

# foundations

**Issue No.15**  
**Autumn 1985**

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# **foundations**

**A Theological Journal  
published by the  
British Evangelical Council**

**Price £1.25  
Issue No.15  
Autumn 1985**

**Focus: The Church  
Union and Separation**

**Liberation Theology in Ulster**

**Ecumenical Theology**

**Book Reviews**



# **foundations**

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**Foundations** is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in November and May; its aim is to cover contemporary theological issues by articles and reviews, taking in exegesis, Biblical theology, church history and apologetics — and to indicate their relevance to pastoral ministry; its policy gives particular attention to the theology of evangelical churches which are outside pluralist ecumenical bodies.

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# Editorial

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We hope you will enjoy reading this fifteenth issue of *Foundations*. Certainly the articles are both interesting and stimulating.

**Focus** this time turns its attention to the doctrine of the Church and particularly to the vexed questions of **Union and Separation** which formed the theme of the 1985 BEC Study Conference. In this article, the Rev. Neil Richards, an Associate Editor, summarises the contributions of speakers and respondents as well as the more important questions and contributions of those participating in the conference discussions. Here indeed is ample food for thought!

The Rev. Sydney Garland provides a vitally relevant article entitled **Liberation Theology and the Ulster Question** in which he documents the influence of this theology in N. Ireland before challenging evangelicals concerning their attitudes to the problems in Ulster. Are we guilty of unbiblical thinking at all here?

Turning to other book reviews, the Rev. Hywel Jones reviews the Editor's **Wrath of God** (EMW, 1984). This is an appropriate place for us to extend to the reviewer our prayerful good wishes as he commences his duties as Principal of the London Theological Seminary. Professor John L. Mackay of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, reviews **Creation in the Old Testament** (SPCK, 1984). Dr. Eryl Davies begins his review of some new and important books in the area of contemporary **Ecumenical Theology**. This review will be completed in the next issue along with a review of theological journals.

*The Editor, Dr. Eryl Davies, has now taken up his new responsibilities as Senior Tutor of the Evangelical Theological College of Wales. We commend him and this valuable work to your prayers. His new address, to which Editorial correspondence should be sent, is found on the inside of the front cover. All orders and correspondence regarding distribution should continue to be sent to the BEC office in St. Albans.*

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# Focus

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*The purpose of Focus articles is to elucidate Scriptural doctrines and report on the way they are handled in our contemporary situation. There is an urgent need for Christians to think more theologically and biblically about these major doctrines and also for preachers to expound and contend for these truths. The first article by Dr. Eryl Davies focused on Eternal Punishment and the second article by the Rev. Hywel Jones on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. In this issue we consider aspects of the doctrine of the Church, namely, Union and Separation — aspects which vitally concern Evangelicals at the present time.*

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## **Focus: 3    Union and Separation** **a Report on the 1985 BEC Study Conference**

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*Neil Richards*

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The conference met at Cloverley Hall and took the form of five two-hour sessions given over almost entirely to discussion by the seventy men present. The sessions were excellently chaired by Rev. Hywel Jones, with the exception of that at which he presented his own paper. The papers had been distributed to conference members several weeks beforehand and so were only briefly introduced in the sessions. A short prepared response was given to each paper and the rest of the time was given over to discussion. Where I have felt it necessary for a better understanding of both the papers and the discussion I have extended the speaker's introduction in the light of his paper or in some cases I have summarised the paper itself. As the discussions were, in a large measure, a response to the papers, I felt readers ought to be given an outline of their contents. The conference represented a wide range of views both on church polity, from Presbyterians to Baptist separatists, and on church unity, from those happy to work with evangelical Anglicans to others advocating second degree separation. Although the conference did not resolve all the issues — it would have been unrealistic to have expected it to have done so — many issues were clarified; differences were examined and reassessed; new ways of looking at church issues were opened up; prejudices were broken down; superficial views and over-simplistic solutions were exposed, and all in all the conference was worthwhile and, we trust by God's good grace, some small progress was made towards the unity of the Body of Christ.

### **The Visibility of the Church Catholic**

The first paper was given by Pastor Peter Misselbrook. The opening paragraph summed up what he wanted to say: 'I have been concerned to show

that the Gospel is God's power in the world creating visible saints, and visible communities of saints. The Christian is visibly a Christian because he possesses a life given him by the Spirit which cannot be hidden. The local church is a community of men and women who share a common life given them by the Holy Spirit, a common life which is made visible in the relationship of the members one towards another. The catholic church is a body of Christians or of Christian churches (how it is conceived will be discussed below) which possesses a common life, which common life is made visible in the many varied relationships between the various members. The visibility of the church catholic is the visibility of an organism which can never be captured within the confines of a single organisation.'

### **The Gospel, the Christian and the Church**

The Gospel is the power of God which changes lives and produces visible saints — the Church is then made up of these visible, recognisable Christians.

### **The Nature of the Church**

Mr. Misselbrook felt that the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, had failed to stick to the New Testament definition of the Church as a visible company of the faithful; both men had tended to define the Church in such a way as to include unregenerate men and women. Luther's idea of a territorial Church led inevitably to this. Their view of baptism made it impossible to define the Church as a visible company of saints. It was left to the Anabaptists to define the Church as the creation of the Gospel in the form of a gathered community of disciples. 'Invisibility' with regard to the Church is not a New Testament concept.

The matter of schism was then examined. The New Testament deals with schism primarily as a breaking of fellowship with the local church rather than between separate churches. Mr. Misselbrook believed that where churches differed over such things as baptism, divine sovereignty in salvation, and charismatic issues, they were better meeting separately and that this was not schism.

### **The Relationship between Particular Churches and the Church Universal**

The speaker challenged the widely-held view that the word 'church' is used in two senses in the New Testament: of the church universal (the innumerable company of God's elect), and of particular local churches. He referred to a book by Robert Banks on 'Paul's Idea of Community', in which Banks argues that the term '*ekklesia*' is always used in the New Testament for a gathered community or congregation and that it either refers to the heavenly church — gathered around the throne — or to particular local churches. In view of this we ought not to think of the local church as part of a larger structure, i.e. 'the church universal'. Local churches are to relate to each other because they live under the same rule.

### **The Visibility of the Church Catholic**

The New Testament demands that we seek visible expressions of church unity — but what form ought they to take? Mr. Misselbrook believed they ought not to take an institutional form. To pursue the dream of 'a single and all-

embracing organisation which expresses and makes visible the spiritual unity of evangelical churches' can lead only to further fragmentation and distract us from 'pursuit of those means by which the unity of evangelical churches may truly be expressed ...' Churches are to relate to each other, by mutual encouragement, exhortation and conference, as those who live under the rule of Scripture. There is room, the speaker felt, for a wide variety of associations, complementing, rather than competing with, each other. The more substantial our doctrinal agreement the greater the possibility of co-operating together in the work of the Kingdom. We are guilty of schism when we 'cut off relationships with other companies of the Lord's people who, though they may be defective in many things, yet do genuinely desire to live under Christ's rule and are still ready to receive His Word.'

The respondent, Rev. Sidney Garland, affirmed the invisibility of the church and defended the Reformers at this point. Our knowledge of who are the regenerate is frail, but 'the Lord knows those who are His.' Invisibility affirms the church as God sees it; visibility, the church as we see it. However, Mr. Garland was happy with the emphasis on the visibility of the church but not with the two-fold view of the church as the local church and the church in heaven. Is there not a third usage of the word 'church' to describe churches in an area, and did not this usage imply a shared leadership and common oversight? He argued that the common life of the church surely implied common government. It was present in the New Testament, for example Acts 15; has it ceased? The matter of baptism had been raised — was Mr. Misselbrook unchurching paedo-baptists? And so the old — yet not irrelevant — debate between Presbyterians and Independents continues. We may hope that iron will sharpen iron.

### **Discussion**

The discussion focused on the third view of the church raised by Sidney Garland. Reference was made to the historic meeting at which Dr. Lloyd-Jones made his appeal to evangelicals to leave the doctrinally-mixed denominations and come together in a fellowship of evangelical churches. What sort of unity did the Doctor have in mind? A loose federation of churches and not a single united church, seemed to be the general view. This was followed by some discussion on the significance of the Council of Jerusalem. Were its decisions mandatory for the churches? Surely they were, but did the presence of the apostles make that kind of council unique to the apostolic age? Obviously the Independents felt it did but the Presbyterians differed. The Chairman, seeing the danger of the conference grinding to a halt over the presbyterian/independent controversy, posed the question, 'If we accept the third view of the church would it provide us with a greater impetus and challenge to achieve visible unity or is there enough common ground to work at without this?' He went on to express the view that 'given the common life in Christ which we possess, there do have to be certain 'forms' to channel that life, to safeguard it and express it.' Or as someone else put it, 'How can the world witness our unity if we have no organisation?' The presbyterian view deserves more serious consideration than English separatists are prepared to give it, and yet even without organisation and structure, oneness in truth, in

love and in mutual care does have an inevitable visibility. We must not make our lack of agreement on church polity an excuse for our failures in these areas.

## **The Basis of Union**

Introducing the second paper Professor Donald Macleod explained that the foundation of all unity is membership of the body of Christ. 'We are not one because of a common polity or a common belief but because we are all Christians.' This spiritual unity is an undoubted fact and places us under an unconditional obligation to one another.

## **The Marks of the Church**

How are we to recognise a Christian church? What are the marks? Calvin saw two marks: the preaching of the Gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments. The Scottish confession of 1560 added a third — church discipline — and the Westminster divines added a fourth — public worship. Finally the 'Second Book of Discipline' added a fifth — distribution, that is, the ministry of mercy and compassion.

## **Doctrines**

The doctrinal basis of union consists in those doctrines which all Christians hold in common and which are fundamental to the Christian faith. We need a sense of theological proportion — all that God has revealed is to be believed and taught by the Church but all is not equally essential to the existence of true Christianity. The Scripture itself makes this very distinction — for example, in 1 Cor. 15:3 Paul speaks of those truths 'of first importance' or 'among the first things'. In Gal. 1:8 Paul is clearly saying that there are certain elements of the Gospel message which, if tampered with, nullify the Gospel. Again, in 2 Tim. 2:17,18 Paul speaks of those who subverted the doctrine of the believer's resurrection and says that it was tantamount to turning away from the truth itself. Reference is made to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi; and to John's words in 1 John 4:1; and to 'those doctrines which the Church has sought to define and safeguard in its great creeds'. Using this criterion, Prof. Macleod drew up a list of 18 fundamental doctrines and said that 'The plea for a minimal confession (for example, 'Jesus Christ is Lord') clearly cannot claim the support of Scripture.' It is interesting to note that baptism, church government, election and the gifts were all absent from that list. One other matter was raised here, and that was the doctrines peculiar to Pentecostalism — tongues speaking, Spirit baptism, and prophecy. 'The question is not', says Prof. Macleod in his paper, 'whether the Pentecostal view on prophecy and Spirit baptism constitutes the grounds for separation, but whether these views are fundamental and should be safeguarded in any basis of union. Pentecostals would insist that they are and that they should.' This presented the speaker with serious problems as he regarded the doctrine of a subsequent Spirit baptism 'as unacceptable as the doctrine of purgatory, and the ministry of a prophet as repellent as that of a priest'.

Divisions, for the most part, have not been doctrinal. Other factors have been far more influential — matters of church order, views on the Millennium, per-



sonality clashes and relatively obscure doctrinal matters. Our main concern ought to be our grievous separation from orthodox Christians and not with the problems of the doctrinally-mixed denominations.

There is no such thing as a pure church. As the Westminster Confession reminds us, 'the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and to error'. There is the danger of polarisation on church polity. We must press for unity in action and ask ourselves upon what foundation can we get together to evangelise our land, to train men for the ministry and to find placements for them.

The paper also contained sections dealing with the sacraments, discipline, worship and distribution. Some brief comments must suffice though there is much food for thought.

**The Sacraments:** Where there are no sacraments, there is no church. Prof. Macleod commented on the Lord's Supper and on baptism, but it is the latter that presents most problems with regard to unity. Differences over the mode and subjects of baptism were long-standing and deep-seated, but surely not entirely without hope of resolution, as the speaker said. As well as a plea for mutual respect, frequent consultation, co-operation in witness and fellowship in prayer between Baptists and Paedo-baptists, the speaker made two special pleas. First, for Baptists to think carefully about the implications of re-baptism. 'I would find it impossible to have fellowship with a church which insisted on re-baptising members of my own.' Second, a plea that Paedo-baptists abandon the practice of indiscriminate baptism.

**Discipline and Worship:** In a comment at the end of the section Prof. Macleod warned against making the absence of church discipline an excuse for leaving the church. He pointed to the church in Corinth and to the seven churches of Asia, where discipline was very loose but there is not a suggestion of secession.

The New Testament suggests three criteria of worship: Is it in the truth? Is it in the Spirit? Is it conducted decently and in order?

Rev. Elwyn Davies, General Secretary of the Evangelical Movement of Wales, responded. He commented briefly on what he felt was the soft treatment of Roman Catholics (Prof. Macleod had pointed out that men like Don Cupitt were further away from us than the Roman Catholicism of Vatican II), and the heavy-handed treatment of modern Pentecostalism — more of that later. Turning then to his main comments he spoke first of the need to give far greater prominence to regeneration by which the heart is enlightened and disposed to the truth. Mr. Davies drew great encouragement from this to persevere in grappling with our difficulties. He then quoted with approval Prof. Macleod's statement that 'the marks of the church are all essential and all equally essential', but that there was room for a 'hierarchy within the marks'. This approach, if right, would allow us to conceive of the possibility of churches adopting differing levels of credal statement, expressing degrees of comprehensiveness, applicable to different levels of fellowship.

## **Discussion**

The discussion focused initially on Prof. Macleod's contention that most divi-

sions were not doctrinal in nature. It was pointed out, in response to this, that recent secessions had clearly arisen over doctrinal issues, e.g. the churches which separated from the Baptist Union over Michael Taylor's denial of the deity of Christ. Donald Macleod then quoted Athanasius who stayed in and fought. On being asked under what circumstances he would secede, he replied that that was like asking, 'When do you kill your father?' The answer is 'Never' — but then there are terrible circumstances when it may be necessary. We should stay in and fight until driven out or forced to go against conscience.

Those who are not regular readers of the Free Church Record (of which Prof. Macleod is editor) — and I suppose that includes the majority of the conference — were somewhat shaken by these views. How far do they reflect Prof. Macleod's own secure Free Church background and his lack of experience of the doctrinally-mixed denominations? Nonetheless it does us no harm to have our convictions questioned by so able and highly esteemed a man as Prof. Macleod.

The discussion then moved on to Prof. Macleod's comments on Pentecostalism. The problem lies, as he sees it, with Holy Spirit baptism and prophesying. Union with Pentecostal churches would mean 'having these doctrines imposed upon us as fundamentals of the faith'. This he felt was unacceptable. Pentecostal teaching on the Baptism of the Spirit meant that a man could be 'in Christ' and yet still lack the very promise of God. Moreover, Prof. Macleod felt there was a latent legalism in saying that anything more than mere faith was needed to obtain the gift of the Holy Spirit. This provoked a strong response from Pentecostals present and indeed from many others not in the Pentecostal church but who hold some form of Spirit baptism and were sympathetic to the possibility of prophecy in the church. The debate went along familiar lines with each side feeling misunderstood and misjudged. Perhaps part of the difficulty lies in how much prominence Christians give to the Baptism of the Spirit and prophecy. So long as they are treated as secondary matters not belonging to the fundamentals of the faith they need not present a barrier to relationships between evangelical churches. Prof. Macleod's concern to safeguard the teaching of the church at this point is understandable, just as it is in the case of baptism. However, it was a sad discussion and highlighted our weakness and need of divine light and power.

Several issues were then taken up. The Chairman raised the sacramental issue — would some kind of hierarchy within the marks of the church cope with differences over baptism? He warned against enlarging divisions here. The sensitive issue of paedobaptists being unable to become members of Baptist churches (not all Baptist churches take this position, of course) was referred to briefly — is this not a failure to grasp the larger issue of the common life we have in Christ? Others referred to the BEC position of not proselytising on our distinctives or using the BEC platform to press our distinctive positions. The need of association for mission was stressed. Unite to **do** something. We were reminded that evangelicals already work together in missions, for example in work amongst students, but we are concerned to express our unity on a church level. Prof. Macleod strongly advocated co-operation in training men for the

ministry and for the BEC to look at the problem of the **placement** in churches of men called and trained. Could we not identify **areas** where there is no Gospel witness in Britain and on the Continent and support men to work there?

## **The Basis of Separation**

This paper was given by the conference chairman, Rev. Hywel Jones with the Rev. Hector Cameron taking over the chair. He began by emphasising that he viewed separation only in relation to union and unity. The life of the Church must be expressed in some outward form — quoting in his paper from Professor John Murray, ‘Ideally, there ought to be only one Christian Church throughout the world, the Church of Christ, one in doctrine, one in worship, one in government, one in discipline ...’ (Corporate Responsibility — Collected Writings Vol. I). We have to face the fact that there are no contradictory church politics in the Scripture, the fault lies with us. How far we are from the ideal, and yet the ideal is important. We must not become so engrossed with contemporary problems that we lose sight of the goal. Nor can we hide behind some concept of the unity of the invisible church; the New Testament speaks of a visible oneness. ‘Concrete as well as discrete visibility is involved’, says Professor Murray.

## **The Gospel**

Mr. Jones raised the question, ‘With which churches can we unite?’ The Gospel is the arbiter. There should be no difficulty in finding **the** Gospel in **the** church. The Church owes its existence to the Gospel; it lives by the Gospel and it is to live for the Gospel. Where the fundamentals of the Gospel are believed and preached there is the Church of Jesus Christ, and with that church we ought to express our union and unity. Where the Gospel is overthrown and Christ is hidden, from such a situation we ought to withdraw. As Calvin puts it, ‘It is enough for me that it behoved us to withdraw **that we might come to Christ**’. To be involved in a doctrinally mixed denomination in which a plurality of gospels is openly countenanced is an unholy association. How then should we relate to evangelical churches in that kind of association? Where such churches not only proclaim the Gospel but plainly reject and repudiate what contradicts it then there is a place for church relationships.

## **Mixed Denominations**

The more difficult and thorny question is how should we relate to churches who do have fellowship with evangelical churches in mixed denominations. Mr. Jones felt the phrase ‘second degree separation’ was not a helpful one. In his paper he dealt in detail with Paul’s teaching in 2 Thess. 3:6-18. In v.6 we are commanded to withdraw from Christians who do not live according to the apostolic teaching — they are still ‘brethren’ but we are to distance ourselves from them. Then in vv. 14 and 15 he tells us not to associate with — or to have close fellowship with — anyone who refuses to obey the instructions of this letter. In other words, those who continue to associate with Christians who do not live according to the apostolic teaching are themselves the objects of a discipline and are to feel the pain of a withdrawal of close fellowship.

The response was prepared by Rev. Brian Edwards but read in his absence. He challenged the idea that the Church ought to be one throughout the world, and argued for 'unity not uniformity' in worship or even in church government. The Gospel as the test of a church was acceptable, but might we simply ask, 'Can a man come to faith in Christ in this church?' Is that an acceptable test? (See Phil. 1:15-18). Mr. Edwards felt that separation could be carried too far. In church discipline we are to discipline those who offend but does the New Testament ever speak of disciplining those who consort with offenders? Can we apply that principle to churches? Referring to 2 Thess. 3 Mr. Edwards pointed out that commentators like Calvin and Hendriksen differed with Mr. Jones on the meaning of the passage. Does this uncertainty over its meaning point to the need for caution here? Mr. Edwards felt that to speak of 'separation' from evangelical churches in mixed denominations indicated too strong an attitude. We might be 'unhappy' with them but he saw no warrant for going further than that.

### **Discussion**

Discussion moved along several lines. The distinction was made between an 'amiable' separation between evangelical churches on grounds of, say, baptism or church government, and separation in which we refuse recognition which is a far more serious thing. Again, if the Gospel is the arbiter, how much content would we want to put into it? Would we include a particular view of baptism? What about the inerrancy of Scripture? In the discussion, questions and issues were not always pursued to a conclusion.

In the discussion one speaker commented on the need to recognise what was the prevailing spirit of the age, namely, a feeling that truth cannot be defined and that all must be finally seen as 'a matter of interpretation'. There is a general dislike of plain statements of Christian doctrine. Church standards have been reduced, ordination bonds loosened. Subscription to the 39 Articles in the Church of England has been greatly weakened. In this climate diverse and even contradictory theologies can, and do, exist together. The implications are very serious and the uniqueness of the Gospel can be obscured. We cannot ignore these trends when thinking of church relationships.

The question was asked whether it was consistent with BEC principles to associate with Evangelicals in mixed denominations on an evangelical doctrinal basis. One speaker replied that great care was needed in inter-church co-operation and that the connection between the Gospel and the Church meant that nothing should be said or countenanced by the Church which would weaken the uniqueness of the Gospel. People sign bases of faith all too easily, for example, even Roman Catholics and Liberals signed an evangelical statement of faith for the London Crusade. Continuing this line, another speaker asked how our relationship with a Gospel church in a mixed denomination — and Mr. Jones had made it clear in his paper that such churches exist — would differ from the way we relate to an apostate church in the same denomination. In reply it was suggested that limited fellowship would be possible depending on the strength of the church's evangelical position and the degree to which the church sought to repudiate error in the denomination. Some felt that co-

operation in evangelism was surely possible but others felt happier with extra-church matters such as co-operation in the Evangelical Library. There had to be a difference between the level of fellowship possible between evangelical churches separated from the mixed denominations and evangelical churches involved in compromising alliances. A plea was made for people in the mixed denominations needing Gospel preachers and there was deep sympathy for them. Moreover, people were at different stages of their thinking regarding these issues and therefore there was a need for tolerance.

The exegesis of 2 Thess. 3:6-18 was discussed. Does Paul's word in v.14 on not associating with any who refuse to obey his instructions 'in order that he may feel ashamed' apply only to matters mentioned in v.12, or to the wider issues of v.6? However, even if the more restricted view is accepted surely the same principle applies in the more serious case of those who continue in fellowship with heretics?

The discussion was long and complex but again and again the same basic questions arose. What kind of unity ought we to be striving for? Is the unity of the Church like the spokes of a wheel without the rim — united because joined to Christ but no visible organisational links with each other? Can an evangelical church in association with apostate churches expect to have unlimited fellowship with evangelical churches separated from mixed denominations? Can we face both ways? What obligations do we have in the BEC to show our concern for the holiness of the church and our love for brethren in compromised associations by placing painful limitations (painful to both sides) on our fellowship with such brethren? How is the Church to guard the Gospel — by preaching it, yes, but what about the keys of discipline?

## **Dealing with False Teaching**

Rev. R.J. Sheehan's paper began by making two points. First, that the touchstone of truth is Apostolicity. 'The apostles were very conscious of their authority (2 Cor. 13:10). They had received revelations from God (Gal. 1:11,12; Eph. 3:5); they spoke God's Word (1 Thess. 2:13) and they wrote God's words (1 Cor. 14:37). It was in the light of the fact that the apostles knew themselves to have received revelation from God, that they made their teaching the touchstone of truth and error. No ordinary Christian could have spoken as the Apostle John did when he made the distinguishing mark of those who teach the truth, their submission to the teaching of the apostles (1 John 4:1-6).' Second, error is always dealt with pastorally, asking why the error has occurred.

### **Categories**

Mr. Sheehan went on to speak of several categories of error:

The sincerely ignorant, who simply need teaching e.g. Apollos (Acts 18:26). Those who unintentionally misinterpret Scripture — e.g. 1 Cor. 5:9-11.

The temporarily inconsistent — the supreme example of this is the ever impulsive Peter (Gal. 2:11-13). Such people must be confronted with their error and corrected.

Those who are themselves deceived and who need to be dealt with faithful-

ly, pastorally and with a clear denunciation of the error involved (Gal. 1:6-9), and — perhaps most difficult for us to accept — with a forthright attack on the teachers of error as well as on the error itself (Gal. 2:4; 5:12; 2 Cor. 11:13; Phil. 3:18; 2 Peter 2:1,12).

The deceivers themselves: for example, the Judaisers (Acts 15). 'The whole incident reveals a responsible and orderly way of dealing with error. A united stance was taken on the whole matter. The very title given to the decisions reached at Jerusalem — *dogmata* (Acts 16:4) — implies that they were authoritative.'

### **Application**

There followed ten points of practical application:

We must know the truth in a thorough and clear way.

We must know ourselves. Mr. Sheehan warned against having a party spirit and being concerned only to defend our own group and traditions without being willing to expose those traditions to the authority of Scripture.

We need to recognise an interdependence between churches, where each congregation has responsibility to each other congregation. Formal structures in church relationships are, Mr. Sheehan felt, not in line with the New Testament pattern.

There is great need of discernment in distinguishing between those who are in error in some matters but basically in submission to apostolic authority, and those who show no evidence of submission to apostolic authority.

There is need of strong leadership in local churches. 'One of the most noticeable features of modern evangelicalism is the failure of its leaders, who are often very hesitant to defend the truth and to speak out against error.'

There is need to regularise those who go out preaching.

The danger of allowing personal loyalties to override our concern for the truth.

The need of consultation between churches.

The need to be aware of the subtlety and deceptive nature of error.

The danger of superficial and sentimental judgments — e.g. many evangelicals were sympathetic to the Pope simply because he seems to be a 'nice man'.

Responding to the paper, the Rev. John Rosser had few criticisms to make and in the main endorsed what Mr. Sheehan had said. He did suggest an 11th application to the church (or denomination) situation in which error is in the ascendancy and cannot be dealt with by way of discipline and when separation seems to be the only option.

### **Discussion**

Discussion focused on apostolic authority, which, it was said, is the key issue in 2 Thess. 3 where Paul deals with Christian brethren who defied apostolic authority over certain areas of their lives. We need to distinguish between the regenerate heretic and the unregenerate heretic whom Paul speaks of elsewhere as 'the enemies of the cross'. The key issue is Scripture rather than any one particular doctrine. The question to be asked is, 'Is this man seeking to be

faithful to Scripture?’ This is surely the criterion for deciding where fellowship is possible, and not simply whether a man is involved in a mixed denomination. The question was then asked, ‘When does a man cease to be in error by ignorance and become much more seriously and closely involved?’ When this does happen it surely calls for a different response.

There was a call for more to be written to persuade Evangelicals in the mixed denominations to re-think their position; too much of our writing is entirely for our own constituency. Is there need for some kind of forum where there can be dialogue? The matter of differences of interpretation of Scripture was raised — what do we say to a Christian brother who says ‘I understand the Scripture differently from you on this matter’? This is not a rejection of the authority of Scripture, so how can we discipline such a person? And yet we must be careful not to make sincerity itself a criterion for judging matters; a Christian may be sincere in his interpretation of Scripture and yet wrong, and so stand in need of correction. The absence of the apostles to explain their teaching is no answer here for Scripture carries within itself adequate principles of interpretation.

One speaker made the point that we are often dealing with Christians who have a very different view of the Church from ourselves and this greatly added to the difficulty of confronting them with the compromise in which they appear so clearly to us to be involved. Others felt that this could not relieve us of our responsibility to every Christian.

The discussion served to press home upon us the seriousness of false teaching in the Church and our need of wisdom and discernment in distinguishing between erring Christian brethren and those who are ‘the enemies of the cross’, and the different approaches required for each.

## **Biblical Principles and Freedom of Conscience**

The fifth paper, presented by Rev. Alan Gibson, General Secretary of the BEC, began with the inevitability of differences over church issues arising, not from any deficiency in Scripture, but from our own frailty and sinfulness. Although God has good ends in view in permitting these differences, we must seek to understand the nature of our divisions and work for increasing unity.

### **Scripture**

The second section dealt with differences over the use of Scripture, beginning with areas of agreement, such as the authority and perspicuity of Scripture. Evangelicals differ over the sufficiency of Scripture. The historic Anglican position is that Scripture is sufficient in the matter of personal salvation but not in the realm of ecclesiology, and therefore the episcopal system is to be justified not on Scriptural grounds but on the grounds of its antiquity and usefulness. This position, generally accepted by evangelical Anglicans, clearly has a bearing on the whole matter of the unity of the Church. Mr. Gibson brought the matter nearer home by asking whether we believed the Scripture to be sufficient to resolve those matters on which the churches of the BEC are still divided. The harmony of Scripture is a further area of difference. Some Evangelicals maintain that the New Testament contains not a single view of

church order, but a developing picture in which there is a variety of church patterns. This led on to a consideration of differences over principles of interpretation. Two examples were given: first, the way in which we relate Old Testament church order and worship to the New Testament church in matters such as baptism, and the concept of a national church. Second, the matter of the regulative principle by which nothing of spiritual significance is to be introduced into the Church except by the warrant of Scripture. This was, of course, very much an issue during the English Reformation. Do we require a positive Scriptural warrant for our church order or is it sufficient to say that whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is allowable if it appears to us good and helpful? Anglicans have taken the latter position; many of us would take the former — both equally sincerely. Hermeneutical principles lie at the heart of the issue.

### **Principles**

The third section focused on differences over perceived priorities. As Evangelicals look out upon the church scene they see more or less the same picture and they read the same Bible, and yet come to very different conclusions about, for example, what is most needful at the present time. The fact is that we all have different pre-suppositions. Mr. Gibson developed this idea along the following lines:

**Models of the Church:** the way in which we perceive the Church will control our priorities. So those who give to the institutional aspects of the Church the major controlling significance may well consider support of their denomination and its ecclesiastical structure to be of prime importance even though they acknowledge the existence of serious doctrinal error and compromise in its witness. The question is, how should one church relate to another if their perceived priorities are different?

**Biblical Principles and Graded Absolutes:** as Evangelicals we recognise that biblical principles have absolute authority because they express the will of a sovereign God. Our difficulty arises when more than one biblical principle is relevant to us at any one time and when obedience to one principle appears to conflict with obedience to another. This situation may be resolved by recognising that biblical absolutes may be graded and that some are more weighty than others and have a higher claim upon us. This principle, surely not new, can be helpful in dealing with church issues.

**Pastoral Pragmatism:** for example, a church might be convinced of the need to sever its links with a mixed denomination and yet feel that for serious practical reasons it must delay that step.

### **Conscience**

The fourth section dealt with differences over liberty of conscience. That conscience is to be captive to the Word of God, all Evangelicals would agree. (This is always a somewhat dangerous assumption, but it is difficult to see how any man can claim to accept the authority of Scripture and yet refuse submission to it.) However, the New Testament does allow liberty of conscience in matters not sinful in themselves, e.g. food offered to idols (Rom. 14 and 15; 1 Cor.



8—11). Does this principle help us in church matters? We have to recognise that the view of the Church taken by some Evangelicals allows them to remain in the mixed denominations without a troubled conscience. If our being true to our conscience means that in the light of 2 Thess. 3:6,14 we must withdraw from public fellowship with a brother who associates with those who deny the faith (the mixed denomination situation), how far ought we to consider 'the other man's conscience' (1 Cor. 10:29)?

The paper concluded with some guiding principles for handling our differences, drawing some very helpful material at this point from Michael Harper's book, 'That we may be one' — though the main thesis of this book is entirely opposed to the BEC position.

In his response Rev. Gordon Murray spoke of our being inhibited by two kinds of fear — good and bad. The fear of distrusting God's truth, and the fear of denying the Christianity of those who are our brethren in Christ, were proper fears. But the fear of man ('which bringeth a snare') was also liable to inhibit us from speaking as plainly as we might. He warned against the danger of an over-simplistic approach, of seeing everything in black and white. We need to recognise the Anglican approach to the Scriptural teaching on the Church. There were historical differences here. The basic approach was different for they held a different view of the regulative principle. On the matter of 'graded absolutes', Mr. Murray felt our duty was to obey conscience and leave the consequences to God. Yet we need to recognise other men's conscientious actions in staying in or coming out. Finally he urged us to be aware of our own liability to declension and our need of watchfulness and prayer.

### **Discussion**

The Chairman directed our attention to two aspects of the subject which ought to be further considered: the place of conscience with regard to our own differences and the position of Evangelicals in the mixed denominations. What are the roots of our differences? The question was then asked, to what extent does our doctrinal basis (in the local church situation) bind men's consciences? In reply it was said that there must be a core of truth about which we are sure — the Church's doctrinal basis is not a personal private interpretation of Scripture but the result of the progress and conviction of the Church over a period of time (the legitimate role of tradition). The matter of how Christians with paedobaptist convictions ought to be received by baptist churches was raised. Strict Baptists felt that it was impossible to receive them into membership whilst others saw no difficulty in respecting their consciences in this matter and receiving them in good faith. But how is it, one speaker asked, that we can accept the conscience of the Paedobaptist but not of the evangelical Anglican? In answer to this it was said that evangelical Anglicans must demonstrate that the Anglican Church can be justified and there must be a repudiation of doctrinal pluralism. The former speaker then asked if we could conceive of an evangelical Anglican in good standing — acting conscientiously in his situation, and if so then surely it ought to be possible to co-operate with him on extra-church issues. It was felt by some that this was a whole area in which we could not legislate for each other. A plea was made for

more contact between ourselves and evangelical Anglicans; we need to be prepared to sit down and talk with them.

## **Contemporary Challenges**

Rev. Peter Seccombe of St. Albans began the final paper by pointing out the peculiar difficulties of presenting the concluding paper — of having to ‘scratch where it itches most and probe where it hurts most’; and of having to build on what has gone before without the advantage of having read the previous papers. He then gave a brief summary of biblical principles governing unity and separation — I repeat them here as they do represent common ground for the whole conference.

### **Unity**

All true believers are one in Christ.

This unity is given by God, being the result of the new life given by the Spirit in the new birth, accompanied and manifested by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This unity is to be guarded, maintained and expressed by Christians. Its leading characteristic is to be a Christlike love.

Though this unity is, at root, inward and spiritual, its expression is to be visible even to the unbelieving world.

Whilst the primary expression and enjoyment of this unity is to be found in the local church it should also be manifested in the relationships between churches.

In this world such unity will be far from perfect and will be strained and attacked frequently.

### **Separation**

Christians are called to be separate from the world although retaining contact with it.

Christians are called to separate themselves from professing believers who deny the Gospel either by what they profess to believe (or not believe) or by their manner of life.

Such separation from other professing believers is designed to safeguard the purity of the Church and the clarity of its testimony but also to correct and win back the erring.

Whilst churches are to be fellowships of regenerate people, none but the smallest are likely to be so in their entirety. There is almost certainly to be an admixture of false professors and temporary believers.

### **History**

In his second section, Mr. Seccombe considered some of the lessons we can learn from history, arguing ‘that we are by no means the first generation to face the challenge of honouring our God by united and yet uncompromising testimony to the Gospel and that at church level. We may therefore expect that there are lessons to be learnt from the past.’

He noted, first of all, the difficulty of the problem. ‘For nearly nineteen centuries the problem has defied any real and lasting resolution despite a succession of able and godly minds being applied to it. We recognise that our

evangelical fathers a century ago, generally speaking, ducked the church issue and went instead for an evangelical unity outside the churches, setting up para-church bodies for the purposes of fellowship, joint social action, evangelism and overseas missions ... We ought to be able to understand fairly readily why they chose what appeared, and ... proved to be, a far easier route to some kind of evangelical unity than that which seeks it at church level. We will be in a better position to criticise them when we have got something better.'

Secondly, warned Mr. Seccombe, disintegration and apostasy must always be expected. The imperfect sanctification of true believers, the influence of unregenerate professors as well as the activity of the devil himself have always ensured that it has been so. Were we, then, 'in our generation able to attain to some significant degree of unity amongst evangelical churches, how long would it last? Without continuous reformation compromise would quickly set in. With continuous reformation, division and fragmentation would almost certainly result.'

Thirdly, an increase of spiritual life and light tends to increase the problem. 'I suppose that the professing church was never more united than it was in the dark ages. Peace and quietness are commonplace in a grave yard but not in a house full of lively minds, active bodies and differing temperaments! The Reformation brought not only separation from Rome but division amongst those who were seeing new light and tasting new life. Some men saw things more quickly than others. Different men had different, but no less conscientiously held, priorities. A new awareness of individual liberty, founded upon a recognition of every Christian's direct access and accountability to God, brought the seeds of individualism and disintegration into the Protestant churches ... Is it not true to say that the increased doctrinal awareness within some sectors of evangelicalism in the post-war era has been a major factor in bringing to a head the issues we are now discussing?'

Fourthly, there are dangers which we must be careful to avoid. 'Where there has been a serious concern for the working out of the biblical doctrine of the Church, there has been a tendency towards (a) Authoritarianism (strong spiritual leadership can easily over-reach itself so as to deny liberty of conscience to the individual believer/church), (b) Narrow Exclusivism (e.g. Romanism, Taylorite Brethrenism and some Gospel Standard Baptists), (c) Isolationism (little or no concern for any relationship with other true churches), (d) Comprehensiveness (Romanism; also some evangelical Anglicans seem to have accepted their church's comprehensiveness as being right and inevitable rather than as something at best to be tolerated with regret).'

### **Confusion and Complexity**

Turning to a survey of the present scene, Peter Seccombe believed that two words — confusion and complexity — describe fairly accurately the contemporary church scene. In more detail, he listed (a) the state of the nation, (b) distortions and denials of the Gospel (the Bishop of Durham is only the tip of an iceberg), (c) ecumenical trends, (d) Charismatic influences, which some see as offering an alternative focus for Christian unity to that of doctrinal agree-

ment. Mr. Seccombe felt this was 'one of the most alarming and dangerous trends in the Charismatic movement.' Then, (e) there is the matter of evangelical divisions which appear to be more extensive than ever before. The widening breach of fellowship between Evangelicals within the doctrinally-mixed denominations and many of those outside was, on the whole, to be regretted. 'Undoubtedly 1966 and the opening rally of the National Assembly of Evangelicals, organised by the Evangelical Alliance and addressed by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, was a watershed for evangelical relationships but not entirely the watershed desired by the speaker. The appeal that night was for Evangelicals to leave the mixed denominations and to come together in fellowship, working together for the same aims and objects. In the following months and years, a good many churches and ministers have seceded but there has been no mass exodus. The more obvious aspect of the watershed proved to be a greater separation between those Evangelicals within the mixed denominations and those outside them. The latter have seen the former as compromisers; the former have seen the latter as extremists.'

Then there are divisions between BEC aligned evangelical churches and others like the Brethren and Pentecostal churches, etc. which are not ecumenically involved. Furthermore, there are divisions between aligned churches (e.g. Reformed/Arminian, Charismatic/non-Charismatic, Baptism and Church government issues) and within each group there may be sub-divisions! For many of our people concern over these issues seems largely ministerial, theoretical and remote; what finally matters to many is whether the local church has a biblical ministry and a warm fellowship rather than its association with other churches. We were challenged and humbled by the issue of evangelism; not only by our frequent lack of success but by the fact that many of those who were seeing a real measure of blessing in true conversions differ from us over church issues.

### **Contemporary Challenges**

What should be our response to the situation in which we find ourselves, in the light of biblical principles and bearing in mind the lessons of church history?

(a) We must strive for a right balance between truth and love, separation and unity. 'Most of us would agree', Mr. Seccombe added, 'that Evangelicals in the 'mixed denominations' have got the balance wrong. They are too heavy on unity, too light on separation. Might not our danger be to swing too far in the opposite direction?'

(b) We must put our own house in order. Mr. Seccombe suggested that the fragmented state of independency was a powerful disincentive to separation. We must aim for independency without anarchy, disagreement without division, and unity without compromise. We do need to be much clearer about what the BEC stands for as people have different ideas of the aims and priorities of the BEC. The fact is that Christians are often far more committed to their particular church grouping (FIEC, EFCC, Free Church, etc.) than to the BEC. So what does that say about our supposed commitment to as large as possible unity amongst Evangelicals outside the mixed denominations?

(c) We must seek a wider evangelical unity. Is BEC unity, at its best, an adequate goal? 'We may say', warned Mr. Seccombe, 'that this is where we have

to start; present indications are that it is where, at the very best, we will have to end — unless we are prepared to re-think certain issues.’ In application of this point, he urged upon us five points:

We must exercise and demonstrate love to Evangelicals in the mixed denominations. ‘Private fellowship does not manifest to the world our unity in Christ!’

We must respect Evangelicals who sincerely differ from us in their doctrine of the Church.

We should judge ministers and churches by their words and actions rather than by their labels and associations.

We must be realistic.

We must make sure that the cause of the Gospel remains our priority.

While we must ask, “Is not the refusal of our fellow Evangelicals to separate from liberals, radicals and sacramentalists hindering the cause of the Gospel?”, we must also pose the question, “How far is our separation from such Evangelicals furthering the cause of the Gospel?” Mr. Seccombe continued: ‘The situation in our land is desperate. At the very least we cannot be complacent about confronting the enemies of the Gospel divided among ourselves. Has not Luke 11:17 some application to us? ... Is it conceivable that in some situations at least we could work towards a fellowship of all avowedly evangelical churches in which we would pledge that in things that affected one another in the local situation we would not act without consultation and seek to avoid anything which would embarrass or create difficulties for one another? A fellowship in which we would seek to act in concert with regard to outside initiatives that would by-pass or hinder the responsibilities of our churches?’

In his final section of the paper, we were reminded of our duty to pray for revival.

Dr. Eryl Davies, in his response, pin-pointed three important biblical principles in Peter Seccombe’s paper.

First of all, we must take heed to ourselves and to our doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). No amount of attention to doctrinal orthodoxy will compensate for failure to examine ourselves and set our own house in order.

Secondly, we have a responsibility to the wider Church. But how are we to show that concern for believers in the doctrinally-mixed denominations? Dr. Davies suggested some pointers:

(a) We must be persuaded of this principle ourselves; we ought to make our BEC fellowship as wide as possible and avoid despair or cynicism and work at the problems.

(b) We need to recognise our special responsibility as pastors to instruct and encourage our churches in these matters, and to do all that we can on a local level to foster unity. Dr. Davies shared his own experience of personal contacts with ministers outside the BEC constituency resulting in increased mutual understanding, greater prayerfulness, and respect which had not been present before.

(c) The living Lord revives His true Church. Dr. Davies welcomed the references to revival in the paper but regretted that they had not been developed more. How deeply persuaded are we in this matter? And yet we must not be passive and simply wait for revival but pray and work for it.

### **Discussion**

The Chairman guided the discussion in a practical direction along the lines of Dr. Davies' three principles. Differences over our response to Evangelicals in mixed denominations surfaced immediately. One speaker could not see what purpose remained for the BEC in the light of this paper. Unlike the Evangelical Alliance, the BEC is clear in its opposition to the ecumenical movement while seeking a more visible unity between evangelical churches.

The discussion drew to a close on the issue of theological pluralism. Anglicanism, it was said, meant the acceptance of several gospels in one church or denomination and many evangelical Anglicans appear happy to accept this position. The controversy in recent months over the Bishop of Durham, for example, has served to confirm theological pluralism. While we must not betray the Gospel in this way, others felt that the triumphalism pervading evangelical Anglican churches in the 1960's has largely passed and there is an opportunity now to build bridges.

The Chairman drew the meeting to a close. He reminded the conference that our primary loyalty was to the Gospel and that this was the essence of the BEC position, that is, church unity on the basis of the Gospel. We ought not to contemplate doing anything that would go against the BEC stand, but we do have a responsibility towards Evangelicals in mixed denominations and ought not to write them off. However, we need to ask them what they are doing to oppose error and to demonstrate their belief in a unique Gospel. We recognise them as brethren and as those who belong to us and yet their alignment with those who deny the Faith causes us problems.

*The Rev. Neil Richards is minister of a Baptist church in Winterley, Sandbach, Cheshire, and an Associate Editor of this journal.*

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### **Conference Summary**

*When the BEC Executive Council met in May they approved for circulation the following Summary of the major conclusions of the Study Conference. It indicates their considered reflection on the discussions as well as the papers and serves as a valuable supplement to Neil Richards' helpful report.*

The Study Conference performed a most useful purpose in providing a context for brotherly study and discussion of a subject which is close to the *raison d'être* of the BEC's origins and continuing ministry. While much was not exhaustively discussed and even more not satisfactorily resolved, the various positions did emerge more distinctively. Many expressed appreciation for the way their own thinking was developed by the discussion. Though we did not come away in unanimity we did leave knowing better where each other stood.

## **Union**

There was a common concern for evangelical unity to be furthered as it related to our churches but there was not agreement as to how this should be expressed, e.g. whether formal union could even be considered and in what ways unity among churches should be expressed. We are one and know we need to be more at one and to be seen as such.

## **Separation**

Various positions emerged regarding separation at church level from those in doctrinally-mixed denominations:

Anti-separation in principle and/or in practice:

This was a minority view. Objection was raised to separation both in principle and in practice. Others, though not reneging on it as a principle, yet believed that in the current situation (no longer that of 1967) separation should not restrict all our public relationships and co-operative links with individuals and churches in the doctrinally-mixed denominations.

Pro-separation in principle and in practice:

This view though supported by several was nevertheless a minority view within the conference. These brothers upheld the principle that the need to maintain a clear witness to the Gospel requires a reluctant but necessary church separation from evangelical churches in mixed denominations. There was no wish, however, to prohibit private fellowship with individual Christians in those denominations.

Pro-separation in principle but not total church practice:

This was the majority view. Separation was recognised and upheld in principle but it was not regarded as alone regulating all inter-church relationships and activities. These were to be determined in the light of conscience and local conditions.

## **Conclusions Drawn**

The continuing need for us to work for ways to express genuine evangelical church unity.

The continuing need for us to remain separate from doctrinally-mixed denominations.

The continuing need for us to grant each other liberty to pursue what each believes to be right within our common commitment to the aims of the BEC and to each other within the BEC family.

*For my part, until by a fresh pouring out of the Spirit of God from on high, I see Christians in profession agreeing in pursuing the end of Christianity, endeavouring to be followers of Jesus Christ in a conversation becoming the gospel, without trusting to the parties wherein they are engaged; I shall have very little hopes to see any unity amongst us, that shall be one jot better than our present differences.*

John Owen  
Animadversions on Fiat Lux, IX.1.

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# **Liberation Theology and the Ulster Question**

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*Sidney Garland*

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Religious, political and cultural divisions in Northern Ireland have erupted into the most prolonged period of violence which the State has known since its formation in 1921. The alienation of the two communities is very deep and the Ulster Question has brought both frustration and fear to successive British Governments. Many lives have been maimed or destroyed, while countless hearts have been broken and homes shattered as a result.

A higher proportion of the population in Ireland, Protestant and Roman Catholic, attend church regularly than in any other country in Western Europe, and yet hopes of reconciliation and a lasting peace in the community are very low. Around the world the cause of Christ has been dishonoured by the conflict in Northern Ireland, while in Ireland itself, both north and south, there is an increasing drift from the Church.

Those churchmen who have been most vocal have not always displayed a spirit of love, understanding or reconciliation, preferring a polemical spirit which has often fuelled the fires of an idolatrous nationalism in both communities. One evangelical has recently challenged those who respect the Scriptures: "How much genuinely biblical thinking has been done about the underlying causes of the troubles?"<sup>1</sup>

## **New Challenge**

A new challenge to Christian thinking has come from the impact of Liberation Theology. This has come to Ireland mostly through the influence of Irish Roman Catholic missionaries. The Northern Ireland problem is believed by some to be a close parallel to some 'third world' situations where Liberation Theology is developing. International capitalism and British imperialism have, it is claimed, oppressed and exploited the Irish people but have failed to extinguish their desire for the completion of the liberation of Ireland, a task only begun by the Easter Rising of 1916. The following dialogue with Liberation Theology can be profitable if the result is a deeper understanding of Scripture and of the contemporary needs of our society and a renewed desire to live out the will of God, thus making the love of Christ visible.

## **Problems of History**

Some understanding of the history of the Church in Ireland will give helpful background to our present situation.

When the Reformation came to England there followed some half-hearted attempts to establish the Reformation in Ireland. The Irish language was not used in the services and the Scriptures were not yet translated into Irish. The



Church historian, James Seaton Reid, laments the practice of “employing exclusively, as the agents of this work, the natives of a Kingdom against which the Irish were deeply and justly incensed. By this means the reformed religion became unhappily identified with England.”<sup>2</sup>

Queen Elizabeth had little zeal for the spread of the Gospel, but her Irish wars led to the extension of English rule in Ireland. When the last of the Gaelic chieftains fled to Europe in 1607, their vast estates were confiscated and granted to English and Scottish settlers. This seizing of Catholic lands has been resented ever since and has left behind a structural inequality where it is usually Protestants who own the most and best of the land.

The Plantation population experienced a gracious period of revival in the 1620's. However, this had little effect on the native Irish and the brutalities of the 1641 rebellion increased the settlers' feelings of insecurity and the development of what has been described as the siege mentality. Cromwell did his utmost by a combination of military force and evangelism to overthrow the Catholic Church in Ireland. However, the general result of his policy “was to deepen the gulf between Protestant and recusant (Catholic), and to strengthen the recusant's conviction that they would never be safe under a Protestant Government.”<sup>3</sup>

It is of great interest to note that there was a period of Irish history when many Presbyterians had common cause with Roman Catholics against the injustice of the ‘penal laws’ which discriminated against both and in favour of Ireland's small Anglican élite. The significance of the unsuccessful insurrection of 1798 led by the United Irishmen has lived on in the hopes of Irish Republicans that it would be possible to unite Catholics and Protestants in the pursuit of an Ireland free of English rule. This tradition of revolutionary violence has never wholly died out in Ireland.

However, by the nineteenth century, Presbyterian radicalism declined and a defensive mentality prevailed as the Protestant community rallied to protect their Protestant ascendancy. Last century also saw a major effort by English Evangelicals to evangelise Ireland. This so-called ‘Protestant crusade’ was no doubt motivated by a genuine concern to free Catholics from the burden of their sin but also by a desire to bring the blessings of British civilisation to the Irish. Their efforts had only limited success and one of the unintended results was to stir up community conflict and to increase hatred of England.

The anti-British feeling of many Irish Catholics was sadly confirmed by the Great Famine of the 1840's. It is estimated that as a result of the Famine one million people died. Though many English Evangelicals responded generously to the relief of need, the English Government acted hesitantly and half-heartedly. Such were the tensions of the time that Protestants who offered aid were falsely accused of using relief measures as a means of bribing Catholics to turn to Protestantism.

Other factors which brought division were separate schooling, the association of Gaelic culture with Catholic nationalism and the campaign for Irish independence or home rule. The Ulster Protestants believed that ‘Home Rule’

would mean 'Rome Rule'. Despite their invocation of divine aid and their expression of loyalty to the Crown, the 200,000 signatories to Ulster's Solemn League and Covenant pledged themselves to "use all means" to defeat Home Rule. They were in fact preparing themselves to defy the constitutional authority of the British Parliament.

The eventual partition of Ireland satisfied the Protestants of Ulster but seemed to be a surrender to violence, a thwarting of democracy and an injustice to the nationalist (Catholic) population in Northern Ireland. In spite of early clashes, the 1922 Settlement brought a degree of tranquility which was the opportunity for the healing of old wounds.

### **The Present Troubles**

By the 1960's the lot of many people in Northern Ireland was improving and yet this was the time when the present conflict began. It has been pointed out that revolt has come in many societies "not at the time of greatest deprivation but a time of rising expectations".<sup>4</sup> The rising generation of Catholic young people, stimulated by student activism in the United States, France and Germany, inspired by the American Black Civil Rights movement and frustrated by the conservatism and sectarianism of the Stormont Government, now began to organise a mass movement of opposition to the Government.

By focusing only on the violence which resulted, many Protestants too quickly condemned this movement and dismissed its concerns. However, the charges of discrimination in employment, housing and electoral practices, though exaggerated, cannot be totally refuted. Faced with a moderate reforming programme, the Government dithered while the initiative seemed to go to the extremists on both sides. Extreme 'loyalists' condemned every reform as a victory for violence and a step towards the destruction of the State. Extreme republicans saw every delay in reform as further confirmation that they would never achieve justice in the Northern Ireland State. Both sides included men who were prepared to take up arms to advance their cause.

### **The Development of Liberation Theology**

Liberation Theology is a movement which is attempting to develop "a new way to do theology"<sup>5</sup> from within the context of oppression and human need. Beginning with the 'scientific analysis' of the social reality, the theology of liberation seeks a new understanding of God as the One who sides with the oppressed and calls His Church to work for radical change in the world. Though it is primarily associated with Latin America, the theologians of many countries, facing different kinds of oppression (racism, sexism, etc.) are contributing to the development of the theology of liberation. For this reason it is now more accurate to speak of the theologies of liberation rather than merely the theology of liberation, though both terms continue to be used. There is now an enormous and still expanding literature on the subject.

Liberation Theology has grown out of the 'sinful situation' of the poverty and underdevelopment which has clearly been perpetuated by western countries for their own advantage. The Catholic Church has historically been linked to

the oppressive forces of colonialism and the ruling élites. The Catholic hierarchy has in various ways opposed the new ideas which have nevertheless continued to develop, especially in the Catholic Church.

A group of radical Protestant theologians developed in their thinking “from a predominantly Barthian theology to a theology of God’s transforming action in history greatly indebted to Paul Lehmann and Richard Shaw until Ruben Alves gave it creative expression in critical dialogue with Marcuse on the one hand and Moltmann on the other.”<sup>6</sup> God was said to be present in the struggle for humanisation and the Church was urged to join him and become a “revolutionary church”.

Two strands within Liberation Theology are represented by two Catholic priests who have each had a profound influence upon the movement. One of them, Fr. Camilio Torres, was shot dead on 15 February 1966 by government forces while leading his band of guerillas. The other, Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil, has been described as “an aggressive and practical pacifist”.<sup>7</sup> He himself spoke of ‘the spiral of violence’ which he saw in Latin America. The ‘first violence’ is the oppressive power of the system; this is resisted by violence which in turn provides more violence and repression. Camara believes that armed revolt is legitimate but impossible and prefers to speak of ‘peaceful violence’ and claims kinship with Martin Luther King.

Liberation Theology claims to be a universally valid way to do theology and says that “the task of Christian theology, wherever it may be developed, is the systematic effort to re-read history from the viewpoint of the rejected and humiliated.”<sup>8</sup>

### **A Theology for Ireland?**

A wide variety of Irish theologians (clerical and lay) have begun to interact with Liberation Theology and to endeavour to develop it or build on it in the Irish context. At a conference on Liberation Theology organised by the Student Christian Movement, a Dublin priest called on the Church to take a political stance against the injustice and deprivation experienced by the Dublin slum-dweller. Another lecturer, John Maguire, described the Irish economic situation in terms of neo-colonialism and foreign exploitation. In his view this system is maintained by an extremely authoritarian government with very strict emergency powers and by “a church that is extremely conservative politically”.<sup>9</sup> Maguire makes no apology for his Marxist outlook.

Paedar Kirby has written extensively on Liberation Theology and is extremely critical of the Catholic Church for being out of touch with the social needs of its people. On Northern Ireland Kirby is critical of the Church for not analysing the structural causes of the conflict and for assessing the situation in a static way: “there is a lot of violence. Violence is not Christian” and the result of this is that “the Church has no role in this problem because there is no historical analysis of what has been causing these problems.”<sup>10</sup>

Michael Garde, a Protestant layman, attacks loyalists such as Rev. Ian Paisley because he “takes the Province of Ulster as a given absolute which can be separated from the whole history of Ireland.”<sup>11</sup> Garde, clearly sympathetic to

Liberation Theology, views the situation as one dominated by British imperialism and an Orange State which cannot be reformed.

Enda McDonagh, Professor of Moral Theology at Maynooth, takes a much more critical approach to the Marxist influence on Liberation Theology. He wonders if there is any country in the world where Marxism “actually led to the liberation of a dependent people and not to a new form of slavery.”<sup>12</sup> A much more wholehearted supporter of Liberation Theology is Fr. Joe McVeigh. He contends that the Church must be on the side of radical, social and political change and that “the image of a middle-class clergy cannot be justified”.<sup>13</sup> He says that “the Christian response to the conflict in Northern Ireland, I believe, must be along the lines suggested by Liberation Theology.”<sup>14</sup> He favours a “consciousness-raising” type of education rather than the bomb and gun as the way to achieve the new society.

The man who has gone furthest in adopting a liberationist stance is Fr. Des Wilson, a controversial figure who lives in an ordinary house in one of the most deprived areas in West Belfast. Wilson strongly supports Sinn Fein, the political party which supports and justifies the armed struggle of the IRA. While his own bishop has warned Catholics not to vote for Sinn Fein, Wilson commends the party as “the reasoned choice of a dignified people”.<sup>15</sup> He claims to be following the example of Archbishop Helder Camara in “refusing to condemn those Christians who took arms in the struggle for justice.” Wilson believes that “what the British Government is doing in Ireland is unjust, vicious and degrading”<sup>16</sup> and asserts his view that “there is no way out of this impasse except by some kind of force.”<sup>17</sup> Wilson himself would hope for some kind of non-violent direct action but he is convinced that something radical will have to be done, and the sooner the better.

## **The Distinctive Method of Liberation Theology**

In making a more detailed assessment of Liberation Theology the following features are clearly prominent:

### **A Call to Praxis**

The Scriptures challenge the Christian to “do the truth” (1 John 1:6) and to “not merely listen to the word” (James 1:22). We know that the Gospel must be worked out in terms of concrete action and that orthopraxis is just as vital as orthodoxy. However, for Liberation Theology **praxis** is more than the point where belief issues in action. It “takes much of its meaning from its use in Karl Marx as the call for response arising out of the historical movement.”<sup>18</sup> Praxis is a particular kind of response and involvement; it is a participation in the class struggle to bring about the creation of a new socialist society. This is the kind of praxis which must come **before** reflection and the development of theology. It is the new starting point for hermeneutics. Theology is then placed at the service of this prior commitment to socio-political liberation.

### **Fear of Abstraction**

Liberation Theology says with some justification that traditional theology has been privatised and abstracted from historical realities. To avoid this danger of abstraction, theology must be rooted in the human and therefore in the

political dimensions of life. Christians must realise that they must not and indeed cannot escape politics.

### **The Role of Ideology**

A central feature of the theology of liberation is the conviction that there is no ideologically neutral theology or exegesis. Liberation theologians reject the ideologies of the status quo, and opt for an ideological commitment to the oppressed which for most of them means Marxism.

### **Basic Flaws in the Theology of Liberation**

However much we may learn from Liberation Theology, it is essential if we are to develop a scriptural theology, to enter the following caveats:

#### **Use of Scripture**

The Liberation theologians do not give to the Scriptures the primacy and authority which they demand and deserve. The Bible is often used, but more as a book of illustrations than as the sole authority in matters of faith and conduct. It seems that the text is swallowed up by the context and Scripture is not allowed to judge the theology or the Marxist philosophy tied up with it. The 'Christian feminist' and Liberation theologian, Rosemary Reuther, asserts that the text, the Bible, becomes "a document of collective human failure rather than prescriptive norm".<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Church, which for centuries withheld the Bible from its people, now uses the Bible but without inculcating respect for its authority and infallibility.

#### **View of History**

The theology of liberation has an optimistic and Marxist philosophy of history. The Marxist has a certain discernment of the future, a faith linked to the inevitable march of history, brought about by 'the revolution', which is of course just around the corner. This can lead to justifying anything since the revolution must succeed. The Sovereignty of God, the Fall, the Cross and the Second Coming of Christ are of little significance in this view of history.

#### **Externalisation of the Gospel**

With Liberation Theology we must reject the tendency to privatise and spiritualise sin, and to emphasise the vertical at the expense of the horizontal. This has resulted in church members who are "all too naive about the injustices of the present social order and too comfortable within the womb of the consumer society".<sup>20</sup> However, Liberation Theology is in danger of so externalising the Gospel that it seriously neglects the vertical God-ward aspect of salvation. By hitching their wagon to the Marxist train, the liberationists are in danger of repeating Marx's failure:

He failed both to plumb the depths of alienation (as estrangement from God) and to follow the perfect orthopraxis of the Creator's Son. Instead he bequeathed to an unjust world a powerful locomotive of revolutionary activism, but only the most frail of ethical tracks to run it on.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Ideological Captivity**

Liberation Theology rightly warns us of the way in which religion can be turned into an ideology of the State. However, Liberation Theology itself has become captive to an anti-Christian ideology. Without disputing the value of a

partnership between theology and sociology, we must reject any supposed neutrality in sociology, least of all Marxist sociology with its Enlightenment view of man. Professor Harvie Conn points out that "Marxism as a tool builds on a metaphysical definition of man as bearing within himself the power to subject to himself the whole of reality and to bring it under his own humanising regime".<sup>22</sup> By this means God is pushed aside, the Bible is prevented from saying anything unsaid by Marxism, and the door is open to a new Pelagianism, that is, man's advancement by his own efforts.

## **Liberation Theology's Challenging Agenda**

It would be all too easy to dismiss Liberation Theology and so neglect the challenge of working out a theology which applies the Gospel to every area of life and culture. René Padilla, an evangelical theologian in Argentina, asks: "Is not the radical leftist theology itself, at least in part, a reaction against the deadly reduction of Christian mission that has characterised Latin American Protestantism? In our aloofness from social analysis and interaction on the problems people face is there not what amounts to a de facto fundamentalism of the Right?"<sup>23</sup> The sections that follow are attempts to bring aspects of the Gospel to bear on issues people are facing in Ireland and around the world today. The agenda is wide open.

### **Liberation and Salvation**

One of the most common slogans daubed on the walls of Belfast is "Ireland unfree shall never be at peace". One of the most violent of the terrorist factions takes the name 'Irish National Liberation Army'. But what is freedom? What is true liberation? One of the most basic problems with Liberation Theology is its confusion of biblical salvation and political liberation. For example, Gutierrez says that in the "struggle against misery, injustice and exploitation, the goal is the creation of a new man"<sup>24</sup> This is both a biblical and a Marxist expression, but with quite different meanings. The "one new man" of which Paul writes is God's creation by Christ's death and God's gift to those who are personally in Christ (Eph. 2:15,16; 2 Cor. 5:17). This cannot be the same as the "creation" through Marxism of a new social order for all men, whether Christian or not. Liberation Theology is essentially committed to universalism. Gutierrez asserts "the universality of the salvific will of God".<sup>25</sup> The message is that God is going to save everyone. By the inevitable processes of history all men are heading for salvation and liberation. Those who jump in the stream (of political action) now will be carried along all the faster by God's liberating current. Gutierrez says that "man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others, even if he is not clearly aware that he is doing so".<sup>26</sup>

This equation of salvation with political liberation is similar to the definition of salvation which prevailed at the WCC Assembly in Bangkok in January 1973 and entitled "Salvation Today". According to the Assembly report: "salvation is the peace of people in Vietnam, independence in Angola, justice and reconciliation in Northern Ireland ..."<sup>27</sup>

Gutierrez goes so far as to say that "The God of biblical revelation is known

through interhuman justice. When justice does not exist, God is not known; he is absent.”<sup>28</sup> This is a distortion of the biblical doctrine of grace. We can agree that a true knowledge of God must issue in love and justice towards our neighbour, but to put it the other way round “is uncommonly like a doctrine of salvation by good works”.<sup>29</sup> Prof. Harvie Conn rightly warns that “Roman Catholic theology, throughout its history, has compromised that *sola fide* message with its ‘grace, plus’ bypass. Within Liberation thinking, is that ‘plus’ not now being reinforced?”<sup>30</sup>

Liberation Theology’s inadequate doctrine of grace is matched by an inadequate doctrine of sin. Fr. Des Wilson is typical of many in holding an unbiblical view of the goodness of man and viewing all men as “redeemed by Christ”.<sup>31</sup> Though Liberation Theology is right in showing that sin is more than an individual matter, a merely private or interior reality — that it has corporate, social and structural dimensions — nevertheless its view of sin remains dangerously shallow. As Carl Braaten reminds us:

Sin provokes the wrath of God; it is slavery to Satan; it is a state of spiritual death; it is a disease of the whole person — a sickness unto death. It is a state of corruption so profound that the elimination of poverty, oppression, disease, racism, sexism, classism, capitalism, etc., does not alter the human condition of sinfulness in any fundamental way.<sup>32</sup>

### **Human Rights and the Christian View of Man**

The present troubles began with a campaign for civil rights. This gave opportunity to some who were opposed to the very existence of Northern Ireland to begin a campaign of violence. As the Government tried to clamp down ever more severely on the violence, so concern shifted from civil rights to human rights — concern about powers of arrest, internment without trial, the treatment of suspects, allegations of torture, prison conditions, non-jury courts, and the use of paid informers. The result has been more alienation from respect for the rule of law.

Christians have been very slow to get involved in either civil or human rights issues, tending to concentrate their attention on the most wicked atrocities carried out against innocent people by terrorist (IRA) forces. There has been little understanding or sympathy for the sense of grievance widely felt in the nationalist community.

In discussion of rights we need to get back to the basic question of the Psalmist “What is man?” (Ps. 8:4). The Bible teaches that man had a distinctive origin which set him apart from all the rest of God’s creatures (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7). Man’s nature is also unique: he is made in the image of God, both male and female, made like God and to relate to God as a covenant being, responsible to God (Genesis 1 and 2). When it comes to the implications of this for human rights we can echo the words of the Lausanne Covenant (1974):

Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited.<sup>33</sup>

These principles should make Christians more willing to contend for the rights of others, especially the under-privileged, the weak, the unborn. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones warns us that “looking at history, it seems to me that one of the greatest dangers confronting the Christian is to become a political conservative, an opponent of legitimate reform, and the legitimate rights of the people.”<sup>34</sup>

As far as political or democratic rights are concerned it is surely time for Unionists to consider whether the invocation of “majority rule” is the way to do justice to the aspirations of around 40 per cent of the population. On the legal front the use of the uncorroborated evidence of paid informers has been challenged by many. A Reformed Presbyterian writer, Neville Kerr, on the basis of texts such as Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16 and 1 Timothy 5:19, concludes that “the supergrass practice, insofar as it leads to the conviction of men solely on the uncorroborated evidence of a self-confessed criminal is in direct conflict with the principles given to the Children of Israel by God.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Revolution and Christology**

Our society faces a carefully planned and totally ruthless campaign of violence, sometimes indiscriminate, sometimes directed against so-called ‘legitimate targets’ such as policemen, prison officers, judges and politicians, and sometimes directed against prestige targets in England. The aim is to secure ‘British withdrawal’. However, this is seen as only the first step towards the revolution and the eventual establishment of an All-Ireland Cuban-style socialist republic. As Michael Garde explains:

The Provisional IRA ... see themselves as freedom fighters finishing the work of de-colonisation which was uncompleted at the beginning of the century ... A necessary consequence of the Provisional’s nationalistic religion is the genocide of the Protestant people they are trying to force into a united Ireland.<sup>36</sup>

One of the sad realities of the Northern Ireland situation is that there has been equivocation on the part of some clergy on the issue of the use of violence in this present conflict. Fr. Des Wilson has clearly shown his sympathy for the IRA’s campaign of terror. He protests about the whole system of government as “institutionalised violence”. He says that the churches routinely condemn violence but he says “the churches have adamantly refused to define what they mean by violence. To them violence is when the poor guy in the street goes and gets a gun and shoots somebody, but violence is not when people are driven into exile, are driven into unemployment, deprived of adequate means of livelihood or deprived of their dignity.”<sup>37</sup> But Wilson is ignoring Paul’s teaching in Romans chapter 13. He resorts to the just war theory to try to justify his position, arguing that the revolution has hope of success and that a mandate has been given to the revolutionaries by the oppressed people. However, his own bishop, Cahal Daly, has refuted this argument showing that the ‘war’ is unjust because it lacks the support of the vast majority of Irish people, it treats the Protestants of Northern Ireland as non-people, and it uses methods which are barbaric.<sup>38</sup>



The theology of liberation has put forward a new approach to Christology which has serious doctrinal and practical effects. Liberation theologians have rejected popular Latin American images of Christ (as either vanquished and helpless or celestial monarch and remote), believing that these images have been manipulated by conservative forces to prevent change in society. Without doubt the repudiation of unbiblical traditions must be repudiated. However, the Liberation theologians have inherited from European theology a scepticism about the possibility of any sure knowledge of the Jesus of history. The result of this scepticism about the sources of Christology is that Liberation theologians are in danger of being among those who "depict Jesus in their own image".<sup>39</sup> As a result they are left with a Jesus who was a mere man who sided with the poor against the Establishment — a revolutionary Christ who is far from the Christ of the Bible, the Christ who is God Incarnate (John 1:14) and God with us (Matt. 1:23), the Christ who told His disciples in the Garden to put away their swords (Matt. 26:52) and who said to Pilate "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight" (John 18:36).

### **Poverty and the Kingdom of God**

One of the most disturbing challenges of Liberation Theology comes when it awakens our conscience to the extent of poverty in the world and also the depth in which this theme is treated in the Scriptures. High unemployment and years of bad housing especially among the Catholic urban population have contributed to a sense of hopelessness and alienation from the State and society in general. This has undoubtedly contributed to the violence in Northern Ireland just as similar disadvantages experienced by the black community in England have contributed to urban riots. This is not to condone or justify what has happened but to try to understand.

Evangelicals have at times been guilty of a middle-class internalisation which avoids the impact of the biblical message. We have spiritualised 'poverty' into an interior problem. However, Liberation Theology has gone to the opposite extreme by an externalisation which puts all the emphasis on social alienation, social-class conflict and economic deprivation, viewing all the poor as on God's side. For Liberation Theology "the movements of the poor can be seen as signs of the Kingdom, as places where God is working in history".<sup>40</sup> Herman Ridderbos points the way to a more biblical understanding when he suggests that the poor

"represent the socially oppressed, those who suffer from the power of injustice and are harassed by those who only consider their own advantage and influence. They are, however, at the same time those who remain faithful to God, and expect their salvation from His Kingdom alone".<sup>41</sup>

Jesus made it plain that He expected His followers to identify with the poor and to fulfil their obligations to the poor. This requires us to do more than verbalise our concern for the poor. We need to develop a more simple life-style. We need as individuals and as churches to consider ways of helping to change structures which contribute to poverty. Ministers and many other Christian people must face up to the challenge of remaining in or re-locating to the areas of greatest need. As John Perkins points out: "Many of

our neighbourhoods cannot be improved until there are people living there with the skills, the talents, and the resources that can make the difference.”<sup>42</sup>

Every effort must be made to bridge the gap between the Church and the poorest of society. David Sheppard says that Christians must begin with service to the community and realise that the time for naming the name of Christ “may be ten years down the road, when the neighbours have had the chance to see signs in the life of the Christian community”.<sup>43</sup> However, I believe there is a grave danger of substituting social activism for evangelism, and so we will ‘sell people short’. Surely we cannot wait ten years to tell the poor the good news remembering the way Jesus integrated word and deed in His ministry? It was reported of the labours of Christ that: “the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matthew 11:5).

## **The Church and its Role in Ireland Today**

### **The Calling of the Church**

Each church must ask itself: How far does our church fulfil its calling to be “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world”? For Gutierrez “any claim to non-involvement in politics — a banner recently acquired by conservative sectors — is nothing more than a subterfuge to keep things the way they are”.<sup>44</sup> One of the greatest needs in Ireland today is for churches who will display the *koinonia* in the New Testament Church, loving one another, serving the world, rejoicing in the power and grace of the Spirit.

### **Prayer**

We are under constant pressure to substitute activity for prayer in our own lives and in the life of the Church. Prayer is the cry of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (for putting things right) (Matt. 5:6). As we look at the world in its fallenness we are to cry out like widows asking persistently for justice before the “unjust judge” (Luke 18:1-5). We must acknowledge that the task of winning souls to Christ and of gaining victory over the powers of darkness and injustice is too big for us and so we must make prayer our top priority.

### **Social Responsibility and Evangelism**

One of the benefits of the debate with Liberation Theology has been the way in which Evangelicals have re-assessed the relationship between social responsibility and evangelism. Depending on the situation and depending on our gifts and function in the body of Christ, it may be right to concentrate on one or other of these two Christian duties. Although evangelism relates to people’s eternal destiny and the supreme need of all men is the saving grace of Jesus Christ, yet it has been well said that “seldom if ever should we have to choose between satisfying physical hunger and spiritual hunger, or between healing bodies and saving souls, since an authentic love for our neighbour will lead us to serve him or her as a whole person”.<sup>45</sup> Positively we can agree to the validity of the Grand Rapids Report view that social activity is a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism and a partner to evangelism. The same report helpfully distinguishes between social service (relieving human need,

works of mercy) and social action (removing the causes of human need, the quest for justice). There is much scope for individual Christians to get involved in both kinds of activity, sometimes combining with other Christians and sometimes getting involved alongside non-Christians as co-belligerents to advance a particular cause. In Northern Ireland the pro-life organisation LIFE has provided a sphere where Protestant and Catholic have come together as concerned citizens working for the common good.

The Churches in Northern Ireland have had a rather narrow social involvement, focusing mainly on issues such as temperance and Sabbath observance. In his recent study on the Gospel and the working classes, Roy Joslin challenges the Church to widen its concern and to become "a friend to the lonely" (widows and orphans, senior citizens, the single-parent family), "a defender of the powerless" (poverty, race, discrimination) and "a champion of the oppressed" (unemployment, fair wages, and human working conditions).<sup>46</sup> Although the title *deacon* may not have been applied until later, Acts 6 supplies us with a model for diaconal ministry which could be applied today to the administration of many church-based ministries to the needy. Johannes H. Verkuyl in a very thought-provoking study of the role of the diaconate lists some specific projects: "freeing people from addictions, advancing meaningful community, bridging the gap between conflicting groups, struggling against unemployment, and serving justice".<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Liberation Theology uncovers the urgent need for Irish Evangelicals to do more listening, to see ourselves as others see us. Then with a deepened understanding of the Scriptures and a renewed appreciation of our own Reformation heritage, we must begin to put aside the siege mentality and reach out across the barriers of alienation. We must communicate Christ by word and deed in ways which will not be misunderstood. In view of our responsibility to imitate the incarnation (Phil. 2:5ff) we must face up to the challenge of renunciation of status and pride, of independence and of immunity from trouble. The Ulster Christian should be more concerned for the rights and interests of others than his own. Professor Fred S. Leahy, a Reformed Presbyterian minister in Northern Ireland, challenges the Protestant majority to "recognise the distinction between their legal, democratic right on the one hand and their Christian obligation on the other".<sup>48</sup> While his suggestion of a federal solution to Ireland's problems may be far beyond the realm of practical politics, there are ways in which this spirit of reconciliation and self-sacrifice could be shown in Northern Ireland. It is no compromise of our Reformation heritage to admit that Protestants have been guilty of prejudice, discrimination and violence against Roman Catholics. Fears about the long-term future of Northern Ireland should no longer be fostered and exploited in order to excuse the failure of the unionist community to give the nationalist community a generous share in governing Northern Ireland. It is time to confess with Dr. Clifford Smyth that Protestants have "added fuel to the tinder of frustrated nationalism by their complacent disregard of the aspirations of the Roman Catholic minority in the North, and their neglect of the spiritual needs of Ireland as a whole".<sup>49</sup>

We must confess that we as Evangelicals have been guilty of “a spirituality without discipleship in the daily social, economic and political aspects of life”<sup>50</sup> and that “very often our quest for doctrinal truth has not been balanced with a desire for the grace which characterised the Master we seek to follow”.<sup>51</sup>

The task before the Church in Ulster today is urgent and daunting. And yet there are encouragements to be found. On many occasions the patience and prayers of God’s people have held us back from a Lebanon-type conflict. Ulster continues to be one of the most privileged countries in the world in terms of the strength of the cause of Christ and Ulster has been blessed with remarkable times of revival in the past. The Christians of Ulster would do well to ponder the considered opinion of Charles Finney that “revivals are hindered when ministers and churches take wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights”.<sup>52</sup> And yet in God’s mercy the number of evangelical preachers has been increasing over the past fifteen years.

I am convinced that genuine hope for Ulster and Ireland today is not to be found in a Liberation Theology which is ideologically captive to revolutionary Republicanism, nor in a narrow Fundamentalism which has married the Gospel to Ulster unionism, but in a biblical Calvinism which calls all men to repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ and asserts that all of society and all of culture must submit to the claims and authority of Jesus Christ.

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# Ecumenical Theology: Part I

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*Eryl Davies*

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Some useful books relating to the theology and history of the ecumenical movement have been published in recent months and the purpose of this article is to outline and review some of the more important publications which are of significance to our readers. I make no apology for beginning with **LESSLIE NEWBIGIN'S** autobiography, **UNFINISHED AGENDA** (SPCK, 263pp, £7.50 paperback). Without doubt this was one of the most absorbing and stimulating autobiographies I have read in recent years; it throws light not only on British theology and church life from the late twenties but it also documents Newbigin's involvement in the preliminary discussions leading to the establishment of the church of South India then his more extensive and official involvement in the World Council of Churches. The book is excellent value for a mine of information is here provided in a most readable style and I was impressed by the author's obvious sincerity.

Born in Northumbria and blessed with loving, godly parents, Lesslie Newbigin was educated in a Quaker public school at Leighton Park, Reading. By the end of his schooldays he had rejected the faith of his family and embraced a generally deterministic philosophy of history. However, William James's essay **The Will to Believe** made him acknowledge that a reasonable case for belief was possible and this was confirmed by reading a lucid exposition of the Faith by a Presbyterian minister, Herbert Gray.

From Leighton Park School he then went to Queen's, Cambridge, in the autumn of 1928. In his first year much of his time was spent climbing, singing, debating and there was no need for him to work hard on his geography Tripos. He also attended the SCM meetings and here his faith was nurtured, for the movement still included at this time many converted people who were profoundly devoted to Christ. Visiting speakers to these meetings included men like John R. Mott, William Temple (Newbigin recalls one of his telling statements: "It is possible to be comparatively religious but there is no such thing as comparative religion") and Frank Buchman, the founder of Moral Rearmament.

At the end of this degree course Newbigin accepted an invitation to join the SCM staff based in Glasgow and here he met his wife who was also on the same staff. Feeling both a call to the ministry and a deep concern for India, he then did his theological training at Westminster College, Cambridge, under John Oman. His early months in Cambridge marked a turning point in his theological convictions. As he wrestled with the Greek text of Romans over several months, his liberalism was undermined and he began to recognise the centrality and objectivity of Christ's atonement accomplished at Calvary. "The decisive agent in this shift", he remarks, "was James Denney. His commen-

tary on Romans carried the day as far as I was concerned. Barth I found incomprehensible. C.H. Dodd seemed to have made the Epistle palatable by removing its toughest parts — the parts where I found strong meat. His ‘demythologizing’ of the wrath of God seemed to me effectively to remove the love of God for if ‘wrath’ was only an anthropomorphic way of describing the consequences of sin, then ‘love’ would have to be explained along the same lines. At the end of the exercise I was much more of an evangelical than a liberal ...” (p.31). His commitment to political and social issues continued but one weakness he noticed and lamented in the Reformed tradition of ministerial training was the lack of prayer and meditation; Herbert Farmer, however, who succeeded John Oman at this time, introduced a quiet day for meditation and prayer which greatly encouraged Newbigin. The Cambridge SCM at this time hosted church leaders like Mott, Temple, Weatherhead and Micklem but, adds Newbigin, “it was William Temple who most powerfully influenced the students of that generation”; Temple also discussed theological issues with Newbigin and unfolded his vision for the future of the Ecumenical Movement. “It was from him,” he adds, “that I heard of the plans for some kind of world organization of the churches to follow the Oxford and Edinburgh meetings of 1937” (p.33).

At the end of his theology course, Lesslie Newbigin was ordained by the Presbytery of Edinburgh in July 1936 and two months later sailed with his new bride for missionary work in India. A broken leg in a road accident interrupted his missionary work at an early period and he was compelled to return to Edinburgh for nearly two years. In this difficult period he saw God’s wise providence and learned “that even if I never managed to do a hand’s turn of missionary work, God is still my Saviour and I can give myself to Him and trust Him for everything” (p.46).

Newbigin eventually returned to India to work in the sacred Hindu city of Kanchipuram. The learning of Tamil, the visiting of local Hindu homes, teaching in the High School and preaching fully occupied him at first but he was concerned that word and deed should not be separated. “I do not think”, he writes, “that the street preaching of wandering strangers is likely to bear much fruit in a place like this: but when men have earned their right to be heard by their service to the city in a school or hospital, their public testimony will carry weight, especially with those who have themselves learned the story of Jesus in a mission school. Thus the institutional work gives weight to the preaching, and the preaching gives point to the institutional work” (p.56). Newbigin also at this time met with some local Hindu scholars and studied in typical Indian fashion on alternate weeks the Gospel of John and the *Svetasvara Upanishad* and one of these scholars belonging to the Hindu school of *Visishtadvaita* which has been called and expounded by Rudolf Otto as “India’s Religion of Grace” and Newbigin was impressed by its many close parallels with evangelical Christianity.

From Kanchipuram, the young missionary spent increasingly more of his time in the villages for preaching and pastoral work when “the Gospel was doing what it has always done, making it possible for those who were formerly ‘no

people' to become 'God's people' " (p.63). Then there was the added responsibility of teaching and advising the village catechists and teachers who met with him for two days a month to learn Old and New Testaments, Christian Doctrine, etc. besides preparing for many of their meetings. During the following months, Newbigin recognised the wrong dependence of these nationals upon a missionary thus hindering any 'spontaneous expansion of the Church' which we see in the New Testament "because it was assumed that a congregation required a teacher, a teacher required a salary and a salary had to come from a committee in Scotland which had firmly declined to sanction increases in the budget." The 'Great Commission' then had to be suspended pro tem! He saw the need to localise the church and train gifted men to teach and pastor as "the key to future expansion". Frustrations, however, quickly set in for this busy missionary. Administrative duties were demanding by now and, rightly he felt it was not his job "to sit at a desk and organize the work of Indian pastors and evangelists. I thought that he ought to be himself a pastor and evangelist sharing their joys and sorrows as a colleague" (p.70). But Newbigin's approach was not approved by his superiors and he became more distressed over the way in which in the life of third world churches the assumption that the work of preaching the Gospel ... and building up the Body of Christ, is regarded as a relatively unimportant occupation compared to the work of administering a large organization. In words which are relevant to busy pastors in Britain, he goes on to declare, "it has caused thousands of pastors to speak of their workplace as an office rather than a study, to cherish a drawer full of files as the symbol of a status higher than that denoted by a shelf full of books, and to see the office desk as the place of real power."

Newbigin then moved to Madras City and then gradually over the following months and years he was involved in discussions about the famous 'South India Scheme' of church unity. Feelings were divided and in the early 1940's the whole unity movement had reached an impasse after talking which had stretched over nearly quarter of a century! His own written contribution to this problem was entitled **The Church and the Gospel** and later expanded into **The Reunion of the Church**. Newbigin himself had serious difficulties about accepting the 'historic episcopate' as a necessary element in a united church, a church — he insisted — which "was constituted by the Gospel, communicated in word and sacrament and evoking the response of faith. Ministerial order was therefore secondary ..." However, his views were changed after reading Michael Ramsey's **The Gospel and the Catholic Church** in which he thought — wrongly, I think — he had found a doctrine of the ministry compatible with both the Gospel and the Church. It was not easy resolving some of these issues and the implied but practical problem of reordination for non-Anglicans raised acute problems for many people on both sides. In September 1946 events began to move more quickly when the five Anglican bishops in South India agreed "that all who have the status of Presbyters in the United Church are capable of performing all the functions assigned to Presbyters in the United Church by the Constitution of that Church in every congregation of the United Church" (p.87). There was an immediate and positive response to this new initiative during the following year



and eventually Newbigin himself was elected a Bishop in the newly formed Church of South India at Mudurai in 1947.

His work was far from easy and involved the uniting of India Presbyterian congregations of Scottish and American origins, missionaries and now the Anglicans! Once again he saw his role primarily as that of an evangelist and pastor rather than an administrator and for the next twelve years threw himself vigorously into this work. There were many fears and problems. Some feared that the Church would "slide into Anglicanism" and that "episcopacy would corrupt the pure practice of congregationalism". Newbigin was clear. "The future lay not in the prestigious institutions but in the small village congregations under local leadership" (p.123) and he developed and gave priority to this local church ministry. The small theological seminary, where catechists and others were trained, was directed also to train leaders in the villages and then, along with others, Newbigin felt the need for a study-centre capable of stimulating and preparing men to meet contemporary challenges and eventually the **Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society** was established in Bangalore.

The newly installed bishop of Madurai was also quickly involved in the wider ecumenical scene. He was invited to be a 'consultant' at the Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 where the World Council of Churches was to be formally constituted. On his way there he attended the Lambeth Conference but was disappointed over its unclear voice concerning supplemental ordination. "It was", he writes, "one of those fateful turning-points in human affairs, for if the Lambeth Conference of 1948 had been able to give a cordial welcome to what had been done in South India, I am sure that the whole worldwide movement for unity among the churches would have gone forward. That opportunity was lost, and is not likely to come again" (p.114). The W.C.C. Assembly provided him with the opportunity of meeting theologians like Barth, Brunner and Niebuhr. Incidentally, the opening sessions of the W.C.C. were addressed by Karl Barth and C.H. Dodd on the theme, 'Man's Disorder and God's Design'. He was again in Europe in July 1951, this time in Geneva when he was one of the twenty-five theologians entrusted with the task of preparing the churches for the consideration of 'Christ the Hope of the World' which was to be the theme of the Second Assembly. This proved a stormy conference for the theologians for "Barth was at his most polemical ... Barth vented his wrath on Baillie ... Niebuhr had almost made up his mind to leave" while the other Continentals and the Americans disagreed strongly on the interpretation of the Assembly's theme! Some months later Newbigin was involved again in ecumenical discussions, this time on the famous 'Toronto Statement' which sought to allay the fears of churches that W.C.C. membership would involve compromising their own ecclesiologies. Newbigin felt strongly that the Council should face, as a matter of urgency, the question: 'What is the nature of the unity which is God's intention for the Church?' During furlough in 1952 he delivered the Kerr lectures which were then published as **The Household of God**; in this work he sought to undergird the Ecumenical movement with an adequate doctrine of the Church and to avoid the Catholic-Protestant impasse experienced earlier in Amsterdam. As he

studied the Scripture, he reveals, “I became more and more convinced that this two-fold approach did not reach the heart of the matter, and that these two traditions would only accept each other’s truth if there was brought into the debate a third element — that which lays stress on the immediate experience of divine grace and power” (p.136) and he called this the Pentecostal element.

During this furlough he also attended a conference of the International Missionary Council on the missionary obligation of the Church in which a restatement of the biblical basis of mission and contemporary priorities was attempted. Newbigin was in the theological group within the conference and alongside theologians like Lehmann and Hoekendijk who attempted, reports Newbigin candidly, “to swing missionary thinking away from the church-centred model ... and to speak more of God’s work in the secular world, in the political, cultural and scientific movements of the time. The report which the group prepared spoke of discerning by faith God’s action of judgement and redemption in the revolutionary movements of our time” (p.138). Early in 1958 Bishop Newbigin was invited to become the General Secretary of the International Missionary Council and thus to integrate it into the proposed Division of World Mission and Evangelism within the W.C.C. Despite his great love of the Tamil people and the importance of his pastoral work in the Madurai diocese he felt he should accept the invitation on condition that his church seconded him as a Bishop for a period of five years. This was agreed and the new post was effective from 1st July 1959 and in addition to his diocesan duties over the following months he travelled extensively on lecturing tours, W.C.C. committee work and he also wrote two significant books at this time, namely **One Body, One Gospel, One World** and **A Faith For This One World?**, the latter being an attempt to “state the case for the missionary calling in the context of proposals for the unity of all the religions” (p.165).

Chapters 15 and 16 describe in detail Newbigin’s work in the I.M.C. and then in the W.C.C. at Geneva. The sixties proved to be the decade of the secular and “the world, not the church was the place where God was at work. It was far more important to get people involved in action for justice and development than to have them converted, baptised and brought into the church” and Newbigin disagreed radically with this new secularity (p.198). He regarded, for example, Robinson’s **Honest To God** as “an attack on the very centre of the Christian Faith” and Newbigin contributed to the debate under the title **Honest Religion For Secular Man**.

In October 1965 Newbigin returned to India but this time as Bishop of Madras where he was to work for a period of nine years; after which he retired to teach Mission and Ecumenical studies at the Selly Oak College in Birmingham for five years and he was admitted into the United Reformed Church before pastoring a small church.

I have given extensive coverage to the contents of this book because it covers and comments upon significant developments within Christendom over the past four decades. Undoubtedly the autobiographer is a courageous Christian who has embraced the true gospel but the reviewer for one regards him also as

having blind-spots, for example, concerning the nature of the Church and Christian unity. But this is a book which deserves to be read and read thoughtfully.

Let me now ask you to ponder these descriptions and assessments of another Christian leader in the earlier decades of the twentieth century:-

“an ecumenical and evangelical giant”;

“the leading ecumenical statesman of the Protestant world throughout the first half of the twentieth century”;

“the ablest ecclesiastical statesman and world Christian of his time ... the ecumenical movement would not have been ready for Pope XXIII if it had not been for his vision and work ...”

“the greatest missionary statesman and ecumenical architect in modern times ...”

Can you identify this person? Do you know anything about the man's formative influence upon the World Council of Churches? Probably many readers will have to acknowledge their ignorance both of the person's name and contribution. Well, let me put you out of your agony. His name is **John R. Mott** whose life spanned the long but crucial period of 1865-1955. I am mentioning this 'ecumenical giant' because of a recent and detailed biography which has been published, entitled: **JOHN R. MOTT, 1865-1955: A BIOGRAPHY**, C. Howard Hopkins, (Eerdmans 1979, £19.95, 816 pp., hard-back).

Converted at the age of thirteen through the preaching of a Quaker evangelist, Mott was soon determined to live 'an open, active, religious life'. Later in Cornell College at the age of twenty, he felt God might be calling him into the ministry and he was greatly helped by the visit of C.T. Studd to his college who advised Mott to "look Christ-ward" and to the Bible. Within his Methodist Holiness Church context, he claimed the 'higher ground' of 'entire sanctification' and then went as a college representative to D.L. Moody's first **College Students Summer School** which, later at the age of 85, Mott described as one of the "most creative experiences" of his life. The biographer pin-points some of the lessons of this Summer School as being "far-reaching and formative"; for example, here he learned the "subordination of abstract doctrines to the compelling central Christian thrust towards action" (p.29) and the "interdenominational flavour of the Summer School (an 'ecumenical example') "may well have been the most important lesson" he learnt there.

After completing his college studies, Mott accepted an invitation in 1888 to become travelling secretary, then senior student-secretary of the national YMCA and under Mott the work advanced in spectacular ways. "From the perspective of the last quarter of the twentieth century when the student Christian movement for which Mott laboured has all but disappeared", writes his biographer, "it is difficult to realise that in the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first four of the twentieth, it made one of the most important contributions of American Protestantism to world Christianity. A major source of the ecumenical movement, this youth movement was on the threshold of its greatest development when, in 1890, Mott became the most

dynamic force within it. A direct line runs from the Mount Hermon Summer School of 1886 to the World Council of Churches of 1948, by way of the American-Canadian student YMCA, the Student Volunteer Movement, their parent Associations, and the World's Student Christian Federation" (p.83). The latter organisation, declared John Mott, "will ... inevitably unite in spirit as never before the students of the world. And in doing this it will be achieving a yet more significant result — the hastening of the answer of the prayer of our Lord 'that they may all be one' " (p.119).

Another significant step in preparation for the establishment eventually of the WCC in 1948 was the great 'Ecumenical Missionary Conference' held in New York in 1900. This Conference, remarks Howard Hopkins, "added the word ecumenical to the twentieth-century Protestant vocabulary, epitomized the expansionist sentiment, the growing missionary fervour and the thrust toward interdenominational co-operation that characterised the last decades before World War I" (p.225).

During the opening years of the twentieth century, the social gospel and Progressivism began to influence the movements under Mott's leadership where there was a gradual shift of emphasis both in teaching and in activities.

The World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910 was more than a conference: it was in Mott's estimate, "the most notable gathering in the interest of the worldwide expansion of Christianity ever held, not only in missionary annals but in all Christian annals" (p.342). Others have described Edinburgh 1910 as 'one of the great landmarks in the history of the Church' and a 'watershed in missionary discussion'. Mott was actively involved in preparing for the Conference and it was this Edinburgh Conference that "established Mott's commanding position throughout the Christian world and opened a new chapter in his life. As Conference chairman he exercised his authority firmly. The opening speaker was Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and his presence at the Conference was regarded as 'the dawn of a new era of ecumenism' ". One important decision at Edinburgh was that of establishing a 'Continuation Committee' to explore and implement the vision concerning 'co-operation and the promotion of unity'.

*(To be continued in next issue)*

Another book to be reviewed on this theme in the next issue will include a theological assessment of ecumenism under the title **The Ecumenical Movement: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church** (Geoffrey Wainwright, Eerdmans, £7.95, 263pp, paperback).

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# Book Reviews

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## The Wrath of God

*D. Eryl Davies*

*Evangelical Press of Wales 1984*

*68pp £1.40*

Addresses given at the Bala Ministers Conference are in the nature of Applied Theology. They are not lectures and they frequently become sermons. A particular subject is studied on an exegetical base and within a doctrinal framework before being related to the contemporary situation as it affects ministers, churches and society. The contents of this book fit that description.

Dr. Davies contributed an article in issue No.13 of *Foundations* which dealt with the doctrine of Eternal Punishment in a way which complements this book. In the article, he highlighted those areas of the doctrine which have been and are being decried today and the alternatives to them which are being favoured. Sad to say, evangelicals are not guiltless in this. That article adds a dimension to this book in that it sets the doctrine of Eternal Punishment against a broader theological background but does so in a critical manner.

In this book, Dr. Davies deals with the Wrath of God, the Final Judgment and Hell. He defines wrath, relates other manifestations of God's wrath to the day of wrath and argues for this propriety of wrath in terms of sin's offensiveness to the majesty and holiness of God. Wrath is then integrated with judgment, both as something progressive and coming to a climax, in this case with

the Final Judgment. The identity of the Judge and the basis of the Judgment for believers and unbelievers are discussed. Each of these opening chapters closes with practical observations.

Three chapters are given over to a treatment of the reality of Hell. In the first, definitions of the relevant terms in the Old and New Testament are offered together with responses to these objections to the doctrine of Hell, viz. Universalism, Purgatory and Second Probation. (In the reviewer's copy, pages 43 and 44 are duplicated.) In the second, the nature and duration of Hell are studied in relation to the twin truths of separation and punishment. In this chapter, the teaching of Conditional Immortality is discussed and Dr. Davies argues for the eternity of suffering. A final chapter is given to a consideration of the challenge the doctrine of Hell makes on our belief and our preaching and praying.

This is a much needed treatment of an important — a real matter. It is to be read in association with the Bible which is so often referred to and prayed over as well. There was a time when evangelicals used to be laughed at for believing and proclaiming these things. We need to weep that this is no longer the case. Then, others who are now so secure will weep as well — and we shall all rejoice together in Jesus "who delivered us from the wrath to come".

*Rev. Hywel R. Jones MA*  
*Principal, London Theological*  
*Seminary*

## Creation in the Old Testament

*Edited by B.W. Anderson*  
*Issues in Religion and Theology, 6*  
*Fortress Press/SPCK*  
*Paperback, 178pp, 1984, £3.50*

This book consists of a series of readings which show how modern biblical theology has dealt with the O.T. understanding of creation. After a clear and useful introduction by Anderson himself, there are nine readings which bring out very clearly how thinking has developed in the last century. An excerpt from Gunkel's "Creation and Chaos" (1895), dealing with the influence of Babylonian mythology, is followed by a piece in which von Rad developed (1936) his view of God as Redeemer being more fundamental in Israelite faith than God as Creator. Walther Eichrodt (1962) provides an examination of Gen. 1:1, and then there is a survey of creation motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry by D.J. McCarthy (1967). Assessments of various aspects of Creation Theology are taken from Claus Westermann (1971), H.H. Schmid (1973), H-J Hermisson (1978 — Creation Theology in Wisdom), G.M. Landes (1978 — Creation and Liberation), and B.W. Anderson (1983 — Creation and Ecology). All in all, this provides a useful compendium of well selected extracts, which provide a very clear impression of what is being said in this area.

However, from a conservative point of view, useful though this volume may be as a presentation of modern thinking, it does little to advance our understanding of the biblical

message. It is thoroughly critical and liberal in its approach to Scripture, and its orientation is alien to, and dismissive of, all conservative thought, which is treated as merely an outmoded relic of a past age. Genesis is rather to be interpreted as mythopoeic language (myth expressed in poetry), and the whole is to be understood not just against the background of the mythologies of the surrounding nations, but as evolving out of them. Such an approach has a very restricted conception of revelation. "A historical-critical approach makes it impossible for us to view Genesis 1 as our parents did, namely, as the memorial of a special revelation, which had been granted to the first human being. Unshakeable, however, remains our conviction that in the evolution of Israel's religion the providential will of the living God is revealed." (Gunkel, cited p.47.) This is far from a conservative view of revelation — indeed it is not revelation at all. Furthermore, as the alternative approach adopted is founded upon revisionist dating of Scripture, there are basic flaws in its methodology here also.

But the most lasting impression that this volume makes is the uncomfortable realization of how difficult it would be to compile a comparable selection of conservative writings. Perhaps the focus of our thinking has been oriented too much towards the creation-evolution controversy, and not enough towards a positive modern exploration and presentation of the significance of the doctrine of creation. The liberal approach throws up many questions that need an effective and scholarly answer. How do we ac-

count for the connections between the Genesis narratives and surrounding mythologies? Can we give an effective presentation of early history that accepts the factuality of Genesis, and accounts for the features of the degenerate religious views of the post-flood world?

There is need here for a thorough conservative investigation, and this is also the case with the O.T.'s self-understanding of creation.

*John L. Mackay MA MLitt BD*  
*Professor of O.T.*  
*Free Church College, Edinburgh*

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*A church that refuses to declare what is vital for salvation under the pretext of achieving unity is both cowardly and unfaithful to her God-given mission of being a pillar for truth ... The scandal of the ecumenical movement is ignoring the blood of Christ as the means by which men are reconciled to God and brought into unity one with another.*

J. Marcellus Kik  
Ecumenism and the Evangelical, pp. 16, 118

*John Calvin once wrote to Margaret of Navarre: 'A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward, if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent, without giving any sound.'*

Klaas Runia  
Reformation Today, p.123

*'Truthful lips endure for ever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.'* (Proverbs 12:19)

*Be it observed to the honour of truth, that sacred thing, that if truth be spoken it will hold good and whoever may be disobliged by it and angry at it, yet it will keep its ground; great is the truth and will prevail; what is true will be always true, we may abide by it and need not fear being disproved and put to shame.*

Matthew Henry

*If we refuse to converse because we cannot commune, we fail to go the first mile (to say nothing of the second) towards restoration of fellowship. If, on the other hand, we commune where there is only sufficient unity for conversing, we cheapen both unity and truth and do our brother no good.*

John H. Yoder  
The Ecumenical Movement and the Faithful Church, 1958

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**ISSN 0144-378X**

*Printed in the UK by Christian Design & Print, Colchester*