegated to a list of secondary issues (p 187).

Furthermore, his treatment of conditional immortality and annihilationism is such that, while he does not specifically identify himself with these positions, he makes clear that his real sympathies are with those who do. It is revealing that although he is forced to confess that the existence of an eternal hell is clearly taught in Scripture (p 74), in referring to 'imagery' and 'time' he does so in such a way as to undermine the awful prospect of its endlessness.

Perhaps more central to the author's immediate concern is his treatment of the Church. In our view, this is most unsatisfactory. Certain statements (see pp 133,134) force us to the conclusion that his definition of the Church is far too broad and that almost anything with a Christian label attached to it is to be viewed as making a contribution to the truth.

Questions ought also to be raised in connection with Dr Cotterell's perception of the role of the Church in the world. Although it has become increasingly common for evangelicals to think of mission in broader terms than the evangelization of the lost, serious doubts ought to be raised against this trend. It is not that we are against Christians being socially and politically involved, but we are concerned about the Church and missionaries seeing this as their legitimate role in the world. Part of the problem here is that insufficient consideration is given to the distinction between the legitimate role of the individual Christian in the world, and that of the Church and its appointed labourers. In our view the 'Great Commission' passages do not support the wider role for the Church and history suggests that whenever the temporal is raised by the Church to the same level as the spiritual, it is the latter that inevitably suffers.

## **The salvation of the unevangelized**

No matter what critics may say to the contrary, Dr Cotterell is in no doubt that the Bible does make exclusive claims for salvation in Jesus Christ alone. It is because he takes this seriously and, as he sees it, the need to preserve the integrity of God, that **he looks for a salvific remedy in general revelation.** It is the fact that there are, and always have been, vast numbers of people who

have never heard the gospel, which makes this a very important issue.

His position is perhaps best summarised in the first of his ten theses calculated to address this problem. There he states that, 'To any reasonable person it would appear to be unjust to condemn people to an eternal hell for failing to avail themselves of a medicine of which they have never heard and, moreover, of which they could not have heard' (p 75).

Dissatisfied with the reply that 'the unevangelized do not die because they are unevangelized but because of their sin' (p 68), he suggests that we must find a solution which will not 'outrage common sense and our common ideas of justice' (p 83).

Now it has to be said that it is difficult to see how he can imagine that he has Scripture on his side at this point. Even Acts 17:24-27 does not help him because the point that the apostle is concerned to make is not that men and women do seek and find God through the vehicle of general revelation, but that all are without excuse for having refused the revelation to which they have had access.

Moreover, since when has 'hearing' been the crucial issue? We admit that it is an important issue, but surely not the crucial issue. What about the grace necessary to respond? Do all men naturally possess this, And if not, is not the logic of Dr Cotterell's position certain to drive us on to insist that it would be unjust of God not to provide this grace for everyone?

This, in turn, raises another question in our mind. Why is it that a proper treatment of Original Sin and its consequences is so noticeably absent from this work? Is this merely a coincidence? Its deliberate exclusion would certainly go some way towards explaining, for example, **his virtual deification of common sense**. Are we really justified in being so confident about fallen man's view of that which constitutes justice? It is true that Dr Cotterell does construct a doctrine of lostness in which he refers to man's fall and sin, but it is the doctrine Original Sin that is crucial to our understanding and expectation of man. One cannot help but conclude that he would be less confident about the importance of 'hearing' to the preservation of God's justice if this doctrine were clearly set out in orthodox terms. Moreover, it would make him more cautious about suggesting that natural man, when faced with general revelation, does not inevitably use this knowledge perversely (p 64). Paul seems to suggest that in receiving the knowledge of God through revelation, it is natural for man to 'suppress' it (Rom 1:20).

We believe that those who adopt the traditional position which Dr Cotterell opposes are, in fact, scripturally closer to the dictates of justice. **For God will not condemn men and women for that which they have not heard. They will be judged only for their sins**, including their distortion and rejection of the knowledge which they do possess. From those who have heard the gospel, of course, much more will be required. This is justice.

*Rev Daniel Webber is Director of the European Missionary Fellowship*

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# The New Age Movement

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*Simon Chase*

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## Introduction

The New Age phenomenon is not a movement in the organised sense of that word. There is no formal creed, no central organisation and no way of taking out membership. To say it is an umbrella term would be an understatement; it is a catch-all title to subsume a diverse variety of ideas and philosophies, psychological, medical and religious viewpoints that all tend to the same direction. In this sense it can be seen as a movement.

Although seen by some as a conspiracy it would be a mistake to view it as such. There is no master strategy or secret plan. As we shall see, that is contrary to a New Age outlook. Even though a best-selling book on this subject by Marilyn Ferguson is called *THE AQUARIAN CONSPIRACY*, she wants to use the word in its literal sense - a breathing together. You do not *join* the New Age but rather come into contact with it. It has no visible unity but sees many people and groups working towards the same end.

In fact the syncretism, eclecticism and pluralism of the New Age can lead us to see its influence as more than it actually is; Green issues are very much in harmony with New Age thinking - but a green person is not necessarily a New-Ager. An example even closer to home is that of homeopathic medicine - that can be an expression of New Age ideology, or it can be approached in entirely other ways. We must beware of tarring everything with the same brush.

Three identifiable elements have come together to make up the New Age movement. **Firstly**, in the 1960s and '70s of Flower Power and Hippie fame, there was a rejection of the materialism of Western Society. Exploration of altered states of consciousness via drugs and Eastern meditation techniques became popular. However, that counter-culture in itself had no lasting future and people heading for San Francisco today do not bother with flowers for their hair.

Nevertheless, whilst the student drop-out is now well over thirtysomething, his initial sprint for freedom has been undergirded by a **second element**: the assimilation of a great body of ideas and practices tracing their origins back to the ancient civilisations of India and Egypt. Nurtured by the Gnostics, the alchemists and the Qabalists, in the sixteenth century Jacob Boehme popularised these ideas as did Emmanuel Swedenborg in the seventeenth century. William Blake in the eighteenth century continued to express ideas essentially in harmony with New Age approaches. By the nineteenth century these materials were all becoming generally available. Firstly through the Spiritualist movement from 1848 and much more significantly with the Theosophical Society founded in 1875, Eastern ideas on spirituality became more widely accepted in the West.

**The third element** of the New Age movement is the claiming of various scientific hypotheses as providing support for viewing reality in this kind of way. Rather than seeing the world as a giant mechanism, Einstein's theory of Relativity-forced widespread reappraisal. The latest theories in quantum physics have been exploited to argue that the basic element of reality is not, after all, matter, but energy which can manifest itself in various ways. Perhaps the most popular idea hijacked by the New Age movement is Professor James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. In 1969 he suggested that the lithosphere (the solid part of the planet), the biosphere and the atmosphere form a single integrated system. In fact, the earth should be seen as a single living entity.

One further point to make by way of introduction is that just as the New Age can be expressed in manifold ways, so it can demand and accept many levels of commitment. Someone can be utterly immersed in it or simply *dabble*. **Basic tenets of the movement are the inviolability of an individual's will, and the freedom to choose one's own spiritual path.**

## **A New Age**

Some years ago a West End musical called *Hair* caused a furore over its stage nudity; what may have escaped the notice of Christians at the time was its theme song - *This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius*. The concept underlying this is an astrological one - that just as there are monthly cycles for individuals, so there are ages, lasting around 2100 years, affecting the earth. Each age has its distinctive, and we are now entering fully into the Age of Aquarius, which will bring in a new order of harmony, understanding and peace.

Claims that humanity is on the verge of a new world order are not new, but what makes the Aquarian claim different from, notably, the Marxist claim of inevitable progress towards utopia is the place identified for revolution. Revolution indeed must occur, but not by the capturing of the institutions of society. Revolution must first occur within you and me. Thus whilst the New Age cosmology embraces the whole universe, the starting place for action is within ME. The future course of humanity begins inside the individual human being.

## **A New Consciousness**

To be a New-Ager it is not enough then simply to assent to a set of ideas. To do anything really to assist the ushering in of this time of harmony, we must first be brought into harmony with reality as it really is. This requires a new consciousness, and this is critical to the whole emergence of a new world order.

According to Marilyn Ferguson, what is needed is a paradigm-shift in our understanding of self, society and the world. A paradigm shift is a radical change in outlook that comes about because too many facts emerge that cannot be explained in terms of the old paradigm. She cites the change from thinking of the world as flat to thinking of it as spherical or the change from Newtonian physics to Einstein's model as examples of scientific paradigm shifts. Our failing at the moment is that we try to solve old problems in the old ways. Instead we should be trying to solve these problems at an entirely different level. In the present

context, **change must come about not by political programmes but by inner transformation to a higher state of consciousness.**

As the number of individuals with altered consciousness grows, so eventually a critical point will be reached when the whole of humanity will be suffused with these ideas and the Age of Aquarius will have fully dawned. The intellectual support for such a concept is found in a scientific hypothesis called *Morphic Resonance* which postulates that knowledge is passed on from generation to generation in a given species.

All this presupposes that we naturally have a low state of consciousness, and this is exactly what is mooted. Generally we function at only a fraction of the capacity our minds are capable of. The daily routine and the materialistic outlook of society mean that sometimes we are barely awake. If we are to experience our full potential, we must become more attuned to the right way of seeing things.

The achievement of this changed consciousness goes under various names; *enlightenment*, *kensho* or *samadhi*. The means of getting there is known in New Age terminology as *transformation*. Much of the clutter of meditation, therapy and navel-contemplation of the New Age relates to the various means of passing through this process to emerge as an enlightened one.

## **Reincarnation and Karma**

That reincarnation is in some way related to the New Age is well known; how exactly it fits in is important to grasp. It is not possible to say that we only live once. Rather, we are in a process of existence that manifests itself in a great series of incarnations on this planet. Death is not the end, but the passageway back to a debriefing area, where the lessons learnt can be assessed and the next incarnation planned in relation to what still has to be experienced. In an interview for *The Times Saturday Review* Shirley MacLaine said "Sometimes the biggest internal laughs I have felt have been at funerals, having lost someone really dear to me. It's a release of tension, an outlet from tragedy." As souls passing, sometimes painfully, through a long process of evolution, each earthly incarnation must lead us on. The climax of this is the joining of the individual with the total, so that the culmination of finding oneself is actually the losing of oneself in the All - which is the One.

When we begin as infant souls we have little choice about where or whom we incarnate as. In each life we generate *karma*, both good and bad. *Karma* is explained as the spiritual law of cause and effect, or "that which we sow we shall reap". However both sowing and reaping occur on the earth in incarnations. In this way successive incarnations have to deal with the current state of our karma account. As we mature and progress, however, we can, in conference with the spiritual helpers we encounter between lifetimes, plan which incarnations will be most helpful to us or to those with whom we are linked. Lorna St Aubyn teaches that there are three stages to dealing with karma in any given incarnation; the retributive, where we must face and resolve issues set up by our karma in past incarnations: the redemptive, where we move on from putting right on our own

account to putting right in a servant-mentality for others and other situations: and lastly the transcendent when the backlog of personal issues is fully dealt with and we can concentrate on service of others.

Therefore, as she sets it out, the teaching on karma and reincarnation ought to dissuade us from living in utter self-indulgence because you will have to pay for that sooner or later. Every lifetime that you fail to face and resolve these things means that the situation will recur subsequently and continually until put right.

St Aubyn goes on to mention the existence of *group karma*, whereby we are related to a soul group and somehow progress together, and further postulates the existence of *national karma* in these disturbing terms;

As a general principle, there would seem to be certain countries and races that have agreed to be used in order to expiate specific issues or to accomplish certain tasks. Poland could be seen as illustrating this very clearly. For several centuries she has been used as the lightning conductor of Eastern Europe, helping to contain through her own suffering the potential for wider conflagrations. Such excesses of persecution and occupation, imprisonment and exile as have been borne by the Poles can only make a modicum of sense if seen as a corporate act of redemption. That they were one of the countries most affected by the Chernobyl disaster seems to confirm this pattern.<sup>1</sup>

## **The New Age Human Being**

If each human being has vast potential that is never really tapped, and if a change of consciousness can bring us into the realisation of that potential, man must be a different being from the one described in the Bible. This is very much the case.

In New Age thinking, man is not a being created in the image of a distinct personal Creator-God. Rather he is an expression and manifestation of the all. Thus he is both a part of the planet and, inasmuch as there is anything divine at all, he is also part of the divine.

Therefore Marilyn Ferguson can speak of

Human-kind embedded in nature ... we are *not* victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions or conditioning. Heirs to evolutionary riches, we are capable of imagination, invention, and experiences we have only glimpsed. Human nature is neither good nor bad but open to continuous transformation and transcendence.<sup>2</sup>

In the same vein Lorne St Aubyn can believe of people that

Once they re-connect with the idea that they are an integral part of the planet rather than a casual visitor to it, they will no longer stand by and watch in silence the dreadful destruction being perpetrated on a home they loved for so long. Deeply involved in its destiny, they will begin to fulfil their roles as droplets of the Divine.<sup>3</sup>

Human beings then have no existence distinct from the universe, but are partial expressions of it. Chinese thought defined the whole universe as dependent on the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, the complementary principles. Behind this duality



is a singularity - a universal energy known as *Ch'i* and almost identical to the Hindu concept of *prana*. The way to both enlightenment and wellness, is being rightly aligned with this energy in its dual expression.

The series of STAR WARS films had the hero, Luke Skywalker attuning himself to the *force* so that he might become a Jedi knight. His father had once been a great warrior too, but had given way to the dark side of the force - not a completely different power, but its negative aspect. New Age living involves being rightly attuned to the energy of the universe - in Star Wars parlance, *may the force be with you*.

The way we can tap into this universal energy source is via the seven *chakras*, or energy centres in the human body. Each one of these has a special function, and good health is only possible when these are all in good working order, both in themselves and in relation to all the others. They are called chakras, meaning wheels, because when viewed by a clairvoyant this is how they appear. Such people can assess the state of the whole body's energy balance and locate problem areas. The first chakra is at the base of the spine and this *root* chakra gives us our drive, lack or even excess of it. The seventh chakra at the crown of the head, is the means of contacting our higher self and those spiritual beings willing to help us. According to Lorna St Aubyn, in paintings of Jesus this chakra is depicted as a halo.

## Help People Can Seek

All these reincarnations, working out of karma and balancing and tapping in to fundamental energies is a tricky business. New Age writers acknowledge that the uninitiated can easily come unstuck; what people need is help. One way is by attuning ourselves with the Earth's own chakra points. This is the thinking behind sites of special spiritual interest such as Glastonbury. Stone circles can also be at the focus of the earth's energies. There are said to be connections between them called *ley lines* and, supposedly, medieval man instinctively knew where to site his holy places to draw maximum benefit from them.

The benefit goes the other way too. By spending time at such places we can bring man increasingly into harmony with the earth and heal some of the disruption in the earth's own energy centres that centuries of man's abuse have created.

The other main way of help on the spiritual path is through guidance. The passing Piscean age brought learning as pupils receiving from a master; in the Aquarian age people will "learn to find within themselves that still small voice which can grow increasingly authoritative if we have learned to listen with humility, through a channel unencumbered with our own wishes and fears."<sup>4</sup>

So says Lorna St Aubyn. Even more dangerously she continues;

Our greatest initial difficulty in establishing contact with something beyond our everyday self will probably lie in trusting a process with which our conscious minds will feel uneasy ... . We are not taught ...to listen to dreams

and intuitions ... . Rational thought has, of course, a vital role to play, but it must not become so powerful that it excludes from our lives the whole rich world of the unconscious.<sup>5</sup>

It is through the assistance of discarnate souls that we can receive guidance and help in living life. However these are neither omniscient nor necessarily benevolent and great care is urged in discriminating. Assistance should be sought from people who are well versed in these areas so that dangers can be avoided. One, two or three of these spirit guides can then be resorted to, depending on the particular situation and their own expertise. One way in which help from entities in the spiritual realm is said to be received is by *channelling*. Whereas mediumship supposedly contacts the spirits of the departed, channelling relates to these discarnate beings. Apparently the actress Sharon Gless, made famous in the TV series "Cagney and Lacey", when receiving a television award for her role, acknowledged the aid of a spirit-guide called Lazaris who is channelled through one Jack Pursel. Seth is another spirit-entity who apparently channelled through Jane Roberts. This woman spent much of her life from 1963 until 1984, when she died, channelling and publishing this material. Seth is one of the best known and most widely published of these guides; **the basic message of the books is that we each create our own reality through our beliefs and desires.**

The word *occult* is frequently used in New Age writings, but whereas we would hear such a word with fear, those involved consider it simply as the means of entry into the hidden wisdom of the ages. Magic and witchcraft or *wicca* form a part of this, as do shamanism and divination. Each of these elements attempts in one way or another to link with the reality behind appearances and the energy available in the universe so that we may make better progress in living in this incarnation. Changing of situations and guidance for the future, analysis of problems and healing from diseases all come under this form of help.

## **New Age Christianity**

There is a distinctive reinterpretation of Christian doctrine in New Age thinking so that **key words and ideas that define truth are emptied of their Biblical content and filled with something other.** Walter Martin's book "THE NEW AGE CULT" identifies in the words of New Age teachers eight perversions of Scripture doctrines.<sup>6</sup>

- 1 God: In a sense there is no such thing as God, God does not exist. And in another sense, there is nothing else but God - only God exists .... . All is God. And because all is God, there is no God.
- 2 The Trinity: Eternal thought is one; in essence it is two - Intelligence and force; and when they breathe, a child is born; this child is Love. And thus the Triune God stands forth, whom men call Father-Mother-Child.
- 3 Jesus Christ: What is the Christ? Within all life there exists a quality, an energy, which has as its basic characteristic irresistible growth, irresistible and inevitable expression of divinity. It is a quality which says that whatever form I am enclosed in, I will not be held prisoner of that form, but I will transform it

into a greater form. I will use all life, all experiences as stepping stones to greater revelations of divinity. The Christ is the basic evolutionary force within creation.

4 The Atonement: The crucifixion is nothing more than an extreme example. Its value, like that of any teaching device, lies solely in the kind of learning it facilitate.

5 Salvation: How simple is salvation! All it says is what was never true (ie sin and its punishment) is not true now, and never will be. The impossible has not occurred, and can have no effects. That is all.

6 Eternity and Judgement: God never made a heaven for man; he never made hell; we are creators and we make our own. The Last Judgement might be called a process of right evaluation. It simply means that everyone will finally come to understand what is worthy and what is not. After this, the ability to choose can be directed rationally.

7 Demonic Powers: It is important to see that Lucifer, as I am using this term, describes an angel, a being, a great and mighty planetary consciousness. It does not describe that popular thought-form of Satan who seeks to lead man down a path of sin and wrong doing. That is a human creation, and yet it is a creation that has some validity but represents the collective thought-form of all those negative energies which man has built up and created.

8 The Second Coming: In a very real sense Findhorn represents the Second Coming. Any individual, any centre, who so embodies the new that it becomes a magnetic source to draw the new out of the rest of the world, embodies the Second Coming.

It is clear that historic, Scriptural Christianity is utterly at variance with New Age views of spiritual reality. In fact the New Age writers argue that so-called mainstream Christianity is not representative of the real thing and that this was lost with the demise of the Gnostics. Indeed, much of New Age spirituality would be amenable to that kind of heresy.

## **The New Age Mentality**

Hand the man on the Clapham omnibus a New Age book and the chances are he won't have a clue what is being said. Our late 20th century secular and materialistic viewpoint is a long way from the New Age mentality. It seems unlikely that vast numbers of people in this country are likely to be won over rapidly to such a belief at present.

However, whilst the New Age itself may have some way to go, we should be aware of the factors that are going into creating a climate that will eventually be conducive to New Age beliefs. When famous people appear on TV chat shows and mention these things, a seed is planted. When you realise that a significant number of people voted for the Green Party at the last Euro elections it shows that people are becoming conscious of the environment. Even mineral water is sold on the basis of creating a good balance between mind, body and spirit!

The book *SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL* by E F Schumacher has proved very popular;

literature recently has been enormous - what STAR WARS had as its underlying rationale was brought out more explicitly by THE DARK CRYSTAL screened in the UK over the Christmas period. As Marilyn Ferguson points out, "A generation in love with Tolkien's fantasy (THE LORD OF THE RINGS) .... are ready for magic in themselves and in their young children."<sup>7</sup> Stimulated by such role playing games as *Dungeons and Dragons*, many enter an imaginary world which can, if taken to extremes, act as a pathway to New Age experiences. The Ladybird reading scheme PUDDLE LANE introduces young children to wizards and magicians at a young age - and they are benevolent too.

The latest computer game produced by one company is called *SimEarth*, explicitly founded on the Gaia concept mentioned before. The company, Maxis, previously had a colossal success with a game based on city planning concepts; it was called *SimCity*. This was purely secular, but now many who enjoyed creating a city will want to progress to a planet and will do so in New Age terms. The casual use of the term New Age in the media all helps to raise the profile.

None of these things is New Age in itself, but the cumulative effect of all this will be eventually to create a society in which the man on the Clapham omnibus will consider New Age to be the obvious answer.

## Appraisal

In its broadest influence **the New Age could represent a vastly more potent threat to Christianity than modern cults** such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. The New Age should not only be seen as a false belief system that could deceive some and confuse many. Unlike secular humanism that invites us to advance to a post-Christian society, the New Age invites us to return home; to go back almost literally to our roots. It is nothing short of an invitation to advance to a *pre-Christian* society.

The historian Francis Oakley analysed the impact Christianity made on Medieval thinking about society. Pre-Christian thinking was thoroughly monistic.

The sharp distinction that modern Westerners are accustomed to make between nature and supernature, between nature, society, and man, between animate and inanimate, were almost wholly lacking. Nature was alive; it was "full of gods"; it expressed, both in its benign cyclical rhythms and in its intimidating and catastrophic upheavals, the movements and indwelling of the divine ... . If we ourselves find that pattern to be well-nigh incomprehensible today we would do well to remember that we do so precisely because our very idea of what it is to be divine has been radically shaped by centuries of Judeo-Christian thinking with its obdurate insistence on the unity, omnipotence, and transcendence of God, centuries during which the meanings ascribed to such words as *god, divine, religious*, and so on have, by primitive or archaic standards, been narrowed down to a degree bordering on the eccentric.<sup>8</sup>

What Oakley was applying specifically to politics, Dr R Hooykaas applied in RELIGION AND THE RISE OF MODERN SCIENCE. He wrote

There is a radical contrast between the deification of nature in pagan religion and in a rationalized form, in Greek philosophy, and the deification of nature in the Bible. By contrast with the nature-worship of its neighbours, the religion of Israel was a unique phenomenon. The God of Israel, by his word, brings forth all things out of nothingness ... . The New Testament proclaims again the message that there is no eternal cycle of nature or cycle of history ... The Bible knows nothing of "Nature" but knows only "creatures", who are absolutely dependent on the will of God. Consequently, the natural world is admired as God's work and as evidence of its creator, but it is never adored ... in total contradiction to pagan religion, nature is not a deity to be feared and worshipped, but a work of God to be admired, studied and managed. When we compare pagan and biblical religions, we find a fundamental contrast between the ideas concerning God and man which have emerged. In the Bible God and nature are no longer opposed to man, but God and man together confront nature. The denial that God coincides with nature implies the denial that nature is godlike.<sup>9</sup>

This he concludes was the belief that made modern science possible. Oakley's point was that it was only the Christian faith that divested the political ruler of divinity. All this and much more would be lost to the advance of the New Age. All this was granted us by the pure preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whether the New Age becomes a major religious viewpoint in our day or just another stubborn deception depends largely on whether our society loses its fundamentally Biblical outlook on the world, or whether God will graciously preserve it from the blindness into which it seems so ready to plunge.

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- 3 St Aubyn, op cit p 17
- 4 ibid p 41
- 5 ibid p 41
- 6 Walter Martin, THE NEW AGE CULT, Bethany, Minneapolis, 1989, pp 25-32
- 7 Ferguson, op cit p 353
- 8 Francis Oakley, THE CRUCIAL CENTURIES, Terra Nova Editions, 1979, pp 108 & 111
- 9 R Hooykaas, RELIGION AND THE RISE OF MODERN SCIENCE, Scottish Academic Press, 1972, pp 7-9

*Pastor Simon Chase BA is the minister of East Street Baptist Church, Walworth, London. This article is the substance of an address given to the Westminster Fellowship of ministers in London.*

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# A Social Ethics Reading List

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*Alan Gibson*

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It is customary to distinguish between *personal ethics* as the consideration of how individuals should behave and *social ethics* as discussing how communities should behave. This cannot be an absolute distinction as societies are made up of individual and groups change as their leaders change. Whether we are even right to speak about a *Christian social ethic* begs the question of a *Christian society* but that is another story!

Publishing books on Social Ethics has become a growth industry and most of us have difficulty keeping up with the flood. This list is restricted to what has either originated in or is readily available in the UK. A few titles currently out of print (marked OP) have been retained because of their value. The notes are intended to indicate the contents of the book rather than attempting an evangelical evaluation.

## Principles of Christian Ethics

CHRISTIAN ETHICS, Norman Geisler, Apollos, 1991, 336 pp, £14.95

A new work from an American evangelical and a genuine advance on his two earlier books, this is now available in the UK in an IVP imprint. Geisler analyses different ethical stances and then shows that the Bible's absolute norms are not all equally applicable to every case but are to be graded hierarchically. These principles are then well applied to nine major contemporary issues, including bio-medicine, civil disobedience and ecology.

PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT, John Murray, 1957, IVP, 272 pp, OP

By using a biblico-theological approach Murray considers aspects of Biblical ethics grounded in the creation ordinances. He is not given to slick answers but always repays careful study. The concluding chapters on The Dynamic of the Biblical Ethic and on The Fear of God are especially valuable in relating ethics to the gospel.

BIBLICAL ETHICS, R E O White, Paternoster, 1989, 256 pp, OP

The former principal of the Baptist Theological College of Scotland provides the substance of his lectures for the degree course on Christian Ethics. He too takes the material in its Biblical order but in contrast to Murray is much fuller on the New Testament than the Old. If some OT critics are quoted too uncritically the closing summary rightly points us to Christ and his Spirit.

RESURRECTION AND THE MORAL ORDER, Oliver O'Donovan, 1986, IVP, 284 pp, £14.95

The author argues that belief in the gospel means that we are committed to certain ethical beliefs and we must therefore denounce the libertarian and legalistic options. Intended for an academic readership the book is very densely argued and engages thoroughly with historical and contemporary thinking. One

review began, 'This is not a book for the faint hearted!'

**THE MORAL MAZE**, David Cook, SPCK, 192 pp, £6.95

Cook sketches the various traditions of moral thinking before introducing his own method of reaching decisions in a rational and responsible way. This is then applied to the topics of Abortion and Euthanasia. The book has the air of a college textbook and an evangelical reviewer said, 'It is strong on method but shy of conclusions'.

## **Christian Social Ethics**

**ISSUES FACING CHRISTIANS TODAY**, John Stott, Collins, 2nd Edit 1990, 428 pp, £8.99

Stott discusses the role of Christians in a non-Christian society and goes on to give detailed consideration to a range of Global Issues, Social Issues and then Sexual Issues. The desire to be biblical and up-to-date makes this the most important single book on this area in recent years. This edition contains much fresh material and includes the formerly separate Study Guide

**EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL ETHICS**, Klaus Bockmuehl, Paternoster, 1979, 47 pp, OP

This slender monograph is a commentary on Article 5 of the 1974 Lausanne covenant with particular reference to the relationship of evangelism to social responsibility. It provides some correctives to those who suggest that we may actually spread the righteous fruits of the Kingdom by social means.

**ESSAYS IN EVANGELICAL SOCIAL ETHICS**, ed D F Wright, Paternoster, 1981, 192 pp, £5.50

In 1978 the National Evangelical Conference on Social Ethics met to hear and discuss these seven papers. This was the first major British consideration of the subject and the papers indicate that even then there were wide differences of approach among evangelicals. Only David Lyon's chapter begins to do justice to the full range of Scripture.

**GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S WORLD**, John Gladwin, IVP, 1979, 191 pp, £4.95

The author was formerly Director of the Shaftesbury Project and wrote this to give biblical justification for evangelical social involvement. His basic approach is Incarnational but he also seeks to show the relevance of Creation, Fall, and Kingdom for the subject. He sees it as inevitable that the church becomes politically involved.

**THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE**, Roy McCCloughry, IVP, 1990, 192 pp, £3.35

Another former Shaftesbury Project Director exposes the idolatry of the self and the tyranny of economics as the two major factors underlying the current changes in our society. It is one of the most perceptive analyses of our western world available from an evangelical writer. For his positive prescriptions, see below.

**TAKING ACTION**, Roy McCCloughry, IVP, 1990, 96 pp, £2.95

One of the brief and colourful Framework series, it is intended to grab those less used to tackling heavier books. The practical advice is on the dangers and

opportunities of social involvement at work, in the community and on green issues.

**LIVING AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD**, C J H Wright, IVP, 1983, 224 pp, £6.95  
Sub-titled 'The relevance of Old Testament Ethics', this book attempts to provide a framework within which OT ethics can be both understood and then applied to social issues today. His principle of regarding Israel as a social paradigm for nations today has influenced many evangelicals, some of whom have gone beyond the author in the direction of a social gospel.

**A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE**, Alan Storkey, IVP, 1979, 416 pp, OP  
This big book by an evangelical sociologist argues for a distinctively Christian view of knowledge, authority and the social realities of our community, not least those of economics and the state. His approach owes something to Dooyeweerd and is concerned about corporate morality.

**CHRISTIANS IN SOCIETY**, ed B G Webb, Lancer, 1988, 144 pp, £2  
This is Issue 3 of a series called Explorations, publishing papers presented at Moore Theological College, Sydney. Its significance lies in the critique of the modern pre-occupation with social involvement at the expense of evangelism and in its engagement with the views of Ron Sider, John Stott and Chris Wright. UK enquiries to Proclamation Trust, St Peters upon Cornhill, London EC3V 3PD.

### **Particular Issues**

**NOT BY BREAD ALONE**, D B Knox, Banner of Truth, 1989, 143 pp, £2.50  
The humanist mind set affects the whole of life. Knox, formerly in Sydney, now in South Africa, examines how a variety of issues have been distorted by this perspective. The chapters are necessarily brief but ten topics are covered including Race, Censorship, Sunday, War, and Women's Lib.

**SOCIAL ISSUES AND THE LOCAL CHURCH**, ed Ian Shaw, Evangelical Press of Wales, 1988, 178 pp, £4.95

Ten essays from well respected evangelical authors cover matters such as Work, The Inner City, Education and Social Welfare. Each focuses especially on our collective responsibilities as members of a local church. There are suggestions for further reading and questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.

**EVANGELICAL ETHICS**, John J Davis, Presbyterian & Reformed, 1985, 299 pp, £10.95

The American background of this good Reformed treatment of nine current issues means that although it is well documented the civil context is different from our own. The topics chosen are medical, sexual, family and law and order issues. It is more of a text book than a popular treatment.

**RENDER UNTO CAESAR**, Herbert Carson, Monarch, 1989, 122 pp, £4.99

This is an expansion of Carson's earlier booklet, *The Christian and the State*, and is enriched by his experience of living in Northern Ireland. As one chapter is entitled, *Downhill from Constantine*, his free church perspective is clear. There is a positive emphasis on responsible citizenship as he handles issues like The



Government, Party Politics, Censorship, and War.

PASTORAL ETHICS IN PRACTICE, David Atkinson, Monarch, 1989, 256 pp, £7.95

After an opening chapter on The Place of the Bible in Christian Ethics, the book goes on to discuss pastoral ethics under three broad categories: Personal Relationships, Social Issues and Questions of Life and Death. He is concerned to develop a Christian mind on these contemporary issues.

ISSUES OF LIFE AND DEATH, Norman Anderson, Norfolk, 1976, 130 pp, £6.95

These are the 1975 London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity. Starting with a discussion of the sanctity of life they cover Genetic Engineering, Birth Control, Abortion, Euthanasia, Capital Punishment and Revolution. Such issues have, however, become even more technically complex in the last 16 years.

PACIFISM AND WAR, ed Oliver Barclay, IVP, 1984, 256 pp, £7.50

One of a series of books entitled, *When Christian Disagree*, this represents a debate in print between 8 prominent Christians adopting contrasting positions on a very relevant issue. The format is especially helpful in showing how evangelicals committed to the same authority do reach different conclusions. Other social topics in the same series are The Role of Women and a forthcoming title on Politics.

GROVE ETHICAL STUDIES, various authors, Grove Books, 24 pp, £1.95

The (Anglican) St John's College, Nottingham is where this series of monographs originated in the 1970's and now they cover a wide range of social ethics topics. Recent issues include Economic Sanctions, The Green Heritag, Toleration in Islam, Brain Grafts, and Sport. Write for catalogue to Grove Books Ltd, BRAMCOTE NG9 3DS

JUBILEE CENTRE BOOKLETS, various authors, different prices.

The Centre researches contemporary economic and social issues in the light of biblical norms and proposes alternative policies to decision makers. Booklets include The Extended Family (70 pp), Family Roots or Mobility (18 pp), Families in Debt (160 pp), and From Generation to Generation (150 pp). They show the Centre has wider interests than the Keep Sunday Special Campaign for which it is deservedly better known. Write for details to Jubilee House, 3 Hooper St, CAMBRIDGE CB1 2NZ.

CHRISTIAN IMPACT STUDY PACKS, Christian Impact, various authors, different prices. CI is the merged name of the former Shaftesbury Project and the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. These Packs are intended for group discussion use and include tapes, booklets, information and work sheets. The topics covered so far are Aids, Debt, TV, New Age and Mental Handicap. Write for details to Christian Impact, St Peter's Church, Vere St, LONDON W1M 9HP

*Rev Alan F Gibson BD is General Secretary of the British Evangelical Council*

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# The Lost Vision

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*Neil Richards*

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*A review article on RESTORING THE VISION, a collection of essays in which evangelicals speak out, edited by Melvin Tinker, Monarch, 1990, 286 pp, #8.99*

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We must not idolise the Puritans - they had their weaknesses - and yet with the ejection of those never-to-be-forgotten men went a vision of a spiritually revived and reformed Church of England. Since those far-off days that vision has never been restored. There have been good and faithful men, many of them, but there has never been a corporate vision amongst them of a reformed church with a biblical gospel, church order agreeable to Scripture and spiritual church discipline. The restoration of that vision would mean an end to episcopacy, establishment, pluralism (more than one gospel) and liberalism. If present-day Anglican evangelicals do get in the driving seat - and with George Carey's appointment to Canterbury many would say that is now a fact - they do not seem even to want to go in that direction. Which leaves many evangelicals in our free church constituency perplexed and saddened. We do not enjoy our differences with brethren in the Anglican church, nor do we think ourselves without faults, but we cannot for the life of us see how a serious commitment to Scripture and to the honour of Christ as Head of the Church can go along with a desire to maintain the Church of England in *its present form*. It seems extraordinary to us that this 'half-way house' of the Elizabethan settlement, with all its political expediency, spiritual compromise and incomplete reformation, should have become such a permanent institution, beloved by liberals, high-churchmen and evangelicals alike.

The general comments are sadly confirmed by David Holloway in his essay **What is an Anglican Evangelical?**. He dismisses the suggestion that Anglican evangelicals are suffering from as 'identity crisis' ('What is Evangelical?') believing that all is 'reasonably well' and that 'basic evangelical doctrine - the heart of evangelical identity - is not under threat at the grass roots.' The key to progress, for Holloway, lies in having an evangelical Archbishop and a sympathetic bench of bishops. 'Without such leadership Anglican Evangelicalism will probably (and sadly) become less Anglican and more partisanly evangelical. But with such leadership Anglicanism will become more evangelical ... and more Catholic and less alienating to the Catholic constituency.' What kind of vision is this?

Gerald Bray's contribution on **What is the Church? An Ecclesiology for Today** is stimulating, brave and worthwhile. He affirms the final authority of Scripture, engages in a good deal of basic biblical thinking about the church and is strongly critical of much within Anglicanism. However, Dr Bray doubts whether the Scriptures contain any clear guidance concerning church order and so is willing to live with the 'non-biblical' (his phrase) Anglican order. 'Unlike

the Puritans of the 17th century, evangelicals do not believe that it is necessary to recreate a 'Scriptural church' by reading order out of the pages of the NT. To do this is unhistoric and leads to controversies ...' We found this a depressing note and wondered if it does not undermine the 'sufficiency' of Scripture. Whatever the failures of the past surely we ought to believe that Scripture does give us sufficient guidance to establish a church order that is worthy of the name 'biblical' in which the Headship of Christ comes to proper expression. So far as evangelical unity is concerned Dr Bray settles for spiritual unity between all evangelicals across denominational barriers. This is in line with his stress on the invisible church, the bonds of unity of which are spiritual and not organisational. Thus Dr Bray bypasses the vital question (as it seems to us) of how we justify being in visible unity with those who deny the gospel and visibly divided from those who affirm it. To quote his words, 'Thus it is perfectly logical for an evangelical to recognise the presence of the Church wherever the gospel is preached and people are being converted, to question or deny its presence when these phenomena are not apparent.' This is our position exactly - with this addition, that we ought therefore to unite visibly with gospel churches and separate from those which are not true churches at all. Here the issue is not church order first and foremost, but the gospel.

Dr Packer's essay on **Evangelical Hermeneutics** is first-class and deserves to be read by all who are concerned to see God's Word preached faithfully. The same can be said for Melvin Tinker's piece on **Content, Contest or Culture** - his warning against pluralism and relativism is timely. Perhaps I enjoyed most Alec Motyer on **The Meaning of Ministry**. His profound grasp of Scripture makes the essay particularly rich in insights. The Priesthood and the Lord's Supper are handled very helpfully; the recovery of Eldership and the ministry of women less so. We have sympathy with his conclusion that 'The supreme need of the Church of England at the present day is to stop dying and start living, to stop declining and start growing. The key to that is the local, not the central, and the deciding factor between life and death is the recovery of the priorities of apostolic ministry: devotion to prayer and the ministry of the Word.' Yet the wider issue remains of the discipline of heretics and the repudiation of heresy; if this cannot be done, as all the signs would indicate, then local churches with apostolic priorities must take apostolic steps to withdraw from false teachers.

Chris Wright's essay on **Inter-faith dialogue and the uniqueness of Christ** seeks to meet the new challenge of a multi-faith society. He identifies 3 approaches: Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism, and recognises that evangelicals have traditionally adopted the exclusivist position, ie 'that if Jesus Christ is uniquely the truth, and the only way of salvation for mankind, then that excludes the possibility of other faiths being true in the same way, or being ways of salvation.' However, this view seems too rigid for Wright and he seeks to open it a little by suggesting at least the possibility that devout adherents to other faiths may have a true experience of God - though if they do, then such grace finds its source in Christ. The arguments here are extremely tenuous - in fact, little more than wishful thinking.

One more contribution calls for comment, and that is by Roger Beckwith on **Ecumenism; the Way Forward?**. I found this the least acceptable and, in places, quite provoking. To trace the modern ecumenical movement back to the labours of Calvin and Cranmer for unity amongst the Reformed churches and then to charge the 17th century Non-conformists with the sin of schism because they broke communion with the Church of England is rather a lot to swallow in one essay. I have two questions I should like to ask Dr Beckwith: first, if, as he says, the NT teaches 'division is necessary to rid the church of unrepented sin and serious doctrinal error', where does that leave evangelicals in the Church of England today? The second is this - what Scriptural grounds are there for demanding our interest and involvement in any form of Christian unity not based on the gospel?

There is great need of a restored vision today - not only amongst Anglican evangelicals but all who love the historic Christian faith. We are sadly fragmented and our testimony to the world is weakened by our disunity. **But it is not enough to affirm the final authority of Scripture if by our attitude to church issues we undermine its sufficiency.** The saying 'Stick with nurse for fear of finding something worse!' must be replaced with 'Step out in faith, with the hope of finding something better.' Surely the NT holds out something better than Anglicanism - a brighter and clearer vision of a church body established on the gospel, and in which the gospel is believed and proclaimed. Not simply a good place to preach the gospel, but a fellowship of saints going out into the world with the gospel.

*Rev Neil C Richards is the minister of Wheelock Heath Baptist Church, Cheshire and a member of the FOUNDATIONS editorial board*

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*Today evangelicals need to learn to travel light, to abandon the cares of this world as much as possible, and to seek to follow Christ as the New Testament reveals him to us. We need to recover both the vision and the reality of a church which is the source of life, the mother of the faithful, there to nourish and support us as we seek to witness for our Lord in the world. If we can achieve this, then there is every reason to suppose that we shall see the fruits of our faithfulness in the increase of the church. But if we stick to cultivating our own patch and let religious frivolity take the place of serious witness, then we should see the source of our life dry up before us, and the church as we know it will wither away and be destroyed by Jesus in the way he destroyed the dead fig tree in the Gospels.*

G Bray, RESTORING THE VISION, p 210

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# Book Reviews

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## The Sufficiency of Scripture

Noel Weeks

*Banner of Truth, 309 pp hdbk,  
£11.95*

In this book, Dr Weeks responds to recent discussions about the Bible and is concerned because there has been 'a shift in the debate to the point that the older positions (eg evangelical/liberal) are no longer so clearly defined' (p xi). The book aims, therefore, to highlight and examine the principles and arguments in the current debate.

*Part One* of the book deals with Basic Issues such as Authority and Exhaustiveness, the Form of Biblical Teaching, General and Special Revelation, Providence and Scripture, the Bible and Technical Precision, Imprecision and Error, the History of Revelation, the Perfect Translation, Words and Meanings, the Bible and the Historian, the Human Element in Scripture, Contextualization, the Hermeneutical Circle, the Redemptive Focus of Scripture. All these chapters are brief but penetrating and analytical; defective views of, and attitudes to, Scripture are exposed in a logical and firm manner.

In *Part Two*, Dr Weeks deals in considerably more detail with Points of Contention such as creation, interpreting prophecy, women in teaching/ruling offices in the Church, slavery, worship and government of the Church, the Scripture and 'advances'

in psychology, 'Rabbinic' exegesis in the New Testament, pseudepigraphy, proving the Bible, freedom and honesty, the political/social task of the Church, Bible translation. Some of these chapters like creation, women, "Rabbinic" exegesis, the political/social task of the Church are rich in analysis and critique yet biblical. 'Really to defend women in the teaching and ruling offices of the church', concludes the author, 'one must say that Paul was wrong to appeal to the creation account and/or that the creation account itself is wrong. Once that inevitable logical step is taken it is clear that the authority of Scripture has been rejected, (p 150). Concerning the political/social task of the Church, Dr Weeks in a stimulating way repeatedly appeals to the Scripture and concludes, 'our first question....should be a question about that church as a church, not as a political lobby group. Has it been living as the church lives? Or has it been influenced by racism. social prejudice, immorality and greed? Has it sought, according to the means provided by Christ, to preach the gospel to all men? That is, not the false political 'gospel', but the Biblical gospel of freedom from sins through the sacrificial death and glorious physical resurrection of Christ....if it has failed in these things, its message to the state....will lack authority and power... (p 268).

Here is a useful, stimulating and contemporary book which I will want to return to often in the coming months.

*Dr Eryl Davis BA BD, ETCW*

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## How to Read the Psalms

*Tremper Longman III*

*IVP 1988, 166 pp, £4.95*

This work on the Psalms is a very welcome addition to IVP's selection of OT study helps, commentaries etc. Although the book's contents do not provide anything essentially original, it does provide a fresh presentation of background information necessary to increase the reader's appreciation of the Psalter. Until now most of this information has been accessible to the specialist reader only; being scattered amongst various highly technical, academic works. Tremper Longman III has successfully transferred and conveniently packaged, in paperback form, the most important and practical tools which enhance the reader's ability to understand the text. He thus achieves his main objective set out in the Preface and Introduction. The whole work is generally well founded academically and tackles relevant issues and problems using clear, effective arguments.

The most useful sections of the book are:-

**Ch 1, Genres of the Psalms.** This chapter provides a substantial classification of the various literary types integral to the Psalter.

**Ch 6, OT Poetry,** and **Ch 7, Understanding Parallelism,** both of which help clarify something of the inherent complexities of Hebrew poetry - especially the 'enigma' of Hebrew parallelism as a literary device. The exercises included at the end of each chapter helpfully facilitate the application of

the information supplied.

However, the book is not without its disappointments, the most prominent being:-

**Ch 2, The origin, development and use of the Psalms.** He tends to present an over vague, open-ended picture, especially with regard to the historicity and canonicity of the Psalm superscriptions. He states, 'After all the evidence has been surveyed, it is best to treat the titles as non-canonical, but reliable early tradition, p 41. He continues, 'Occasionally a title seems to be in tension with the content of the Psalm'. He cites Psalm 3 as an example. In establishing the fact that the Psalms are always relevant to the people of God, he suggests that during their course of usage within the OT era some of them were expanded. He argues, 'We can still see some signs that the people of God took an old Psalm and added a few verses at the end to make it even more relevant to their own situation' p 46. He cites Psalms 51:18 and 69:35 as clear examples of this practice. Both these verses are then interpreted as stemming from a post-exilic situation, ie centuries after their original composition in the Davidic era.

**Ch 8 Imagery in the Psalms.** He argues that within the Psalter some of the imagery is based on the religions of Israel's pagan neighbours, cf Psalm 74:12-14, which is said to be combining elements pertaining to an Eastern mythology; ie Baal's destruction of Yamm, the sea god (Ugaritic literature) and Marduk's defeat of the sea goddess Tiamat (Babylonian litera-

ture). See also comment on Psalm 48:1-2, p 121f.

Ch 11, **Psalm 130: Thank you, Lord, for healing me.** His concept of a progressive revelation of divine truth seems too narrow, especially with regard to belief in the Resurrection. He argues, '....there is not a great deal of *clear* teaching in the OT about the resurrection of the dead. The clear teaching concerning *heaven* awaits the NT. The OT knows of continued *existence* after death but in a *shadowy* place known as Sheol. The Psalmist was uncertain whether he could praise God from Sheol' p 147.

*John Sieczko BA*

*Lectures in Hebrew and OT at ETCW*

## **Psalm 119**

*Thomas Manton*

*Banner of Truth, 1990, 3 Vols, c 580 pp per vol, £25.00*

Readers of the FOUNDATIONS will no doubt be familiar with Thomas Manton's exposition of the Epistle of James.

The Trust has now published a 3 volume set reprint of Manton's exposition of Psalm 119. The work consists of sermons preached by him in his usual course of three times-a-week. Not all of the verses of the Psalm are expounded and some verses form the basis for more than one sermon.

As could be expected, the exposition is thorough. There is a constant emphasis on the need to conform to

God's Law as a Scriptural and Biblical view of holiness. Writing in 1680, Vincent Alsop comments on the sermons in the work, that 'Their design is practice; beginning with the understanding, dealing with the affections, but still driving on the advancement of practical holiness.'

As often, his writing is made vivid with metaphors and similies. Thus in a comment on verse 9, Manton describes the Word as 'the glass that discovereth sin, and the water that washeth it away'.

This particular edition incorporates a biographical essay of Dr Manton but as with reprints of older works there are minor drawbacks such as the presence of some archaisms of speech. Some readers may also find the print a little small, but these cannot detract from the value and usefulness of the work.

*Iwan Rhys Jones, ETCW*

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*Under this word 'law' there is no doubt but that David comprehended the sum of all the doctrine which God gave his church.*

*Calvin on Ps 119:153*

*This, the 119th Psalm, is the Psalm I have often had recourse to when I could find no spirit of prayer in my own heart, and at length the fire was kindled, and I could pray.*

*Henry Venn's letters*

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1. To articulate that theology characteristic of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.
2. To discuss any theological issues which reflect the diverse views on matters not essential to salvation held within the BEC constituency.
3. To appraise and report on contemporary trends in theology, particularly those which represent departure from consistent evangelicalism.
4. To stimulate interest in contemporary theological matters among BEC churches by the way in which these topics are handled and by indicating their relevance to pastoral ministry.
5. To keep our constituency informed about the contents of new books and journals, as a means of encouraging their stewardship of time and money.

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