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The authors' personal views are not necessarily endorsed by all the churches of the BEC.



BRITISH EVANGELICAL COUNCIL

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

a journal of evangelical theology

John's Prologue

Evangelical Church Unity

Interpreting Justification Today

Preaching on Esther

Contemporary Values

Christian Reconstruction

Clinical Theology

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

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Foundations is published by the **British Evangelical Council** in May and November; 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.

Editor Rev Dr Eryl Davies MA BD
 9 St Isan Road
 CARDIFF Wales
 CF4 4LU
 UK

All MSS, Editorial Correspondence and Publications for Review should be sent to the Editor.

Associate Rev R C Christie MA BD MTh
Editors Rev S Dray MA BD
 Rev N Richards
 Rev H R Jones MA

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Editorial

In contemporary churches, evangelicalism is increasingly spoken of not as a consistent set of doctrinal convictions but as reflecting a spectrum of views. Some significant shifts from traditional evangelical positions have taken place but these are being promoted by those with a gospel experience and who profess to maintain the final authority of Scripture.

From its inception, FOUNDATIONS has published the work of those on the decidedly conservative end of the evangelical spectrum. In this twenty-seventh issue we include some significant articles which well illustrate this principle. Readers will see for themselves how concerned the constituency of the British Evangelical Council is about serious divergences from basic Biblical doctrines.

The EXEGESIS article, for example, focuses on the Prologue of John 1:1-18 and Simon Martin sets it within its pluralist context. By a particular study of vss 9-11 he demonstrates the inconsistency of those evangelicals who use this passage to claim a saving efficacy for general revelation. Here is an extremely important crux for the theology of mission in a pluralist age. Similarly, Philip Eveson updates us on INTERPRETING JUSTIFICATION TODAY. He traces the influence of a liberal work on recent evangelical writers and shows that adopting these views will lead to the accommodation of unreformed Roman Catholic definitions, with all the ecumenical consequences which will follow. CHRISTIAN RECONSTRUCTION is the subject handled by Hywel Jones in a review article giving another example of changes in evangelical orthodoxy in our day. It will serve as a good introduction for readers unfamiliar with this school of thought and the practical issues raised by it. A longer article is provided by G Wyn Davies on CONTEMPORARY VALUES and their danger for Christians; this was originally delivered in the 1990 BEC Conference in London.

Warning about the errors of others, however, is only one side of the journal's ministry. On a positive note, Alan Gibson writes on PROMOTING EVANGELICAL CHURCH UNITY and seeks to apply New Testament principles within and beyond the BEC context. Recently, the Scottish Theology Study Group, which meets under the auspices of Rutherford House, produced a STATEMENT OF FAITH to speak to the issues and concerns of today and this is favourably reviewed by Neil Richards. John Kendall encourages preachers to tackle the neglected text of the book of ESTHER by making useful suggestions about the structure of the book and the way to approach it. Several BOOK REVIEWS are also included. Due to lack of space the promised article on LIBERATION THEOLOGY has been held over until the next issue.

With this issue we welcome new readers in Bible and Theological Colleges who are now receiving FOUNDATIONS at half-price. This has been made possible by special arrangements of the BEC Executive Council. We trust that they will benefit by reading it and recommend it to others.

The sudden death took place on 3rd August of the Rev J Douglas MacMillan, minister of Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church, Edinburgh and an Associate Editor of FOUNDATIONS. He was loved and respected far beyond Scotland. Our Christian love and sympathy have been expressed to Mrs Mary MacMillan and the family in their personal loss.

Exegesis 12: True Light in the World

Simon Martin

An exegesis of John 1: 1-18, the prologue to John's Gospel, with special reference to vss 9-11 and Christian witness in today's pluralist context.

Religious pluralism, and its challenge, is as widespread now as at the time of the Church's birth. No longer is it an issue facing only foreign missions, for within our society are many people of other faiths. Often we feel threatened, largely because we don't understand them or their beliefs. But as Christians, we have a biblical calling to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. How should we approach other religions and their adherents?

Our answer may be determined by what we believe Scripture teaches of God's involvement in non-Christian religions; ie what measure of truth they contain, and the extent to which they might testify to aspects of God's self-revelation. These are matters of current missiological debate, and they *should* influence how we witness to those of other faiths.

Our present scope is more limited. Our concerns are twofold: Firstly, how John himself 'bears witness' against the pluralist backdrop of his 1st century environment, looking at John 1:1-18, *as a whole*. Secondly, what John says about *how* God has revealed himself to men, and *what* has been revealed - looking in detail at John 1:9-11.

The Context of the Prologue

There exist almost as many views on the background to John's Gospel as there are commentators! Debate concerns the author's identity; his knowledge, and use, of contemporary religious ideas; the environment out of which he wrote; his intended audience; the Gospel's date of composition and circulation; and its purpose. Our initial concern, however, is the intellectual and religious environment informing both author and audience. From where did John get his ideas? What would his first readers have understood by his statements? Any valid exegesis rests on such bedrock.

Numerous origins for John's ideas have been proposed¹, with varying degrees of credibility; almost as wide a range has been canvassed in identifying the audience targetted by the Evangelist. Largely, this variety is due to the many supposed parallels 'discovered' between the ideas and language of John's Prologue (1:1-18), and those of other literary and religious traditions believed to be current when the Gospel was composed and circulated. Primarily this involves *logos* ('Word') terminology; contrasted light/darkness; 'enlightenment'; equivalence of light/life; and the incomprehensibility of 'divine light'.

Some parallels are almost certainly genuine and intentional (eg allusions to OT concepts like 'the word of the LORD'). But for others, we must question what relationship, if any, exists between John and these other sources. Is John merely being unoriginally derivative? Or demonstrating wholesale approval of pagan worldviews? Or 'reloading' contemporary terminology with distinctly Christian meaning, in seeking to commend the Good News to unbelievers (pagans and Jews) in his audience?

The Prologue as a Unit

John 1:1-18 is a single unit, showing clear thematic development and movement of action, pointing to a highlighted climax. Numerous studies of these verses have seen it

as a complex poetic chiasm, with pairs of ideas balanced around a central, fulcrum text. However, they seldom agree on either its detailed structure, or the central text, often resorting to arbitrary editing of the Prologue to produce a neater, more poetic, form. Taken as it stands in Scripture, though, these verses are not poetry but a type of rhythmic prose.

Similarly, the action of the passage proceeds, with increasing specificity, towards an identifiable time and place in human history. The opening words of the Prologue (*en arche*) echo exactly (and deliberately?) the opening words of Genesis, focussing the reader's attention on four things:- The existence of *ho logos* ('The Word') prior to the acts of creation; the differentiation from, yet intimate communion with, God of *ho logos* ('was with God'); His equivalence with God ('the Word was God'); and His role in creation ('through Him all things were made'). The pre-existence of 'the Word' is stressed by the reiteration of *en arche* in 1:2. 1:5 again echoes the creation account, with the interaction of light with primeval chaos and darkness. However, at this stage, the author has not disclosed *when* this has happened. Was it 'before' time? Or did *ho logos* relate to *zoe* ('life') and *phos* ('light') within recorded time?

Whatever is assumed as the intellectual background for this Gospel, nothing would adequately prepare the non-Christian reader for the shock of the divine 'Word' becoming 'flesh', the self-limitation of 'the light' within the bounds of concrete human existence. Such ideas ran contrary to popular expectation in every religious strand from which John has been held to have derived his ideas.

The detail of 1:9-11

We see that 'the light' (always definite and specific, ie later occurrences recall its referent when introduced in 1:4) is found in three contexts:- before and outside of creation (1:1-

5); as the subject of the Baptist's testimony (1:6-8); and in 'the world' (1:9). Each new context involves recalling what was declared *previously* about this light.

In 1:4 we read - "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." It is essential to recognise that 'the light' arises from 'the life', *not* vice versa. By tracing the pronouns back from 1:4, we find that it is *ho logos* ('the Word') in whom there is life.³ Life existed in 'the Word'; *this* constituted 'the light' of men. The disclosure here of 'life' in 'the Word' may well look towards the revelation of God in the real, human life of Christ Jesus, ie in 'the Word' become 'flesh'. 'Light' *only* came to men out of the real, human 'life' of 'the Word'; it was that 'life' which illuminated men.

The use of the present tense in 1:5 is also important; *phanei* ('shines' or 'is shining'), says something about the nature of the light. It did not *once* shine, but *has* shined and *continues* to shine; ie its time-relationship to the surrounding events remains undisclosed. From 1:5 alone, we cannot tell if the reference is to the non-temporal arena of 1:1-4, or to the human history of 1:6ff. It is also important to consider what is implied by 'darkness' and its inability to 'grasp the light'. ('Grasp' more literally, from *katelaben*, either in the sense of 'comprehend' or 'overcome'.)

[1:9] The Greek syntax alone cannot show whether 'coming into the world' refers to 'the light' (NIV) or 'every man' (NIV margin). Contemporary Jewish sayings are supposed to support the latter, but no true parallels are evident. In fact, "The true light...was coming into the world" makes sense in the context of the Prologue, with the theme of God's involvement in creation (through 'the Word'), and its disclosure through the Baptist's witness and the Word's enfleshment.

If, as argued earlier, the 'true light' refers back to the 'life in the Word' (1:4), then 1:9 is a clear reference to the entry of 'the Word' into the world. And if, as suggested, 1:9ff captures the Baptist's testimony, then it is certainly true that from *his* perspective, the 'true light' is *on the way*.

This light is 'true' (*alethinós*); not simply the opposite of 'untrue', but 'genuine' over against 'counterfeit', and even 'ultimate' by contrast with 'incomplete'. Significantly, it is here - with its entry into the world - that the 'light' is declared to be 'true', rather than at any point previously. Why is this so?

There are difficulties with the Greek word *kosmos*, here translated 'world'. In Greek it covers a broad semantic range, and we must ask, in each context, what is its intended meaning. It may mean the whole created order, or the world of men, or the stage on which events occur. Any of these might make sense here, especially the first one if this passage referred to God's general, extra-biblical revelation, and in view of the previously highlighted involvement of 'the Word' in creation. However, it can be argued that the Evangelist here maintains his almost universal use (elsewhere in both Gospel and Epistles) of *kosmos* as a negative reference to the created order (particularly the world of men) in rebellion against the Creator. If true, this would tie up two loose ends. Firstly, by explaining the emphasis on the 'genuineness' of 'the light' within this 'world', as stressed in 1:9. Secondly, in giving grounds for the ongoing 'shining' of 'the light' in 'the darkness' (1:5); 'the light' in 'the world' reveals and opposes the sin and rebellion that characterizes 'the world' (eg 3:19ff). Thus we should seriously assess the purpose for which the 'true light' was 'coming into the world'.

'The true light... gives light to (*photizei*) every man'. This might also be given a continuous sense - 'is giving...'. Again, it is not immediately obvious to what time-frame this refers; whether it is timeless, so implying that all men have always been given this light, or whether it is tied to the occasion of its 'coming into the world'. Further, it is not clear in what sense all men are 'given light', *photizei* can have the sense of 'enlighten' (ie an inner illumination), often taken as referring to God's general revelation. Such is

the customary interpretation; yet the present tense causes us to ask when this illumination occurs. Seen from one angle, the 'true light' has been illuminating since before the historical moment of Incarnation, and continues to do so through and after that event. Alternatively, illumination is only now here because at a specific time the 'true light' entered human history.

But *photizei* may also have the sense of 'shedding light on' (ie an external illumination). If such were its meaning here, there would be no reference to God's general self-revelation through creation and conscience; rather we should be seeing the specific event of the Incarnation as it sheds *its* 'true light'. This clearly corresponds with the stress of 1:4, that it was the *life* of 'the Word' that 'was the light of men'. The result of this 'light' of the Incarnation would be to cause 'all men' to choose between 'the Word' and 'the world', between light and darkness. This is a major emphasis elsewhere in John's Gospel; that the entry of the man Christ Jesus into the world produces an absolute division of this sort (eg 3:17ff). The Incarnation obliges men to *choose*.

But who chooses? We must ask to whom 'every man' refers. Again, the whole Gospel supports the view that 'every man' refers not to all people without exception, but to all without distinction, ie every *kind* of man. This, too, supports the idea that 'giving light' is something *other* than a universal general revelation of God through the pre-incarnate 'Word'.

[1:10] Although now 'in the world' 'the Word' remained unrecognised.⁴ Despite having been created through Him, 'the world' has neither recognised nor benefitted from the light that stems from 'life in the Word' (1:4). John's Gospel stresses the fact that those who believe, ie 'children of God' (1:12), no longer belong to 'the world' while still remaining in 'the world'. Yet to have become 'children of God' they must have been drawn towards 'the Word' *within* 'the world'.

[1:11] Not only was 'the Word' in 'the world', but he went specifically to 'his own' (*ta idia* - literally 'his own place'...his rightful property), yet 'his own' refused him (this time *hoi idioi* - 'his own people', ie the Jews). 'The Word' clearly and specifically went first to those, above all others, who should have recognised and received Him. On them, just as on all men, the 'true light' shone, yet with little apparent effect. The whole Gospel records how the Jews as a body attempted to eliminate 'the Word'. This echoes, then, the stress of 1:5, where darkness (in opposition to the 'true light') neither understands nor overcomes the light.

If we are to see 'the Word' and the 'true light', discussed in these verses, as indicators of God's general, non-salvific self-disclosure, then we must conclude that they are singularly ineffective, since not even those most 'in the know' (the Jews) recognised or accepted what was provided. On all the grounds discussed above, it seems far more likely that John's Prologue is considering the radical impact of the man Christ Jesus on all to whom He is revealed.

Conclusion

This brief exegesis of John's Prologue cannot give a full picture of the nature of God's involvement with non-Christian religions and ideologies. Passages such as Romans 1-2 and Acts 17:22ff must also be considered. Yet our study has highlighted some problems with commonly-held views on what John's Prologue does teach about God's self-revelation.

There are good grounds for thinking that John 1:1-18 *does not* disclose much about the truth-content of non-Christian faiths. Few would maintain that non-Christian ideologies bear witness to God's special (salvific) revelation; but our closer, contextual, reading of John 1:9-11 leads us to feel that greater numbers are guilty of over-interpreting this passage.

Viewing the Prologue as John's apologetic 'taster' for his Gospel, we see here God's self-revelation is strictly limited to the 'light' shed through the actual life of 'the Word'. Illumination has come, in John's terms of reference, only with the incarnation of 'the Word' in the life of the man Christ Jesus as testified to by the Baptist, and expounded throughout the Gospel.

The Evangelist's concern is not general revelation, nor the role of natural theology in Christian apologetic, nor even the ability of man's conscience to interpret the world in which he lives. His concern, both here and throughout the Gospel, is the decision-point, the 'Rubicon', that every person reaches in their encounter with the incarnate 'Word' - whether in the flesh, in the pages of Scripture, or in Spirit-endowed evangelism. Confrontation with Jesus presents every man with a decision; a decision which they will make whether consciously or otherwise.

This does not deny the role of general revelation within a New Testament apologetic, but we cannot squeeze it from John's Prologue. **John's objective was to bring people into encounter with Christ.**

Considering our other goal, we can assess how John achieves this with his audience. Like the best of preachers, he has something for almost everyone. His inclusive use of widely-appreciated concepts and terminology is a clear example of effective apologetic. Many, even beyond his original intended audience, would have been drawn to consider the Gospel's detailed claims for Jesus of Nazareth by the subtle use of the familiar alongside a shocking reversal of expectations (the 'earthing' of the divine, 'the Word' becoming 'flesh'!). People's cherished world - views would have been shaken.

We may learn from John on two counts.

Firstly, in his method. We may employ his apologetic approach in attracting the non-Christian faithful to consider the Good News. Yet we must be as well-versed in their world views as John was. This means friendships, interest, and understanding, not hit-and-run 'evangelism' employing utterly alien concepts and language. It will be hard work, since we must see that the Good News is communicated within a framework that they can understand. Like the 'Word' Himself, our communication must be 'incarnated'.

Secondly, in matters of central importance. We need to appreciate how God communicates knowledge of Himself to the people He has created; but this must be part of our ongoing desire to present the challenge of Jesus Christ clearly, intelligibly, and persuasively. In the midst of contemporary religious and ideological pluralism, we must ensure that both Christ and His claims are clearly grasped by those to whom we speak, even if they subsequently reject them both. **Let us be sure it is Christ and the Good News they are rejecting, and not us or our presentation of them.**

References

- 1 Origins proposed for the ideas behind John's Prologue have been:- Jewish (Old Testament, Palestinian & Hellenic Judaism); Greek (Philo of Alexandria, Stoics & traditions, both canonical & otherwise).
- 2 John's Gospel is noted for the difficulty of determining with certainty where 'report' ends and the Evangelist's 'commentary' begins (eg the point at which Jesus' own words stop in 3:16ff).
- 3 The use of verbs in the Greek here is significant. Here (1:4) *en* is the word translated 'was', rather than *egneto*, as elsewhere. The root verbs are not synonymous; *en* stresses existence not creation.
- 4 The pronoun *autou* in 'did not recognise him' is masculine, thus it agrees not with *phos* ('light'), which is neuter, but all the way back with *ho logos* ('the Word'), which is masculine.

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Simon Martin, BSc, MPhil, is a missionary from Uganda at Moorlands Bible College, doing an MA in OT studies before returning to Africa.

There is something which I want to make plain to you. We honour and respect evangelicals who disagree with us. We do not criticize them as individuals. We do not impute wrong motives to them. We grant that they are as sincere as we are and as honest as we are, and that they believe the gospel as we believe it. What, then, causes the difference? Well, the difference arises at this point. We interpret what they and we are agreed about as indicating that we should take a definite stand against the World Council of Churches and its teaching, and that for the following simple reason: we believe that the World Council and the great world church that is hoping to form is going to be the greatest hindrance of all to the preaching of this gospel and the salvation of the souls of men and women.

Let us be clear about this. We are concerned about principles, and personalities therefore should not enter in. We, in the British Evangelical Council, hold the view that not only can we do nothing to further the work of the World Council of Churches, but that we are called upon to oppose and resist it with all the might and strength and power that God gives us. This evening, I want to justify that position to you and I am going to do so by means of a well-known statement of the apostle Paul, found in the first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 14 and verse 8: 'If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?'

Dr D M Lloyd-Jones, Unity in the Truth, p 67, the recently published addresses at BEC Conferences, introduced and edited by Hywel R Jones.

Promoting Evangelical Church Unity

Alan Gibson

This article is the substance of an address given to the Westminster Fellowship of ministers in May 1991. It looks beyond fellowship between pastors to the British Evangelical Council's vision of inter-church co-operation.

'Recognising the urgency of the times, we desire to express our evangelical unity by meeting in fellowship and to discuss prayerfully together the principles upon which our unity may be expressed at church level, moving in the direction of a fellowship of evangelical churches.' So reads paragraph 6 of the Statement of Principles agreed by the re-constituted Westminster Fellowship on 23 January 1967.

From time to time fresh consideration has been given to this subject in the Fellowship and in 1984 the Rev Hywel Jones addressed the issue of 'Evangelical Unity, Separation and the Gospel'. In March 1991 further proposals were considered, based on the historical example found in the 'Worcestershire Association' of churches promoted by Richard Baxter in the 1650's.

Despite having sympathy with this 17th Century precedent, some present were not convinced that it adequately related to our contemporary needs. Although Scripture principles have not changed in 300 years, the church scene in Britain certainly has. At that time there was a far greater community of ideas accepted by evangelical ministers of all denominations. This is not so today. They had not seen the rise of liberalism, democratic individualism, ecclesiastical bureaucracy, theological (if not philosophical) pluralism and the charismatic culture which are all so dramatically influential at the close of the 20th century. What they then did was no doubt relevant to their age. What we today need is help in identifying the appropriate biblical principles and then to consider how these may be applied to the age in which we live. That will be my procedure.

Biblical Principles

1. Commitment to the true gospel is essential for unity. There is only one saving message, distinct and clear in every aspect (Acts 4:12). It unites all those genuinely joined to Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13). It separates them from all who are not joined to Christ (Gal 1:9). This fact must determine our approach to doctrine and to our spiritual life. Although we are committed to *Christian* unity, ie, of those who are 'all one in Christ Jesus', in reality we are limited to *evangelical* unity, ie, with those who share these gospel convictions. This is the ground for our reluctant but necessary separation from those churches not holding to these essentials. Separation is the consequence of our primary commitment to the gospel itself.
2. There can still be diversity with unity. Our Lord Jesus Christ uses the Trinity as our model, in which there is not an identity of persons but there is the closest interdependency between those persons (Jn 17:11,21,22). The differences between Jew and Gentile did not entirely disappear from the New Testament churches but neither did they divide them (Acts 15:19-21). The Council of Jerusalem urged, 'We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles'. Nor should our cultural differences divide churches today (eg a diversity of national cultures or of music cultures). Differences of theological perception over matters 'not essential to salvation' are more difficult

to handle. Local churches willing to recognise that there is such a category of issues (eg eldership, eschatology) can co-operate without having to agree about *everything* else. The FIEC have proved that to be the case in church planting.

3. There really is such a body as 'the church universal'. Theologically it is called 'the church catholic'. We are born-again into it even before we join a local church (Lk 23:43). It should have some visible dimension in society in every generation (1 Cor 1:2-3). Our duties and privileges in that body should find practical expression in inter-church fellowship (Phil 2:1-4). Those who today refuse to countenance any church body other than the local church fail to take account of this biblical obligation. We must have some means of knowing and recognising the other local churches in close enough proximity for us to demonstrate the reality of the church universal. These means represent a temporary scaffolding for the building of Christ's church, ultimately dispensable but currently indispensable to its growth and well-being.
4. Denominations as we know them are not found in the New Testament. They are a later development. That is not to say, however, that the Bible has nothing to say to us about them. We must, for example, take seriously what the first century churches did (1 Cor 16:1-3, 17-20) and did not do (Acts 15:28) as we attempt to work out a pattern of church relationships appropriate for us now. The dangers of denominationism are in interference with local church accountability to Christ as sole Head, in loyalty to the institution rather than to the gospel and in the diversion of resources to non-evangelical churches. Even groups of evangelical churches today must be aware of these dangers. We need to balance this with the church universal concept shown above. Other evangelicals in other groups may, in all sincere conscience, come to different conclusions about how they hold both in balance. In this case we must recognise that their consciences are answerable not firstly to us but to the Head of their church.
5. Christians are called to give priority to others (Phil 2:4), to be concerned for 'the brother for whom Christ died' (1 Cor 8:11). Our motivation in co-operation must not be selfish (What do we get out of all this?) but we must be ready to give to the weaker as well as to receive from the stronger. We must relate sensitively to Christians who, on the ground of Scripture, sincerely hold views different from ours. Not least is this necessary with those whose ecclesiology and view of ecumenism are different from ours. Our concern for their good may need to be expressed in cultivating such a fellowship that we are able to 'explain the way of God more adequately' to them (Acts 18:26). We shall, however, also be willing to learn from them in areas where they may be better instructed, equipped or advanced than ourselves.

What This Means For Today

The British Evangelical Council seeks to apply these principles in two distinct spheres. Our vision involves churches already committed to the Council and also those evangelical churches which are not at present in the BEC. The BEC includes 11 church groups and some 35 churches in no other body, altogether 1,200 congregations. Its Executive is made up of representatives of these Constituent Bodies and two men caring for the interests of the local churches not otherwise represented.

(This 'federal' structure has occasionally been questioned. One alternative proposed would be to disband the present BEC and invite every local church to re-apply for direct association with a new body. This, however, would not be acceptable to the presbyterian churches which were among the founder members of the BEC. Furthermore, the church bodies would wish to retain some form of national consultation for representative functions. As not all local churches in the present BEC would wish to join the new body this would also result in further division over issues not essential to salvation.)

Unity Within The BEC

1. Biblical unity is one dimension of holiness and is promoted by spiritual means. **Our priority must be prayer**, beseeching God for renewal and for revival wherever his people are. We must begin with the churches already in the BEC. Without sacrificing any distinctive belief, these must be encouraged to realise that they are part of a greater whole. A proposal for Christians to visit the prayer meetings of neighbouring churches has recently been made in the BEC newsletter. **Our second priority is the ministry of the Word**. A teaching obligation is involved, as both public conferences and smaller Study Conferences together with publications, such as **FOUNDATIONS**, commend our principles to a new generation. Unless, however, we begin with prayer then nothing will command the motivation needed to carry it through.
2. Prayer will deepen our concern for others and stimulate us to look for ways of co-operating with them. The more the BEC can promote joint ventures the more useful we will be. The principle of *networking* does not mean the BEC as such putting on its own activities but enabling one church group to benefit from the activities of another, eg Youth Camps (FCOS), Family Conferences (FIEC), Ministers' Conferences (EMW). A commitment to the BEC will not restrict a church in what it does but it can facilitate and promote co-operative activities with integrity. (It is not even necessary for the BEC's name to be attached to something for it to serve the ends we are committed to, eg The North of England Conference at Whitby, or a book soon to be published by the IVP and edited by the BEC General Secretary entitled, **THE CHURCH AND ITS UNITY**.) Sharing the same gospel means sharing the burden to spread it in evangelism. There is room for much more creative fellowship here. The BEC is not an abstraction with hidden resources; the churches themselves are the BEC and, humanly speaking, it has no resources other than its member churches.
3. To be meaningful such activities must be localised. We envisage a number of men in their own regions promoting activities consistent with the Basis of Faith and Aims of the BEC. This has already led to a regional committee being set up in Northern Ireland. We are also promoting the idea of a National Committee for Scotland. Ten ministers have already attended an initial meeting to discuss the de-centralisation of BEC activities in the various regions in England. (This is being pursued in liaison with the FIEC who are currently revising arrangements for their churches to relate together in groups and in regions.)
4. Whilst respecting differences of principle among Constituent Bodies, the BEC is a catalyst for closer relationships between them, leading to wider loyalties and better stewardships of resources. For some bodies this could lead to discussions about their merging. Despite some legal questions there are positive signs of closer links between the FIEC and the UEC. Already Grace Baptist churches have one common magazine. Although not actually a BEC project, supports for the London Theological Seminary came originally from those committed to BEC ideals as an indication that ministerial training is an urgent priority among us all.

Unity Beyond The BEC

1. Experiencing co-operation within the BEC enriches member churches and moderates the exclusivist tendencies to which all those with strongly held convictions are prone. By discovering faithful evangelicals outside our accustomed circle in other BEC churches we are then encouraged to reach out to genuine Christians beyond the BEC. The BEC has held regular Consultations with The Church Society, a conserva-

tive Anglican body. Our conferences in Ireland are regularly supported by some Irish Baptists. The character of the Evangelical Movement of Wales, with its strong emphasis on local fraternals, has been an example of this principle. Even if others ever had a 'negative image' of the BEC, that is no longer an accurate picture of our position. We are positive about evangelical ecumenism.

2. Without diminishing our commitment to separation from false gospels and unbiblical ecumenicity, the BEC maintains a link with other evangelical bodies in the interests of Christian witness. For example, coalitions on social issues (on Sunday Trading, Religious Broadcasting etc) contribute towards the visible unity of the church universal. Such mutual activities create opportunities for that better understanding which must precede any closer formal relationships between evangelicals.
3. Personal fellowship with Christians, of whichever church, and local contact with evangelical churches, whichever group they belong to, are positively encouraged. Bridges are being built as Christians from BEC shared in the Consultation for Evangelical Relations (now discontinued) and a private theological study group called The Forum for Evangelical Discussion. Who knows how these may enrich us? As others become convinced of the BEC vision we will urge them to join us. Even if they do not, we must be seen to be taking the initiative and not persisting in isolation. Our improved personal relationships may be one step to closer church links.

We Must Be Men of Vision

Salesmen have their *targets* and sportsmen their *goals* but Christians have *visions*, God-given insights into the purposes to which he calls us. One day God will bring his whole church into perfect harmony, when the varied hues of our differences will combine to show his multi-coloured glory. We are encouraged by glimpses of this vision in the Bible and we must take every opportunity to restate our distinctive understanding of how that vision should unite Christians of our generation in Britain.

This Vision is Distinctive

The vision is essentially different from that of the *modern Ecumenical Movement*, where the unique gospel of Scripture is not seen as essential for church unity. We recognise that some genuine evangelical churches are represented within the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. Nevertheless, we believe that by identifying with a church body which grants equal status to false gospels their own testimony is distorted.

Our vision also differs from that of the *Evangelical Alliance* which has personal, group and local church membership. We recognise the integrity of those working in this body and the fact that its Council declined an invitation to participate in the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. Local churches, however, may belong to the Alliance irrespective of the ecumenical involvement of their denomination. By contrast, the BEC accepts only churches which cannot, on grounds of conscience, identify with that ecumenicity which lacks an evangelical basis.

The BEC does stand for something distinctive but it is more concerned with principles than with 'paper membership'. It is the outworking of consistent gospel unity which matters far more than the name of the BEC. The scaffolding must not be mistaken for the building itself. If we promote the right vision then whether a church joins this or that body, whether the BEC grows or something else one day replaces it, is of less importance. What matters is that we all 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit'.

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

Interpreting Justification Today

Philip Eveson

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a good summary of the historic Protestant view: 'Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.' (Q33)

Modern Scholarship

Traditional Roman Catholic teaching has taken the verb 'to justify' to mean 'to make righteous', maintaining that justification involves an inner change in the individual making him into a righteous person and thus confusing justification and sanctification. More recently the Jesuit scholar, John Bligh, admits that 'to justify' often occurs in judicial contexts and sometimes means 'to acquit'. Commenting on Gal.2:17 he remarks that justification is "the act by which God transfers a man from the flock of goats...to the flock of sheep...but in the process of transferring him he transforms him - intrinsically...So justification is more than forgiveness; it is forgiveness plus transformation." Here justification and sanctification are being fused into a single divine act. Bligh states: "when God forgives and declares just, justice is imparted to the believer".¹ There are other examples within modern Catholicism where God's forensic declaration of righteousness is recognised as creating not only a new relationship between the sinner and God but also a change within the sinner. This confusion is present in the agreed statement on justification by faith in ARCIC II: "Justification and sanctification are two aspects of the same divine act".²

Over the last one hundred years, scholars of a non-catholic persuasion have made various attempts at interpreting the meaning of the verb 'to justify'. Sanday and Headlam, for instance, while they translate the verb 'to be pronounced righteous' and strongly disapprove of 'to make righteous', remove any ground for the charge of legal fiction by insisting that justification is "simply Forgiveness, Free Forgiveness".³ This will not do, however, because justification is more than forgiveness. Again, Jeremias admits that forensic language is used but says "Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness but forgiveness in its fullest sense. It is not merely a covering of the past...it is a new creation by God's Spirit".⁴ In saying this he not only emasculates justification but confuses justification and regeneration. Barrett, on the other hand, objects to translating the verb as 'to declare righteous' because it would be a legal fiction for God to say to an unrighteous person - 'I declare you righteous before the law'. "Not even God may pretend that black is white". He prefers the translation 'to make righteous', but not in the Roman Catholic sense of 'to make behaviourally right' (ethically right), but in the sense of 'to be in a right relationship'.⁵

The Influence of E P Sanders

There have been some significant developments in the last twenty years in the study of Paul's doctrine of justification. An influential book was written in 1977 by E P Sanders, in which it is argued that Judaism of the first century was not a religion of 'works'.⁶ It is "completely wrong", he says, to think of Rabbinic religion as a religion of legalistic works-righteousness. He criticises those scholars, like Strack-Billerbeck, who have relied too heavily on fifth century Jewish sources for their view of first century Palestinian Judaism. The material Sanders uses is limited to the early Rabbinic (Tannaitic)

literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical writings. From this background he shows that the Judaism of Paul's day can be described as "covenantal nomism". Salvation depended on God's covenant with them - his electing love, his provision of atonement for their sins and his promise of salvation for all faithful Israelites. Obedience to the law was not a means of winning God's favour but a demonstration of their response to God's grace and served to maintain their covenant relationship. Their keeping the law showed their distinctiveness as the people of God. When Sanders comes to discuss Paul's doctrine of justification by faith he argues that Paul was not attacking Judaism because it was legalistic (which it never was according to Sanders) but simply because Paul now sees that salvation is only available in Christ. For Sanders the point that Paul is making is simply this, that Christianity is a different religion from Judaism. It is a different understanding of what it means to be the people of God. He sees no continuity between the one and the other.

Sanders also argues that though the verb 'to justify' can mean 'to acquire', the sense changes according to the context. Its meaning can range from 'be reconciled', 'be cleansed', 'be forgiven', to 'become Christian', or simply 'be saved'. Paul's theology is not to be viewed from a legal perspective. The apostle is more interested in union with Christ. He also insists that Paul's gospel starts with the solution and only indirectly deals with the plight of humanity. The content of Paul's preaching was God's saving action in the death and resurrection of Christ and he called his hearers to participate in that action by believing. Repentance and forgiveness have no central role in the apostle's message. The real plight of man is that he is not in union with Christ and under the Lordship of Christ. It is believing not repenting, that brings us into union with Christ.⁷ In a later book he makes the further controversial point that though Paul's view of the law is unsystematic he did think that it was possible to observe the law perfectly.⁸

There is much that is fresh and stimulating in Sanders' writings. Of particular value is his thorough treatment of first century Judaism. His picture of that Jewish pattern of belief in Paul's day is not unlike the view of Mosaic religion presented in Reformed theology. Sanders rightly criticises the traditional Lutheran interpretation which sees Judaism as a purely meritorious system to earn acceptance before God, in the same way as Reformed theology has criticized Lutheranism for thinking of Mosaic religion as a religion of legalistic works. However, to dismiss or ignore the NT evidence (already apparent in the OT) of that natural human tendency to look to one's own works to gain divine approval or to supplement God's work is a basic flaw in his argument. He does not accept the Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastoral Letters, yet they are, at the very least, first century evidence of a Pauline tradition which emphasised that humanity is not saved by works of merit but entirely by the grace of God. (Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:4-7).

Sanders cannot deny that forensic language is used by Paul, yet he is biased against a legal understanding of justification and dismisses evidence he does not find congenial to his thesis. The fact is that sin, guilt, atonement, repentance, forgiveness, and forensic justification are all vital elements in the Pauline message and cannot be marginalized. While we would agree that it is possible for the law to be kept perfectly - the Man, Christ Jesus, actually did keep it - Paul shows in Rom 1-3 and elsewhere that the whole of humanity (Jews included) is in no position to do so. Sanders, however, dismisses these chapters as "internally inconsistent" and "a gross exaggeration".

Many have rightly criticised Sanders for the anticlimax to his thesis when he concludes: "In short, this is what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity." But Paul does far more than this. He shows that the unconverted Jews of his day had failed to perceive the true purpose of their own law. The OT Scriptures, which formed so much a part of their religion and worship, point forward to God's intervention in Christ. With the

coming of Jesus, God's Son, the Messiah has arrived and fulfilled the law and the prophets.⁹

Recent Evangelical Opinion

Sanders has influenced the thinking of such men as John Barclay¹⁰, James Dunn¹¹, Alister McGrath¹², Tom Wright¹³ and Don Garlington¹⁴. These scholars emphasise the relational aspect of justification at the expense of the forensic, and view justification more in terms of membership of the covenant family, and less in terms of the individual's status before God.

Forensic v Relational

Morris¹⁵, Murray¹⁶, Packer¹⁷, Ridderbos¹⁸, etc all express justification in the traditional Protestant sense and have emphasised the forensic nature of righteousness. Sinners are in rebellion against God and have broken the law which reveals God's righteous character. By that righteous standard they are guilty and condemned, and will be finally sentenced by the divine Judge to eternal punishment on that eschatological day of judgment. Jew and Gentile alike are sinners so that no one on the basis of their works belongs to the class of the righteous. Being righteous, God cannot be expected to justify sinners. In the gospel, God has provided a way to justify sinners that meets his own righteous requirements. God's justifying action is his declaration that the guilty sinner is acquitted, pronounced not guilty, given a full pardon, and judged to be in a right standing or relation before God and his law. The astonishing judgment is made on account of Christ's representative activity on behalf of sinners. He lived the righteous life, kept all the covenant demands and endured the covenant curse as the federal head of a new righteous humanity. The righteous are those sinners who rely entirely on Christ as their Saviour and are united to him. Jesus satisfied the divine wrath on account of their sins and his guiltless, righteous life and position is reckoned or imputed to them. They are no longer under condemnation and are assured that on the day of judgment they will be vindicated and blessed for ever. It is through faith alone that God justifies them. Their faith in Christ is not regarded as a work, but the means whereby they embrace his person and work.

The more recent approaches maintain that the biblical understanding of righteousness and justification¹⁹ must be considered not against the Graeco-Roman or present day court background but in the context of the OT covenant.²⁰ Righteousness in the OT is fundamentally concerned with relationships, with activity and behaviour which would be true to the demands arising out of that relationship. It is covenant loyalty, covenant behaviour, activity which befits the covenant. It is something which one has in relation to others.²¹ On the divine side, righteousness is God's faithfulness to the covenant in saving, helping and judging, etc. On the human side, it means belonging to the covenant and behaving according to the demands of that covenant relationship.

Alister McGrath has become a leading authority on the subject of justification.²² Righteousness is primarily seen as covenant faithfulness, sin is viewed as covenant faithlessness - a betrayal of a personal relationship, and the verb 'to justify' is best expressed by the definition: "to declare to be within the covenant".²³ There is little or no consideration of righteousness as an attribute of God, and the law is not presented as an expression of the righteous character of God. Righteousness is not to be thought of as conformity to a norm. Another exponent in this shift of emphasis is James Dunn who speaks of righteousness as God's activity of drawing people into covenant relationships and sustaining them within it. According to him the verb 'to justify' can include both 'to make righteous' and 'to count righteous' because it has to do with God's action in bringing about a new relationship in the covenant. This is acceptable as far as it goes even

though it is confusing, but then he and McGrath seem to agree with recent German scholarship where the divine righteousness is both a gift *and a transforming power*.²⁴ If this involves some kind of change in the sinner then they have confused justification with regeneration and growth in holiness. Justification is being merged with other elements of the gospel in such a way that the particular truth is lost. Paul stated that it is the gospel of Christ which is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), whereas the present emphasis regards the righteousness of God in justification as a creative power.

In his laudable attempt to apply the biblical truth to today's world, McGrath is in very real danger of so widening the meaning of justification that what Protestants have always held to be the essence of the matter is lost or weakened. His ecumenical approach to the subject would also take the church back to a medieval, Augustinian position in which justification would embrace the whole Christian life, including both "the *event* of being treated as righteous and the *process* of becoming righteous".²⁵ He maintains that Calvin, when he taught the doctrine of justification, used contemporary legal terminology to make the truth relevant to his generation. The modern preacher must use terms appropriate to the "felt needs of modern humanity". This is why relational rather than forensic language is considered more appropriate and is, in his view, more in line with the biblical stress. But it is Calvin who is more biblical for stressing the forensic, and it is that same emphasis that is still relevant and very necessary in the ecumenically confused climate of today.

Tom Wright likewise sees justification in terms of membership of the covenant family.²⁶ He states that justification is not how God makes someone a Christian, but God's declaration that the believer is already a Christian. His particular contribution pertains to the matter of faith. Justification takes place *on the basis* of faith, "because true Christian faith...is the evidence that the believer is already within the covenant"²⁷. Instead of law being the sign that a person is a covenant member, as in Judaism, faith is the sign. Faith is not a work of merit or what a person does in order to get in to the covenant family but the badge or sign that one is already in. Faith is the work of the Spirit and the evidence of grace. It is described in terms of its object - Jesus Christ. It is like a window: the person sees out and light can get in. It is belief that "Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead". Wright maintains that "when God sees *it* he therefore rightly declares that the believer is in the right" (*italics mine*) and a member of the covenant family. It is because God sees faith that he declares what actually is the case because faith is the indication that the sinner is in the covenant. He objects to the Reformed position which presents faith as the means or instrument of our justification because, in his view, it merges justification with the atonement and makes faith a luxury.²⁸

Wright's view seems to lean toward thinking of faith as primarily assent and when he takes this faith as the ground or basis of justification, he is in danger of merging justification with regeneration because God would then be justifying on the ground of change within the sinner. Of course, justification takes place in the context of regeneration. Justification is never divorced from regeneration, just as justification is not divorced from sanctification. Nevertheless, as justification must not be confused with sanctification so justification must not be confused with regeneration. God does not justify sinners on account of the Spirit's work in granting faith. Justification is never *on the basis* of faith but *through* or *by* faith, and that faith involves a personal reliance on the person and work of Christ alone.

There is much that can be profitably received from these newer insights and we must not drive a wedge between the forensic and relational aspects of justification. They are not mutually exclusive. It is not a case of either/or, but of both/and. The danger is, however, for the forensic dimension to be weakened, and this is particularly so when

every forensic reference is made to fit into a covenantal framework. While the covenant does provide an important setting for the forensic, it is not the only context. Some, like Dunn, realising this, especially in connection with Rom 1:18ff, where Paul deals with the Gentiles who are outside the covenant, still view righteousness in relational/covenantal terms of Creator and creature.²⁹ But the condition of humanity in rebellion against God is not only perceived in terms of a broken relationship, but of a new legal position where God is now the Judge and all humanity face him as guilty, condemned sinners. The questions put to Adam and Eve in Eden, demanding an account of their disobedience, point to the divine Judge, as do the verdict and sentence that follow. Again, in relation to the impending judgment on Sodom, Abraham pleads. "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 3:9-24;18:25). It is against this background of God's judicial conviction of sinners and sentencing them to punishment that the glorious truth of God's justification of sinners shines out. When justification is only presented as God's declaration that a person is within the covenant this clear biblical forensic aspect is muted. In Rom 5:16-17 and 8:1 justification is contrasted with condemnation, a point not given sufficient attention by these scholars.

The same applies to righteousness and sin. While these concepts are used within a covenant context in a relational sense, they also have a legal or forensic connotation. By concentration on the relational there is the danger of being influenced by an age which dismisses absolute standards of right and wrong. Sin is not only faithlessness, it is a falling short of what God requires, a transgressing of the divine law. God's law is the expression of his righteous character (Rom 7:12) and all are guilty before that law. No-one is good or righteous. In the modern emphasis there is a distinct failure to present righteousness as an attribute of God. In Gen 9:27 Pharaoh has to acknowledge: "The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked". While, for instance, Cranfield³⁰ sees in Rom 3:26 God's righteousness as a reference to his character (cf Lloyd-Jones: "one of God's own glorious attributes"³¹) Dunn sees it as his activity as covenant God of Israel³². It is noticeable that repentance does not figure large in the discussions and propitiating the wrath of God, of foundational importance in appreciating God's justifying grace to a previous generation of, becomes of secondary importance.³³

The influence of Sanders is nowhere more clearly evident than in the complete dismissal of the old merit-orientated background to Paul's teaching. While we may accept that Paul is attacking those who boast in their Jewishness and who insist that Gentiles must become Jews in order to be members of God's people, that is not the whole story. There were those who looked to works as a way of gaining acceptance before God and boasted in their works. Hence Paul's insistence that we are justified "not by works of righteousness that we have done" and that it is all of grace "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8f; Tit 3:4-7). Again, Christ's righteous life as meritorious comes in for criticism. Those who emphasise the relational have no place for it in their scheme. Tom Wright claims that there is no reference in Paul to the righteousness of Christ. It follows from this that there is no such concept as Christ's imputed righteousness. If 'to justify' means to be declared a member of the covenant community then there is no need for a verb like 'to impute' or 'to impart' righteousness. But surely 1 Cor 1:30 states that Christ is indeed our righteousness.

If this view of justification is right then it has profound theological and practical implications. It means that the Reformation was a catastrophic mistake by both sides, a complete misinterpretation of the Bible on this vital gospel truth. **Our modern evangelical scholars have solved the problem and done the ecumenical movement a great service! Justification is no longer about accounting righteous rather than making righteous, for it is both.** It involves a declaratory act and transforming power. It is no longer about imputed over against imparted righteousness. It is simply God's declaration

of a person to be within the covenant. Moreover, this fresh interpretation of justification, though it may well lead to closer visible unity with Rome, will do so without there being any fundamental change in her understanding of the essence of the gospel and her many other unbiblical teachings and practices. This change of emphasis will assist an increasingly serious trend among Evangelicals of regarding the old Protestant evangelical faith as but one of many acceptable interpretations within a united Church.

Status before God v Status within the community

In the traditional Protestant understanding of justification it is the sinner's acceptance before the righteous God that is central whereas recently, a shift has taken place and it is the sinner's acceptance in the covenant community that is emphasised. Now there should not be an either/or here either. Reformed theology, in contrast to the individualism of certain branches of popular evangelicalism, has sought to keep a proper balance. But the modern stress on the communal, covenantal aspect of justification is minimising the Godward aspect and tying justification too closely to the doctrine of the church. Wright, for instance, agrees with ARCIC II setting justification against the wider background of salvation and the church. "Justification is not an individualist's charter, but God's declaration that we belong to the covenant community."³⁴ It sounds good, but this presentation of a gospel, where sin as rebellion against God and the need for repentance are not emphasised, is likely to lead to many nominal professions and a false sense of security. Membership within the visible covenant community cannot shield us from the day of judgment and wrath.

Conclusion

Whatever new insights scholars may present there are no grounds for shifting the emphasis away from forensic justification. Justification is not only a declaration of covenant membership, it is the opposite of condemnation. The acquittal verdict on the final day of judgement is brought forward and anticipated in the present on the basis of Christ's righteous life and propitiatory death, which are embraced by the repentant sinner. At the present time there are strong pressures to modify the Reformers' definition of God's justifying grace in the interests of ecumenism. If justification is reduced to a declaration of covenant membership or broadened to become a synonym for salvation the heart of the gospel will be lost, the errors associated with Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestant Liberalism will continue unchecked, and the Church will enter another Dark Age.

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Rev Philip H Eveson BA MA MTh is the Minister of Kensit Evangelical Church and Resident Tutor at the London Theological Seminary

Esther: Preaching the hidden God from a neglected text

John Kendall

What do you make of the book of Esther? You may have little sympathy with Luther's somewhat untypical comment, "I am so hostile to it that I wish it did not exist for it Judaizes too much and displays too much pagan behaviour".¹ But when did you last preach or hear a sermon on it? In his commentary, David Clines suggests with some insight that, "Esther may...perform a valuable critical function for the Christian reader as a test case for whether one truly accepts the Old Testament as a legitimate and necessary part of the Christian Scriptures".² Since Evangelicals are well served with commentaries such as those of Baldwin and McConville³ perhaps it is time that Esther received more attention in our preaching. This brief article aims to stimulate fellow preachers to tackle this much neglected portion of Scripture.

Discerning the Book's Theological Purpose:

Valid application of Scripture, bridging the historical and cultural distance between 'then' and 'now', depends very much on our discernment of the overall theological purpose of the text. This is especially so for narrative. So what is the point of this book? It bears no mention of God and it has been criticised as being vengeful, bloodthirsty and totally secular in outlook!⁴

Certainly, on the surface, the book's purpose is to describe the origin of the Jewish feast of Purim, to justify its celebration and to regulate its observance, since it had no basis in the Law. However, a careful reading reveals a more fundamental purpose which underlies the significance of Purim and which applies to the people of God in every era. The book indeed appears to be carefully constructed to raise and answer the question, "What governs the destiny of God's people? Human power and effort? Blind chance or predetermined fate? Or the sovereign providence of a hidden God who rules over all things?" Faithful to the historical events that the book describes, the author uses all his literary skill to raise this question in the minds of his readers and **to bring about the conviction that this pattern of events could only be explained by the unseen hand of a God who is transcendently almighty yet intimately and personally present to care for His people.**

This understanding of the book is supported by the following features of the text.

1. **The complete absence of God's name**, which has caused a problem for many, can plausibly be seen as a literary device designed to raise questions for the reader about God's relation to these events. Such questions are made especially urgent by the apparent dominance of human power and the role of chance or fate, symbolised by the lot, in the early chapters of the book.
"The silence about God is quite deliberate, not to make the point that He is inactive in human situations, but on the contrary, that He is hidden behind all events.... The story can become, therefore, a powerful statement about the reality of God in a world from which He appears to be absent".
2. There are several oblique references to **God's hidden presence, activity and purposes** throughout the book.

- a) Mordecai's words in 4:14 provide more than a hint of this. They raise questions and invite the reader to reflect on what was happening. From what "other place" might deliverance come? Why should it do so? And who indeed does know whether Esther has been raised for such a time as this?
- b) The Jew's fasting in 4:3,15,16 clearly implies prayer to God. As we reflect on this, Esther's apparently fatalistic words, "If I perish, I perish" (4:16) are set in quite a different light. They stand as words of "determination which sees that faith permits only one course of action"⁶; indeed, words of trust, committing her life into the sovereign hand of God, whether He delivers her or not (cf Dan 3:17,18).
- c) Yet further reflection is invited by the passive forms of the verbs in 9:1,22. The month had been turned from sorrow to joy. But by whom?
3. The account's **complex coincidence of apparently unrelated events** to produce a coherent pattern is such as to cry out for further explanation. As Clines puts it, "The greater the number of 'coincidences' necessary for the salvation of the Jewish people, and the more implausible they seem, the more directly the role of God is pointed to. God, as a character of the story, becomes more conspicuous the more He is absent".⁷ Among these 'coincidences' we see:
- a) Vashti's deposition which leads to Esther's unsought rise to a key position (1:9-2:18);
- b) Mordecai's discovery of a plot against the king yet his loyalty going unrewarded (2:19-23, cf 6:1-3);
- c) Haman's casting of lots and sending of the fateful edict was on 13 Nisan (3:7,12). The fact that this 'just happens' to be the day before Passover raises the question as to whether the Jews can again be delivered as they had been one thousand years earlier;
- d) the king's unlikely (cf 4:10,11) receiving of Esther and his willingness to grant her request (5:1-3);
- e) Haman's unwitting preparation of the gallows for his own death (5:14, cf 7:9,10);
- f) the king's insomnia at the crucial moment and his 'chance' discovery that Mordecai has gone unrewarded (6:1-3). Notice that at this point there is no further room for merely human initiative. Haman intends to arrange Mordecai's death in the morning so that he might attend Esther's banquet in a happy mood (5:14). Short of divine intervention, Esther's plan will be too late to save Mordecai;
- g) the presence of Haman at that key moment and his comic misunderstanding that makes him both the author and executive of Mordecai's exaltation and his own humiliation (6:4-14);
- h) the king's return to the room just as Haman falls on Esther in supplication. Haman's apparent violation of the queen's virtue seals his fate (7:7,8). Events have been such that Haman has unwittingly threatened the life of the king's servant, Mordecai, together with that of the queen. From Xerxes' viewpoint this can be nothing less than an assault on his own honour and royal dignity.
- Perhaps then, it is no mere etymological coincidence that while the Persian name given to Haddassah (2:7) may derive from the Persian word for 'star' or from 'Ishtar' a deity, when written (as originally) in unpunctuated Hebrew text, Esther's name has exactly the same form as the verb, literally translated, 'I will hide myself'.⁸ This not only fits Esther's role (1:10,20) but may indeed point beyond itself to the hidden, sovereign God.
4. **The ironic course of events** with its turning of the tables on the enemies of the Jews clearly points to the activity of a higher power who brings about poetic justice on their

behalf. There are many parallels between earlier and later parts of the book where this turning of events can be seen. In these cases, similarity in Hebrew wording indicates the author's intention to point to this:

- a) the honouring of Haman (3:1) and of Mordecai (10:3);
- b) Haman and the lot (3:7) and the 'lot' of Haman (9:24);
- c) Haman receives the signet ring (3:10) which is passed on to Mordecai (8:2a);
- d) Haman's orders (3:12,13) and those of Mordecai (8:9-11);
- e) copies of Haman's edict (3: 14) and those of Mordecai (8:13);
- f) Susa bewildered (3:15) and Susa rejoicing (8:15b);
- g) Mordecai and the Jews mourning (4:1-3) and Mordecai's exaltation and the Jews rejoicing (8:15-17);
- h) Haman's exaltation (5:9-13) and his grief (6:12-14);
- i) the gallows prepared by Haman (5:14) and used for his execution (7:9,10).

While there is no precise chiasmic arrangement here, the theme of reversal is clearly stressed and the complex of events is seen to pivot around the fateful night described in 6:1-11.

With such features in mind, it is a useful exercise to make an outline of the main sections and subsections of the book and to attempt to state how each part functions to make the book "work" as a whole. This can help to crystallise one's thoughts on the book in preparation for preaching and helps to avoid 'not seeing the wood for the trees'.

Applying the Book's Message:

Given the tight integration of its story, perhaps Esther is best preached as a whole text, though it may be applied over several sermons. Certainly, the first challenge for the preacher is to convey something of how the book "works" so that the congregation has a grasp of its basic message. And this must surely be done in a way that communicates the book's literary artistry, engaging the minds, wills and emotions of the people. As John Frame puts it, "To say that Scripture is authoritative is not only to say that its propositions are true, it is also to say that its commands are binding, its questions demand answers of us...its exclamations should become the shouts of our heartsits promises must be relied upon... Each speech act is a form of biblical authority; Scripture exercises its authority over us by the speech acts it performs. It calls us to believe God's assertions, to obey His commands, to sympathize with His joy and grief, to laugh at His jokes!"⁹ (cf Westminster Confession xiv 2).

Are we not called to smile along with God as the sham of earthly power, riches and splendour is exposed? Despite his magnificent display of glory in chapter 1, Xerxes has domestic problems and appears to need "the legal experts and the flower of Persia's aristocracy to formulate a response which any self-respecting male chauvinist could easily dream up for himself".¹⁰ And though he brings the whole might of royal decree against Vashti and any potentially insubordinate females in the Persian Empire, we eventually find him mastered by the charm and courage of a submissive young Jewess! Should we not respond with both laughter and horror at the blind folly and self-seeking vanity of the evil Haman in chapter 6 as he talks at cross purposes with the king and thereby contributes to the exaltation of the man he planned to kill? And should we not respond with joy and wonder at our God who works hiddenly and mysteriously in all things for His glory and for the good of His people?

Having said these things to encourage a lively presentation that reflects the 'life' of the book, I would suggest that three major areas of application flow out of the text.

1. The comfort of God's sovereign providence

We live in an age when the process of secularization and the impact of naturalistic thought can work to produce a sense of God's absence or distance from ordinary life, even in the believer. Here Esther works to correct our misaligned perspective.

"An observer in the world, ancient or modern, can in principle discern the immediate and superficial causes of things that happen. He may, furthermore, conclude that all things can be sufficiently explained in a natural way, thus denying that God acts - or exists - at all. The style in which Esther is written acknowledges the fact that there is often, or usually, no obvious sign that God is at work in the world. But the whole series of coincidences in the book is made to show very clearly that nevertheless, natural explanations are never enough. There is a purposefulness behind events which the pagan acknowledges by his recourse to lots, but which the godly know belongs to the nature of their Creator and Redeemer".¹¹

Esther thus serves to remind us that our God really is in ultimate control of all events and is working out His good purposes for His people with loving care. That this control is exercised not by some distant and impersonal deity but by Yahweh, the one who is personally and actively present to deliver His people, is conveyed by the book's subtle but deliberate echoing of the Joseph story.¹²

While God's absolute sovereignty in all events is a truth that can be asserted far too glibly in the face of so much horrific tragedy that confronts us in the world that is fundamentally out of joint, Esther is not a glib book. It is far too realistic about the grim reality of evil for that, and dealing with the problem of evil is simply not its purpose. But it does have the purpose of calling God's people to faith and to find comfort in the fact that even when God seems absent, He is nevertheless working with all wisdom, power and love for the good of His children. The everyday lives and ultimate destinies of those who trust God are not governed by human powers or by chance and necessity. They are in the hands of a heavenly Father who is intimately involved in everyday realities whether bitter or sweet, spectacular or mundane and whose upholding and guidance of life is not a puzzle to be solved but a promise to be trusted.

He is a God who 'turns the tables' to bring about deliverance, not only in Esther's day, but even in the blackest and most awful event that this world has ever witnessed and ever shall witness (Acts 2:22-24). Is it not here, at the cross, in its apparent foolishness and weakness and absence of God, that we find the sovereign wisdom and power and love of God most fully at work? And is it not here that we find our deepest, most profound comfort? Our God is the one who works sovereignly in all things for His own glory and for the good of His people, and Esther's foreshadowing of the 'turning of tables' in His greatest act of deliverance should not be neglected in our preaching.

2. The challenge of human responsibility

Esther clearly implies that God's sovereignty is not simply that of some super chess player who can turn any move of his opponents to his own advantage. God is not an after-the-event god who only acts in response to human initiative to turn men's evil deeds to His good purposes. The book would seem to support the more full-blooded view that God works out His good purposes even in and through the thoughts and actions of evil men; yet in such a way that they remain fully responsible and He remains wholly good and uncontaminated by evil (cf Gen 50:19,20).¹³ This being said, we can rightly turn to Esther's strong emphasis on human responsibility.

The theme of conflicting loyalties that runs through the book is one feature that highlights this. "The author is convinced that loyalty both to temporal ruler and to eternal principles is possible in an alien state, though it may involve conflict".¹⁴ As they struggle with this, Esther and Mordecai are beautiful illustrations of Paul's words in Phil 2:12,13. Whatever our thoughts on the matter of Esther's possible compromise in concealing her

identity (implying concomitant transgression of the food laws?) and in marriage to a pagan, we can only admire her heroic and faithful resolve in chapter 4, where she comes to the realisation that she is inescapably involved in a situation in which sides must be taken, where to do what is right involves the risk of death.

As with Esther and Mordecai, so God is sovereignly present with us in the messy complexities of our lives. As He works in and through us, we too have the responsibility to do our duty and to trust the rest to God's hands; to take courage in times of crisis; to pray and cast our anxieties upon Him because He cares for us and He will answer; to work sacrificially for the benefit of God's people and not count the cost.

God is truly sovereign, but that in no way lessens our responsibility to act and it can never excuse our failure and sin. Rather in view of His providence, we are called like Esther, to faithful, dutiful and obedient action as we seek to live as God's people in the midst of a pagan society.

3. The 'lot' of God's people and God's enemies

Perhaps we can helpfully approach this by asking the question, "If God really is in control, then why did Haman come to power in the first place?" A biblically informed answer will surely recognise that in a world that is fundamentally in rebellion against God, which rejects His rightful lordship over the whole of life, God works both to bring gracious blessing and righteous judgement. Thus mysteriously, there are times when He withdraws His restraining hand on evil men so that even as they rise to power they bring about and heighten their own ultimate judgement (Prov 16:4). And even as they cruelly oppress God's people, they serve to bring about a more profound knowledge of God and deeper dependence on Him than God's people could otherwise have known - real blessing indeed!

It is here that the book of Esther has a valid evangelistic application. It clearly illustrates the wider biblical truth that, at base, there only two groups of people - God's people and God's enemies. And there are only two ultimate destinies - God's eternal blessing or God's eternal judgement. While men's ultimate loyalties may not be expressed in violent opposition to God's people, God nevertheless knows their hearts and will judge their rebellion and enmity against Him.

Yet God does not delight in judgement, and through the work of His son He has provided the means by which His enemies may be saved from His wrath and reconciled to Him (Romans 5:6-11). Indeed, as reconciled rebels ourselves, we can humbly and thankfully preach this message from Esther, trusting in the sovereign grace of our glorious God, who, in His mercy, subdues renegade hearts, turning them to repentance and faith and transforms His enemies into His reconciled people in Christ.

APPENDIX : The issue of vengeance.

The sensitivities of our people may be such that this requires some extended treatment, perhaps in a midweek Bible study. It is certainly worth emphasising that a careful reading of the text does not suggest that Esther and Mordecai were motivated by a desire for unbridled vengeance in issuing their decree (8:9ff).

- a) Esther's concern is clearly stated to be for the preservation of her people (8:3,5,6).
- b) Since the decree of Haman could not be revoked (cf 1:9; 3:8-14; 8:8) action had to be taken to neutralise its effects.
- c) Mordecai's decree allowed Jews the right to gather for self defence and to take action only against armed forces that attacked them. Since this is clearly stated, the words "with their women and children" (8:11), as with NIV, must refer to those of the Jews and not of their enemies. This is further supported by the fact that only men are killed

(9:6,12,14).

- d) The fact that no plunder was taken by the Jews, though permitted by the decree, is surely intended to emphasise that their defensive action was free from wrong motivation (9:10,15b).
- e) That they “did as they pleased” to their enemies (9:5) does not necessarily imply bloodthirstiness. Rather, together with “rest from their enemies” (9:16,22) it is a sign of God’s blessing (cf Neh 9:24,36,37 and the use of the term for a token of royal favour in Est 1:8). Previously, the Jews were under threat of destruction but now they had rightful authority to act for their own preservation.
- f) We should be wary of reading the verb ‘to avenge’ in Est 8:13 in a wholly negative way. The Old Testament forbids the taking of vengeance unlawfully or the harbouring of vengeful attitudes (Lev 19:18; Proverbs 25:21,22). God alone has the right to avenge wrongs (Deut 32:35) though He may authorise human means in doing so (Deut 19:11-13). This background should be assumed in reading Esther.

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John Kendall is a former science teacher now training for the ministry at the Evangelical Theological College of Wales.

Contemporary Values and their Danger for Christians

G Wyn Davies

All evangelicals share a deep regret that there is now an increasingly acute tension between the values commonly held in our society and those eternal values, deriving from the character of God, which are at the very heart of the Christian faith.

In order to show the nature and extent of this tension, I first propose to briefly review four major factors which have given rise to the world-view which currently dominates the way people in our society generally interpret their environment and experiences. Until the Renaissance both Christians and non-Christians believed that there were certain absolute truths, and absolute values deriving from them, which made it possible to judge what was right and what was wrong. However, a stupendous change in thinking has been taking place since that time for the reasons I will now indicate.

What caused the change

First, scientific methodology separates facts from values.¹ David Hume, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, highlighted the logical gulf between facts and values and many of the founders of modern science, Newton, Kepler, Galileo, decided that systematic analysis and experimentation to discover the structure and working of the created world was better done without taking into account its Creator and His values and purpose. Subsequently, the growth in scientific knowledge has resulted in facts being regarded as immutable and, although incomplete, as sufficient in themselves to describe and explain everything that exists. By contrast, values are increasingly seen as variable because they are regarded as wholly a matter of human choice. Nevertheless, values too can be described and explained in scientific terms and therefore, not only is there no need to introduce God to explain what is, but there is simply no room for Him in the closed world of materialistic science.

Secondly, the theory of evolution teaches that everything is in a process of development, of becoming. Consequently nothing is permanent, including human behaviour and values which are viewed as generated and conditioned by the culture and time in which they occur. It is argued that what is esteemed and constitutes value, results from "biological wisdom."² In other words, what is valued is what was found advantageous to the animals who were our evolutionary ancestors. And so God by this reasoning also is excluded from the moral realm: the sole determinants of moral value are the individual and the community in a particular place and a particular age. For example, the significance and form, and indeed the very existence of marriage is seen as wholly determined by the value placed upon it by a particular culture at a particular time.

Thirdly, liberal theology became a dominant trend in the 19th and into the 20th century. It claimed that "theology must be formulated in the light of advancing knowledge in philosophy, the sciences and other disciplines" and many of its advocates regarded Christianity "as not distinctively and exclusively unique, but rather as one 'religion' among others, and sometimes as one cultural movement among others."³ As a result, large sections of the Christian church lost confidence in the reliability of divinely revealed Scriptures and in the unchangeable validity of eternal values derived from the

character of God, as well as in the possibility of salvation through a divine, crucified Redeemer. This loss of confidence was recently demonstrated by the failure of the 1989 Seoul Conference of the World Council of Churches even to affirm humanity's unique status as the sole bearer of the Divine image.⁴ Since such uniqueness cannot be deduced solely from the nature of creation, it can be held with confidence only by those who trust the Biblical accounts of the creation, incarnation and redemption as being historically true and there revealing, amongst other things, the uniqueness of human nature.

Fourthly, the first and second world wars and, in particular, the unleashing of the devastating power of nuclear weaponry spawned a spirit of pessimism and impermanence. This was encapsulated in a slogan I saw some years ago on a school wall in Euston: *Why bother? Tomorrow the bomb!* This, together with other aspects of this century's continuing, frightful history of man's inhumanity to man, has led many to embrace existentialism. At the heart of existentialism in its different forms is the rejection of belief in rationalism and in scientific and technological idealism - because they are perceived as having generated as many problems and more serious dangers than they have solved - and a turning away from the external world to seek knowledge and meaning and hope inside one's own head. As a result, self-discovery and self-fulfillment are the goals of much contemporary humanistic psychology, including counselling theory and practice. Moral values are perceived as solely a matter of personal choice, serving the goals of self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Consequently, consciousness enhancing drugs, homosexual relationships and self-assertion, amongst other things, are counted just as morally acceptable as are helpful deeds and comforting words.

Today the combined influence of these four factors is profound and pervasive amongst both academics and the British people in general. Carl Henry concludes that the effects are far wider, stating that: "The twentieth century in which evangelicals proposed to win the world for Christ in a single generation has in fact become the age in which religious atheism swept millions of persons into its ranks and in which political atheism now rules half the world's population and much of its landmass"⁵. Secular humanism at its best dismisses a Biblical world-view and its related values as outmoded and irrelevant and, at its worst, and increasingly, considers the Christian faith as dangerously inhibiting to human progress and development. Reasons for this antipathy are not difficult to identify. For example, whilst some secular humanists may admit that religious belief and values helped human beings when their understanding of the natural world was rudimentary, they will also argue that since we now have a fuller understanding, we have come of age. We have reached maturity and can stand on our own two feet, facing up to the reality of a material, purposeless world, as well as our own meaninglessness.⁶ And we can now take charge of our own actions - free from the constraints of the primitive beliefs and the imagined, absolute standards of religious creeds. Not surprisingly, given the rebelliousness and pride of a fallen human race, combined with belief in the perfectibility of human nature, the prospect of such absolute freedom and self-sufficiency attracts both scientific optimists and existentialists - and it is particularly resistant to the Christian message with its call to men and women to acknowledge their inherent sinfulness and their utter dependence on a crucified Saviour for forgiveness and regeneration. Secular humanism also poses a number of serious dangers for Christians because of the way it affects contemporary thinking about values and I now propose to examine some characteristics of this thinking and the dangers arising from it.

Characteristics and dangers

Secular humanism advocates value turnover⁶

In his *ESSAYS ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT* Kohlberg⁷ argues that mature moral

reasoning involves out-growing externally imposed moral rules, as well as moral reasoning based on convention and social approval whilst moral maturity is marked by autonomous thinking. This poses a danger to Christians because it sees the abandonment of the moral thinking and especially a Divine-command morality, transmitted within the home, the church or the school, as a mark of an individual's maturity.

Whilst the media, popular music, advertising and peer-group pressure exercise a powerful influence on children and young people, education continues to play a strategic role in value formation and Christians in this country, as in many others, have played a prominent part in establishing and opening up education at all levels to the population at large. Teaching, along with medicine and nursing, was traditionally considered a calling when many other occupations were not so recognized and education has always attracted many able and committed Christians who have given of their best to the intellectual and spiritual development of their charges. For such reasons, Christian parents have continued to entrust their children to the general education system, believing that, even when Christian influence waned, it would still be neutral in matters of faith and conduct and positive in its effect in communicating knowledge.

Today, I believe that such trust is ill-founded. The behavioural sciences which inform so much of education theory and the training of teachers is heavily influenced by the positivist and humanist world-view whose development and perspective have already been outlined. All aspects and all levels of education are heavily influenced by it and it has bred an agnostic, antagonistic or pluralistic attitude to religion. The values and attitudes derived from secular humanism are inevitably communicated to pupils and students by the teachers' behaviour, as well as through the content and methods of their teaching. Therefore, not only can Christian parents no longer rely on schools and colleges to reinforce the Bible-based teaching of the home and church but they are competing against the secular world view and values which have infiltrated the content and methods of teaching. The dearth of Christian primary and secondary schools in many parts of the country means that parents and churches are waging an unequal struggle for the minds and hearts of their children whilst the absence of even one Bible-based higher education establishment of university or polytechnic status in this country is a major weakness in equipping the most able of our young Christians to think Christianly about their disciplines and to contend for their faith in their different fields.

The situation is not without hope, however. The number of Christian schools is growing and there is a Christian School Movement. On the other hand, nine out of ten children are likely to continue to attend state schools and the Education Reform Act, 1988 provides Christian parents with new opportunities to exercise an influence for good in the governing of schools. Christian teachers who are called to work in the state system have a crucial, if difficult, role to play and the work of organisations such as the Association of Christian Teachers and Christians in Education⁸, who support both teachers and others involved in education, should elicit both our prayers and support.

Secular humanism promulgates value diversification

Whilst value turnover denotes the changing of values over time, value diversification denotes the changing of values to suit different people and situations. Since what is right is regarded as that which is determined by a particular individual or group in a particular situation, Fisher et al⁹ argue that the highest stage of moral development entails tolerance, accommodation to the moral thinking of others and delight in the ambiguity of moral decision making and in experimenting with the definition and solution of moral problems. Values, like clothes, should be changed to match the situations, activities and people with which we are involved at a particular time and place and, we are told, such moral flexibility is essential to secure the integration and well-being of a pluralistic

society. Fisher and his fellow writers go on to claim that people who fail to behave and think in this flexible, relativist way will not be effective leaders and colleagues. On such reasoning, **Christians who adhere to absolute, eternal standards, revealed by God and transmitted through the Scriptures are disqualified from positions of leadership and responsibility in the world of work.** These views are now appearing in nationally respected management journals. If they become widely accepted, individual Christians will no doubt continue to be cherished for their integrity and diligence but if moral flexibility is amongst the factors included in leadership profiles and personality tests, then they will militate against the appointment and advancement of Christians to a number of posts. Christians are already experiencing discrimination in some situations and others may also have to face more limited career opportunities as the price they have to pay for their allegiance and witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Value diversification also puts Christians under pressure in their work situations in other ways, since the standards and expectations of others - be they customers, clients, colleagues or bosses - will often be different and conflict with those of Christians. For example, Professor Gareth Jones describes the problems like this in a medical context:

... the right decision for the patient in the opinion of the doctor, may not be the best decision for the patient in the opinion of the patient. In other words, the expectations of the doctor and those of the patient may come into a head-on conflict, perhaps on moral grounds or simply because of the different perspectives of the two... the ethical standards of the Christian working in medicine may come into open conflict with the very different ethical standards of some patients.¹⁰

There are many parallels affecting other professions and work situations. However, the pressure on Christians is made greater because when disagreements take place, in a pluralistic culture which has dismissed God-given moral absolutes, the right decision is not one which reflects such absolutes but one which accommodates the values and expectations of others. The prevalence of such problems makes the work of such organisations as the UCCF and its professional groups which provide opportunities for Christians to share and think through work-related issues particularly valuable. However, the local church also has a key role to play in demonstrating to members the relevance of Biblical principles and how to apply them to the complex and disconcerting moral dilemmas with which many have to face in their day to day work. I regret to say that my impression is that this is a largely neglected area in the teaching and pastoral ministry of evangelical churches.

Ellul argues the result of moral relativism has been value reversal

By this he means: "the use of a word designating a former value as a means of identifying its exact opposite." Value reversal is a long-standing tactic in the spiritual battle for men's and women's minds and hearts. In the very first engagement when Satan tempted Eve (Genesis 3), his main appeal, then as now, was to freedom and especially freedom from God. Satan calls upon "the slaves of God"¹² - constrained and frustrated by His unreasonable prohibition - to go for freedom. He argues that by rebelling against God's commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will both break God's tyranny and themselves become *as gods*: free to do as they wish. However, when they succumb to the temptation, they immediately discover that the freedom of which Satan speaks: the freedom of rebels, is opposite in its nature and its consequence to the freedom which they enjoyed as the viceroys of God!

During this century we are rediscovering the same reality. Freedom that "once was founded on a biblical consensus and a Christian ethos has now become autonomous freedom, cut loose from all constraints... Here is the reason why we have a moral

breakdown in every area of life.”¹³ Autonomous freedom is the opposite in its basis, its ethos and its effects of the ‘glorious freedom of God’s children’ (Romans 8:21). The word freedom has consequently lost its substance: we cannot be sure what people mean when they use it - and the same applies to other value words. For example, erotic films and homosexual relationships are described as ‘pure’; ‘the quality of life’ is used to justify the killing of the unborn and it is argued that ‘human dignity’ is the basis of a right to kill the old and the handicapped.

However, value reversal is not confined to the secular sphere, for Christian terminology also suffers from it. For example, we can no longer be sure when theologians and church members speak of *salvation*, of *love*, or of *hope* that words hold their Biblical meaning for them, or something quite different and contradictory. Similarly, the term *evangelical* is now claimed by some who believe that the Bible is inspired and reliable only on spiritual matters - not in matters of scientific and historical fact. It is also claimed by those who acknowledge every aspect of Scripture is inspired but who claim in addition, direct revelation through present day channels. In both cases the term loses its value in that it now encompasses people whose views are the opposite of the *sola scriptura* position which it has customarily denoted. This is in itself a crucial issue for it is only if the completeness and total reliability of the scriptures are tenable and the truths and values it contains can be proclaimed as eternally reflecting the character of God, that we have a viable, sure foundation upon which we can resist and counter value reversal and other attacks on our faith which are now taking place.

The result is an inevitable value conflict

People’s basic world-view provides “the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their (moral) decisions.”¹⁴ It may be argued that, of necessity, every thinking person holds one of two conflicting world-views, or at least, that they make moral judgements as if one of two world-views is true. As we have seen, the currently dominant world-view is materialistic: It begins with the impersonal - which may be mass, energy or matter, or all three in combination, plus time and chance. This inevitably leads to some form of ‘reductionism’, that is, everything which currently exists - including human beings - can only be properly understood by reducing them to their original impersonal constituents: mass, energy, or matter, plus time and chance. This in turn, just as inevitably, leads us to conclude that to talk about the *meaning* or *dignity* of human beings makes no more sense than to talk about the *dignity* or *meaning* of a pig - or, for that matter, a stone! All are made of the same substance, with the only real difference being that human beings are more complex. Whilst, therefore, it is possible on the basis of secular world-view to *speak* of all living beings as having equal value, it is but an equality of meaninglessness! In his paper *Man Against Darkness*, Stace puts it bluntly: “Nature is nothing but matter in motion” and “if the scheme of things is purposeless and meaningless, then the life of man is purposeless and meaningless too”.¹⁵

We have seen already that a secular world-view also leads to the conclusion that morality has no objective validity in that it cannot be derived from the real, material nature of things and people, and that it must therefore be a product of human imagination. Left in this position, we may *speak* about certain behaviour as being *right* or *wrong* but such words do not describe anything real, for there is nothing, and can be nothing, in the impersonal universe that corresponds and gives substantive and enduring meaning to such words.

The alternative world-view begins with the personal: with a Creator who designed, created and sustains all that there is, but who is different from it. A Creator great enough for such a task must at least be one who is infinite in His capacity to understand and create. The Judeo-Christian faith goes one vital step further in proclaiming that this

Creator has also revealed His presence and character through the creation, the incarnation, and the propositional statements of the Scriptures. Such revelation, the Christian maintains, reliably and truly discloses both God's nature and the nature of reality.

This world-view leads us to conclude that personality and moral consciousness are not just useful figments of the human imagination, but derive their existence and character from that of the Creator. The image of God in human beings gives them both uniqueness of being and uniqueness of value. Jacobs goes on to argue that, "If the nature of man can be defined by the theme of the image of God, his function can be qualified as the imitation of God." ¹⁶ In other words, the moral consciousness which human beings experience derives from the implanted image of God. From the self-revelation of God's character and will in the Scriptures we can derive moral standards which, since they reflect the true nature of reality, give an essentially unchanging content and meaning to the words *good* and *bad*. Living life to the full now comes to mean living in harmony with the Creator's revealed design and purpose for human beings, not by unaided endeavour but by the enabling of the Spirit of God.

These two world-views are wholly irreconcilable, for if one is true, the other cannot be true. Their perceptions of God, the origin and status of human beings, and of values and moral behaviour are in total conflict. For example, for the Christian, the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount are of prime and permanent significance, revealing what God calls His people to be in every age and culture. For the secularist, however, they are but fictions, maybe of historical interest but wholly inappropriate in concept and content for today and any attempt to prescribe or promote them is opposed because they are considered seriously to suppress human development and freedom.

Agreement is limited to the fact that human beings have moral consciousness and that without some regulation of human behaviour through the common acceptance or the enforcement of some moral standards, human societies would degenerate and disintegrate. For the Christian, the degeneration of individual and societal values and behaviour is an inevitable consequence of jettisoning faith in the one true God and in rebelling against His revealed standards and way of salvation. I am not aware of one example of a society, from the Roman Empire to Britain today, in which the rejection of Christian standards and their replacement by man-made values has resulted in that society improving its spiritual and moral health and advancing the welfare of its people. However, there are many examples of societies which have been transformed for good as a result of embracing the Christian faith and values.

Naturalism today

Throughout this paper I have used the term 'secular humanism' to describe the prevailing world-view and values. It is secular in that it treats existence as wholly materialistic. It is humanistic in that some at least, argue for universal moral principles which for example, require the protection of the vulnerable and the poor. Secular humanism is now under attack not only from Christians but from naturalists who argue that its view of morality is logically untenable. Since nature is all there is, they say, the concept of universally valid moral principles is either wishful thinking or the residue of Christian belief and has no foundation in the real world. Furthermore, there is now plentiful evidence - if only from the media and any station bookstall - that both materialistic humanism and secular naturalism are being challenged by a mystical naturalism - or cosmic humanism as some have called it - which sees its roots in pre-Christian paganism. Its most widespread and influential manifestation is the **New Age Movement** which has been emerging since the 1960s and encompasses, amongst other things, pre-Christian folk religion, UFOs and the healing power of crystals, as well as the occult, reincarnation

and new ideas about developing one's potential.¹⁶ 'The fool has said in his heart. There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable deeds, there is none that does good' (Psalm 14;1). In the first chapter of his letter to the Roman church, Paul describes a society beset by the frighteningly familiar moral corruption which results from the persistent and deliberate rejection of God's revelation of Himself and His standards; the exaltation of human wisdom; idolatry; the practice of immorality and depravity and the recommending of such practices as right, and a whole catalogue of viciousness. Every human relationship, that with God, the created world, other human beings and oneself, is corrupted in the name of superior human wisdom.

The tragedy of our day is that such immorality is widespread and largely approved of in our society and that it is nearly always possible to find someone, who in the name of the Christian church, will either publicly approve or excuse such degeneracy. Furthermore, there is a danger that even the evangelical constituency does not accept God's clear verdict on a nation like ours which deliberately rejects Him and opts for human wisdom and moral autonomy. Yet, Paul states clearly: 'And so, since they did not see fit to acknowledge God worthy of knowing, God gave them over to a base and condemned mind to do things not proper or decent but loathsome' (verse 28) and later 'Though they are fully aware of God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them themselves but approve and applaud others who practice them' (verse 32).

A Scriptural response

My task in this paper has been to provide an analysis of current values and their danger for Christians. I have sought to do so without disguising the catastrophic shift in thinking and behaviour which has taken place and which is bearing its fruit in broken families, broken vows and in much else, the casualties of which many of you meet all too often and no doubt seek to help. The danger is that such an analysis will cause dismay and despair and that is not my purpose. The One, True God is a 'God of hope' and the Good News of a crucified and risen Saviour is His message and His answer to men and women who, left to themselves and the influence of the prince of this world, always lapse into spiritual and moral darkness. In closing, therefore, I'm going to exceed my remit very briefly so that we can encourage one another through three responses to such a moral and spiritual crisis which the Scriptures indicate.

The first response is an unqualified confidence in the relevance and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ

If we are to persevere undaunted, we have to be totally convinced that the gospel is the only sufficient barrier against the total breakdown of our culture¹⁷ and the only sufficient source of spiritual and moral health in our society. We also need to be totally convinced that since our Lord had triumphed over the power of darkness and is willing to share His power with us, as He makes clear in issuing the great commission to His disciples (Mt 28:18-20) and in the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), *we can again see the day when our God is honoured and obeyed through the length and breadth of this land.*

The second response is a Christ-like compassion.

Matthew tells us that when our Lord saw the harassed and bewildered crowds (9:36), 'He was moved with compassion' and bid His disciples to plead with the Lord of the harvest to thrust out labourers into His harvest'. And who can fail to hear His distress when, towards the end of His ministry, our Lord cries out 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, murdering the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a mother fowl gathers her brood under her wing, and you refused!' (Mt 23:38) It is so much easier, so much less costly for us to harden our

hearts against the indifferent, the opponents of the gospel and those whose lives are foul in word and deed. But we are called to have the heart as well as the mind of Christ. Our convictions are to be wedded to compassion! We are to cry to our God for this generation. And we are to reach out to it - speaking the truth to it in love.

Finally, there has to be confrontation

In this spiritual battle, as in any other, we have three choices: cowardice, compromise or confrontation. The devil offered our Lord the way of compromise in the desert temptation (Mt 4:1-11) and when He set His face to go to Jerusalem and the Cross, he offered Him the way of cowardice (Mt 16:23) - and you can be sure he will make the same offers to us. But if we have something of the mind and heart of Christ then we will know that confrontation is what we are called to. Our Lord calls us to be salt and light (Mt 5:13-16) in this corrupt and dark generation that our lives and our lips might bear testimony to the fact that the way of wisdom and spiritual health is to be found in Him who is and who alone is 'THE way, THE truth and THE life' (Jn 14:6).

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G Wyn Davies is Dean of Management and Professional Studies at Gwent College, Newport. This article is the substance of an address given at the 1990 BEC Conference in London.

Review Articles

Christian Reconstruction – Hywel Jones

A review article on 'Theonomy', editors William S Barker & W Robert Godfrey, published by Zondervan, 413 pages at £10.35

Theonomy is a shorthand term for a school of thought which is also referred to as **Christian Reconstruction**. Those two terms taken together indicate what is distinctive about this outlook. It consists of a particular view of the legal portions of the Old Testament (Theonomy) and a fervent commitment to their enactment by the governments of contemporary states - penalties included (Reconstruction).

The publication of R J Rushdoony's work on Biblical Law in 1973 and the writings of Greg Bahnsen, Gary North and others have brought this movement to the fore. While it is a North American movement in origin, it owes something to Dooyeweerd and his philosophy of *law spheres* and it has now become a feature of the British scene. A journal entitled **Calvinism Today** has appeared, edited by Stephen C Perks of Whitby, and one or two conferences have been held. It is not impossible that it might have similar effects here as on the other side of the Atlantic where Christians and churches have become not only divided but alienated and the reformed witness has been hindered. This book is therefore a very timely one and it provides useful information about the movement and pertinent rejoinders to it. In addition, its tone is brotherly, unlike the vituperation which some theonomists use with reference to brethren who do not agree with them.

The work is in the nature of a *symposium* to which sixteen scholars associated with Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and Escondido have contributed. As one expects, the essays are marked by scholarly erudition but they are not difficult to follow. This is not the first symposium to be produced by faculty members of Westminster but it is the first of its kind. A previous volume was devoted to the defence of the orthodox doctrine of Scripture, but in this one, issue is taken with the views of fellow reformed theologians. Why? The preface informs us that the work was undertaken partly because churches pastored by alumni of the Seminary were being divided by theonomic teaching. But also important, no doubt, was the fact that Theonomy had arisen from within the reformed camp and yet no evaluation of it had appeared from that constituency. Hence the sub-title of the book which is **A Reformed Critique**.

The perspective on Theonomy which is common to all the writers is that it is a 'distorted view' of the reformed tradition which results from a different 'hermeneutical perspective...It overemphasizes the continuities and neglects many of the discontinuities between the Old Testament and our time' (pp 10&11). A similar lack of 'sensitivity and...discrimination' (p 348) appears when it handles historical data and pastoral/social concerns (pp 265ff). The chapter entitled **Theonomy and the Poor** indicates a rather unfeeling treatment of that subject. The adjectives 'simple' or 'flat' are used in the book to describe Theonomy's biblical perspective and they have real point. The formidable presentation of the theonomic case can leave folk at a loss to know how to reply to it, so it is comforting to read in this scholarly book that there might be 'something to the typical Christian 'gut reaction' to Theonomy' (p 42).

The precise dispute addressed in this book is over how the following question should be answered:

'How is the Israelite theocracy under Mosaic law to be understood and its typological significance related to the proper role of the church and of the state today?'

That is the nub of the issue and those who write on it agree with Theonomists that Jesus Christ is Lord of the nations as well as head of the Church. But a more important question is also involved. What is *the church's* message and primary task in the world today and how is that to be undertaken? Is it to assert and practice the *cultural mandate* as expressed at the end of Genesis 1 or the Great Commission at the end of Matthew? Is the kingdom of Christ to be advanced primarily by the power of the state or by the weakness of a suffering church, not yet glorified? Is it by the gospel or the statute book?

The symposium is divided into five parts with a conclusion. Each part is preceded by an editorial summary of the main point of the essay it contains which is likely to be a great help to the reader. Sixteen essays are contained in the book and each writer provides valuable footnotes to his text. Some of these are quite extensive.

The editors sum up the overall treatment as follows:

Part I seeks to provide basic orientations to the matter of applications of biblical law.

Part II contrasts theonomy with other systematic approaches to biblical theology.

Part III deals with New Testament teaching concerning the nature of the continuity of Old Testament law. Part IV addresses what we perceive as triumphalist dangers in theonomy. Part V is concerned with the historical question of theonomy's relation to the heritage of John Calvin and the Puritans. The Conclusion seeks to end the volume with a constructive challenge to Theonomy.

Some interesting pieces of information about Theonomy are found scattered in these pages, eg that its leading exponents viz Rushdoony, Bahnsen, North and Chilton do not always agree on how OT laws should be interpreted and that there are now different groups of theonomists which are not only separated geographically by distance. This is significant, given the seeming simplicity of their claim that all that is required is fidelity to the plain sense of the biblical text regarding law and penalty, and a determination to apply them to the contemporary situation. If that is so, how can there be room for disagreement, we may wonder? Or perhaps all is not as straightforward as is claimed? Then there is also the link between the charismatics and the Theonomists, partly through Gary North's adoption of the charismatic viewpoint. Does the dominion theology of the charismatics coincide with Theonomy's view of the law and reign of God (p 251). Is there a link between *the health and wealth gospel* and Theonomy? (pp 270&271) Or is there an uneasy theological moratorium here, in the interest of pursuing practical aims? Can it all be held together?

The essay by John R Muether (pp 246-259) which describes the sociological context in which Theonomy has arisen, is well worth pondering. Muether does not seek to explain away the Theonomic case by indicating the social factors which were at work at the time of its origin or subsequent appeal, but it would be naive of anyone to think that Theonomy is purely the result of the study of Scripture. His essay is entitled **The Theonomic Attraction** and he lists in his discussion non-theological features of American society and of the movement itself.

William Barker's essay shows that the New Testament recognises the civil government of the day and does not outlaw a pluralism in society. By *Pluralism* is not meant, of course, a pluralism of faiths but 'the freedom of religious belief and practice' accorded to a variety of groups without any one of them in particular being favoured. From our Lord's statement 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's,' Barker points out that 'the Lord did not expect the civil authority to support the true religion.'

Part V of the book (pp 299-384) examines Theonomy from the standpoint of the history of the Reformed tradition in Switzerland, England and America. What emerges from these historical studies by Robert Godfrey, Sinclair Ferguson and Samuel T Logan is that Theonomy does not stand in the direct line of descent from Calvin, the Westminster

Assembly men or the New England Puritans. These are very interesting chapters and exhibit careful scholarship on the subject of how those referred to regarded the law of God in its bearing on civic affairs.

While historical study has a place in this evaluation, all the writers recognise that the primary element in the reply to Theonomy must be biblical in character. In addition, they are agreed, as has been said, in locating the waywardness of Theonomy in its lack of sensitivity to 'the progress of biblical theology' (p 289), that is the progressive unfolding of the mind and will of God in covenants through history as recorded in Holy Scripture. The answer to Theonomy, therefore, is obtained by a careful study of the legal portions of the Old Testament in their own setting and also in the New Testament to see how such material is dealt with there.

Of the essays which are devoted to this biblical examination some are general in character and others focus on detailed subjects. Important matters are treated in them which Theonomists need to consider. What is more, the entire discussion will help the reader to think seriously about the relationship between the two Testaments.

Robert Knudsen deals with laws (and Law) and the gospel in the nuanced way in which these are presented in the Old and New Testaments. In the course of doing so he points out that law is not given the *up front* position in the New Testament that it is in the Old. While *Law* has a place in the New just as *Gospel* has in the Old, what has to be determined, he argues, is how Law 'fits' into the new age of the Spirit, which laws do so and how they do. 'The criterion for its (ie any law's) usefulness will be a New Testament one' (p 36). An example would be that the destruction of idols which the Old Testament requires is not required in the New. What is to take place instead is the destruction of the thinking which results in idol making and worship (p 147) and that not by carnal weapons. This emphasis on the New Testament treatment of Law and laws touches the Achilles' heel of Theonomy.

Bruce Waltke writes on other theological views of the Old Testament legal material. Interestingly he sets Theonomy alongside Dispensationalism on the one hand and Meredith Kline's *intrusion ethic* view on the other. (The latter sees the legal portions of the Old Testament as typifying life in Christ.) The value of making this comparison is to point out to Theonomists that other views about the legal material of the Old Testament are held by those who seek to be faithful to Scripture and that they do not hold the field alone, so to speak. Of course Dispensationalism does not come into the reckoning as far as Theonomy is concerned but Kline's theological credentials cannot be as easily dismissed. What does emerge in the course of this discussion is that although it is not always easy to differentiate between what is ceremonial and what is civil, to be able to categorise laws does help in authentically interpreting them. It is not easy to abstract the civic laws from the covenant with which they are obviously connected. Their future is therefore bound up with what happens to that covenant.

The essays by Dan McCartney on the New Testament use of the Pentateuch, Moises Silva on the Law and the Promise in Galatians 3 and Richard Gaffin on the framework of New Testament Eschatology provide an overall biblical perspective for the critique of Theonomy. We shall come back to the first two. Gaffin effectively shows how there is no room in the Theonomic programme for the reign of Christ to be extended in the world by a weak, suffering church whose glory is largely hidden from the world and yet that is the story line of the latter part of the New Testament! Theonomic post-millennialism is not in keeping with the New Testament at this point.

Two other essays complement each other and perform a very useful role in the whole work because they relate to the vexatious matter of the Mosaic punishments. The first is by Tremper Longman who looks at these in their Old Testament setting, while the second by Dennis Johnson examines how such punishments are made use of in the Epistle to the

Hebrews. Longman points out that while Theonomists do recognise that a cultural gap exists between OT Israel and America (or any modern state) and take this into account in deciding how civil laws are to be applied today, they do not let the fact that Israel occupied a unique place in the flow of redemptive history have a similar effect upon their thinking - an inconsistency, surely. In addition, Theonomists usually charge those who disagree with their views with being subjective in their use of Scripture, while being seemingly oblivious to the fact that they are not free from subjectivism themselves. For example, Longman refers to the fact that Rushdoony regards the death penalty for sabbath breaking as being non-applicable to states which are not in covenant with God but Bahnsen refuses to make this allowance. In addition, there are some laws in the Old Testament which specify a variable penalty and leave the decision to the judges. Who would decide on how to settle this in a Theonomic state and, more importantly, *on what basis* would they do so? How could that be decided by Theonomists without their making use of the New Testament in some way? And if here, why not elsewhere? What about the New Testament evidence that the death penalty is no longer applicable to adultery - and that by our Lord's decision?

Dennis Johnson has the best way of expressing and responding to the main difference between Theonomy and Reformed thinking (together with Dispensationalism). He sees that they all operate with the continuity/discontinuity outlook in relation to the Testaments but differ on a level of 'predisposition' and this 'shows itself in differing assumptions about where the burden of proof lies in questions concerning the applicability of Old Testament law. In general, Theonomy argues that the *burden of proof* rests on any contention that a particular Mosaic stipulation does *not* apply as it did for Israel' (pp 173 & 174). The reverse holds for the opposite view. So, the disagreement revolves around the silences of the New Testament. Theonomy assumes that laws continue in force unless they are specifically repealed whereas the other viewpoints work on the basis that they need to be re-affirmed in order to be valid.

Johnson then points out that the ways in which the New Testament statedly uses Old Testament laws needs to be the starting point of study and not any of its silences, however loudly they may seem to call out to any interpreter. He then demonstrates conclusively from a study of the epistle to the Hebrews that the Mosaic penal sanctions relate to 'the discipline and purity of the covenant community', ie the church and not the state.

This matter of the New Testament's application of Old Testament material to the church and not the state touches Theonomy at a point of weakness from a *Christian* point of view and this is brought out forcefully in the essays by McCartney and Silva to which reference has already been made. McCartney shows that the use of the Pentateuch in the New Testament proceeds on the basis of a 'covenantal christocentrism' with ecclesiological and ethical implications. This is a massive shift but it is in the nature of a fulfilment of the Old Testament in its entirety. To think of a Theonomic State is to go against the direction of biblical revelation. Silva's essay examines the features of the new and the Sinaitic covenants in Galatians 3 and, while not denying some continuity between them, demonstrates that life is only found in the new. This further strengthens the anti-theonomic case.

The appeal made to theonomists in this volume by their reformed brethren is to join them in study of the legal portions of the Old Testament from the standpoints of exegesis and Biblical theology. One hopes that there will be a positive response to that invitation for, the reasons given. If heat can be turned down, perhaps light can break through. Meanwhile what can we learn from all this? Two things at least suggest themselves. The first is to do with how the Old Testament is to be interpreted and the second with how the task of the *church* in society is to be conceived.

On the first, we must abide by the definitiveness of the New Testament's interpre-

tation of the Old. Without demanding that what continues to be valid from the Old Testament must be specifically endorsed by the New Testament (so one can still recognise the Old Testament as Holy Scripture) what must be appreciated is that there is no possibility of interpreting the Old Testament except in the way in which the New Testament does. The New Testament is not only the last word in a chronological sense but qualitatively too. It is the definitive word of God on all that it says - the interpretation of the Old Testament included. Both Testaments of Scripture are linked to covenants - the Old largely to the Sinaitic, the New to the covenant. For there to be an interpretation of the Old beyond that which is set out in the New, there would have to be another covenant made. An unthinkable - *God forbid*.

Secondly, the task of the church, as distinct from that of individual Christians in their respective relations and walks of life, is not to try to Christianise society by means of the law. The New Testament church did not see that as being even faintly its business. It set about worshipping the Triune God and proclaiming to all nations the good news of his salvation from the demands of the law and its penalty in Jesus Christ. It was more concerned about eternity than time, about heaven (or hell, than earth. That is what is to preoccupy the church in every age. *Is Theonomy therefore sufficiently Christian?*

Rev Hywel R Jones MA is Principal of the London Theological Seminary.

Clinical Theology – Brian Harris

A review article considering the biography of Frank Lake by John Peters, published by Darton Longman & Todd, 250 pages at £12.95

Reading this book was an illuminating experience, since for the past 25 years one was only just aware of Frank Lake as a name somewhere in the background of psychiatry. It is the reviewer's opinion that the book begins to make sense only when it has been concluded that Lake was probably not an evangelical (at least in any commonly accepted sense of the word). Indeed one of the greatest disappointments of the book is that no clear outline is given of Lake's theological persuasion.

The book has eight chapters of varying length. The first is a short Introduction, beginning with a statement of the aim of Clinical Theology, ie "the reintegration of the person through the healing and reconciling resources of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit". The death of Dr Frank Lake, the founder of the Clinical Theology Association was in May 1982 at the age of 67, and this biography attempts to review the man and his work. There is an outline of the background and description of the time of crisis from which clinical theology arose. From a theological point of view the late 50's and early 60's represented a time of great uncertainty and confusion; from an official psychiatry standpoint psychiatric training had discounted religion entirely; and from a medical point of view there seemed to be no training for doctors in counselling. One of the aims therefore of clinical theology was to develop a technique, "for integrating religious values with clinical practice".

The second chapter gives a summary of the history of the Clinical Theology Association. Apparently 1958 was a key year in that Dr Donald Coggan (later Archbishop of Canterbury) and others, personally recommended Lake and his ideas to eleven Diocesan centres so that a series of seminars was set up and convened twelve times a year. This was very much an Anglican venture and it would seem that to begin with there were common sense aims and ideas behind Clinical Theology. "Seminars consisted of a talk (in detail) by a tutor taking up some aspect of Clinical Theology followed by a role play which both illustrated the subject and gave counselling practice to the bolder and more adventurous participants in the seminar".

In 1966 the massive tome "Clinical Theology" was published, by which time the movement demonstrated that it took in largely *dynamic* aspects of medical, psychological, sociological and other perspectives. It is difficult to tease out the aims of Clinical Theology, but some of them are of concern to those who are truly evangelical; time and time again, one is left asking the question 'What does that actually mean?' For example, "it has been the experience of many of us that the encounter of God through His Son, itself creates a new beginning to life. These potentialities of the covenant of God with man through the saying and recreative work of Christ need to become actual in personal terms, *this does come about within groups of persons who are responding together to an experience of the depth and extent of the love of God as it is reflected in the unconditional respect, deep understanding and genuine caring which is shown to one another in human terms*" (p 28).

Chapter three (a sketch of Frank Lake's life), contains an outline of four distinct phases, ranging from his childhood and early days through medical training/missionary work in the north of India, retraining in psychiatry (with the consequent development of the Clinical Theology Association) and finally his death in 1982.

The chapter produces a variety of responses such as:-

- a) *Amazement* that one who had become so taken up with the development of Clinical Theology and its attempt to produce pastoral training should have had such great inadequacies in the setting of family life, both in terms of his relationship with his wife and also with his three children. The rationalising on the part of the third child, Monica, in Lake's dying days is inadequate. "I began to understand why, when sometimes in life a person has to give his all to the world, he will have nothing to give at home" (p 75). Some of the elaborations are shocking - eg. a memory of Monica, "when I was about thirteen I went into his study to say goodnight; he was sitting reading so absorbed that he hadn't heard me from the door. So I went and stood in front of him and repeated my 'Goodnight dad', no reaction, so I knelt in front of him with my hands on his knees and said 'goodnight dad', he was in another world. With tears pouring down my cheeks I went to bed and cried myself to sleep, I didn't try again." (p 53).
- b) *Disappointment* that little is given in terms of Lake's own spiritual pilgrimage and in particular his theological position. Clinical Theology remained largely Anglican throughout its history but there are hints of evangelical experience and "commitment to Christ" (p 38). "Certainly he was a committed Christian when Sylvia met him in 1939 and he always said like Sylvia that he had been a Christian from the beginning and it was a matter of growth and deepening of commitment after that" (p 43) and perhaps where we are told "he was not enjoying a happy and satisfying home life, nevertheless God was felt to have given him a wider family and tremendous joy over the previous few months leading some 150 persons to faith in Christ or to a great deepening of their experience and commitment" (p 50).
- c) *Enlightenment* in realising that the first experiences of psychiatry which Lake had, appear to have been with dynamic psychiatry and a psycho analyst. This of course would have been typical of the day in which he lived (at that point 1949), but what is also evident is the lack of scientific training in Lake's background which would have enabled him to see "psycho analysis" for what it was, ie a kind of "religion" which takes a step of faith to embrace it.

The chapter closes with a moving account of Lake's death. Chapter four is a collection of comments from a variety of co-workers many of whom found it useful to work with Lake at first but more difficult as the years went by, particularly with the development

of his “*primal therapy*” and “*rebirthing*”. Consequently many eventually parted company with him. Overall the comments support the general conclusion that the movement was lacking in a solid theological basis and that those who took up Clinical Theology and continued with it did so as a kind of new “faith” rather like the millions who before them had accepted Freudian psycho analysis.

Undoubtedly chapter five, “*Listening and helping- a guide to Frank Lake's seminal ideas*” is the most difficult of all to follow, largely because of the long quotations from Lake's work and the use of terms specific to Lake's understanding of them. Beyond any shadow of doubt he had incredible drive and “apparently inexhaustible zeal”, which was “a great cost to himself and his family”.

A further expansion of clinical theology is attempted, with helpful definitions viz: “*Clinic*”: “A class, session, or group meeting devoted to the presentation, analysis and treatment or solution of actual cases of concrete problems in some special field or discipline”.

“*Theology*”: “The systematic study of Christian Revelation concerning God's nature and purpose”. Clinical theology therefore purported to offer firstly, the resources of the Christian faith, enhancing pastoral care, and secondly the collaboration of like minded people (page 108). As such it is the theological part of clinical theology which presents most difficulty to the reviewer and one is left asking the question as to what actually is meant by such statements as “I rely for myself, and for my work, on the incarnation of the Son of God, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, and the giving of the Holy Spirit within the continuing life of the universal Church in the Word it proclaims, the sacraments it celebrates and the fellowship which anchors it in human society in every age”.

The importance of listening is a common sense requirement for all counsellors, but the linking of this with various biblical events is, to say the least, novel, and difficult to understand, but worse, could be interpreted as frankly erroneous. “God has not only spoken through His Son, what perhaps is more important is that He has listened through His Son. Christ's saving work cost Him most in its speechless perceptivity of its dereliction. It is this which gives Him the right to be called the great listener to all suffering. It is this which gives His listening its redemptive quality”.

There follows an outline of Lake's view on “*the healing of memories*” which appear to have been very much influenced by his use of LSD and patients under the influence of the latter supposedly reliving pre-natal, natal and post-natal experiences. The chapter contains an illustration entitled “the dynamic cycle” from clinical theology which to the reviewer is totally incomprehensible. After outlining principles lying behind “primal therapy” the writer proceeds with an outline of Lake's involvement with the Charismatic movement, showing how his theories received a ready audience in and amongst Christians belonging to that circle. Lake's views are shown to be consistent with those of leaders such as Rev John Wimber rather than those of such as Rev Colin Urquart, the writer obviously favouring the former, “the fact is that Urquart's view on this particular issue (healing of memories) is unrealistic, whereas Lake preferred to approach people from where they were theologically, psychologically and emotionally”. Interestingly, the chapter also contains insights on Lake's view of the development of Schizoid personality from which he himself may well have suffered. The latter supposedly takes its origin within the first trimester of pregnancy and the relevance of the cross of Christ is that “if it has anything to say to the afflicted, who suffered first, and fatally for their trust, in the first trimester of life in the womb, about the forgiveness of their sins it is that *he is God, begging their forgiveness* for the hurts caused by the sins of the fathers

funnelled into them by the distress of the mothers.” The comment by Peters (the biographer) that such statements are “not in perfect accord with the theology of the New Testament” is an understatement and, at face value at any rate, they appear blasphemous. Chapter six (In Retrospect) is more a collection of anecdotal observations and closes with an outline of the rejection of Lake’s ideas by both conservative evangelicals and charismatics.

Chapter seven gives a brief outline of what has happened to the Clinical Theology Association since the death of Frank Lake, indicating its financial problems and lack of a sense of direction. Finally, chapter eight, (Conclusions) contains little new material, and is a kind of summary of the whole book .

The question must be asked why Lake’s views are to be challenged and are indeed in many instances frankly erroneous.

Firstly from what can be gathered of his theological position concerning sanctification he did not hold a New Testament position. This is not simply a feature of Lake but is something shared by many others who are currently taken up with counselling and the concept of ‘wholeness’ - In broad terms the question can be put as follows: is the New Testament picture of the Christian life really one where *all* conflicts are solved, *all* problems are sorted out, *all* differences come to terms with and is this “wholeness” available in a complete sense in this life? The answer, surely, must be in the negative. The New Testament view of the Christian life (partly related to the fact that redemption of the body will not occur until the next life) is much more of a battle, a fight and an acceptance of problems. We are akin to soldiers in a barracks rather than people who are patients in a hospital having their every problem sorted out. That does not mean of course that counselling and dynamic approaches should be discounted altogether, far from it, but the crux of the matter is the *degree* to which deliverance is expected.

Linked to this is Lake’s ecclesiological perspective. What is a local church? Is it a parish and all the people within the parish, or is it a gathered church, believers who truly have experienced the new birth and to whom the resources of grace are available? Not surprisingly “parishioners” attending for primal therapy and counselling vary from those who truly are regenerate to those who have some vague christian beliefs (but lots of problems). The latter may well be (unconsciously) looking for alternatives to the working of the Holy Spirit in them along New Testament lines but which can be provided for in Lake’s techniques. It is of interest that his views were more readily acceptable (at least to begin with) in charismatic circles than in more traditional evangelical circles and it might be argued that where “wholeness” is of such importance (as in charismatic circles) alternative ways of apparently producing it must be found.

The failure of Clinical Theology highlights the need for an adequate position concerning counselling from an evangelical perspective. Although it is preaching which is pre-eminent, and it is preaching which primarily produces change in individuals, that is not to say that there is no place for counselling at all. Neither does it deny that appropriate counselling can be of help in sorting out *some* modern problems, which incidentally are not really modern but have always been present (witness Corinth). However, we wait to see the development of such a system with both an adequate theoretical basis and availability of training for church leaders and others.

Dr Brian Harris B Sc, MB, BS, FRC Psych, DPM is a Consultant Psychiatrist and Senior Lecturer in the University of Wales at Cardiff

Book Reviews

Statement of Faith

*Scottish Theology Study Group, 1991,
14 pp, £1, Rutherford House,
17 Claremont Park, Edinburgh EH6 7PJ*

This is a good piece of work and worthy of the widest consideration by all who confess the evangelical faith. In days when clear and faithful confessional statements are at a discount and we are inclined to view anything new with suspicion, this statement is as refreshing as the morning dew. If such words seem extravagant - and I don't think they are! - then send for a copy and read the Statement for yourself.

It comes from the Scottish Theology Study Group which meets under the auspices of the Rutherford House Fellowship. The Group is composed of evangelicals from the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the United Free Church and a Baptist Church, and includes such well-known names as James Philip and Donald Macleod. The aim was to produce 'a Statement of Faith which was theologically reformed but which dealt with the issues and concerns of today rather than those of earlier centuries'. As the Introduction makes clear, the Statement 'is intended to stand on its own and not simply be an adjunct to or an attempt to improve upon the Westminster Confession of Faith'. It is written with the Scottish situation in mind, in 'the language of today' and with 'a strong experimental emphasis'.

The Statement reads well and in the main would be understood by the ordinary church member; however, it is clearly the work of men who are familiar with theological thought and careful definition. It is both stimulating and heartwarming.

In structure the Statement is Trinitarian, beginning not with Scripture but with the self-revealing God. Thereafter the order is The Trinity; Creation; The Fall; Jesus Christ

- Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Ascended, Returning; The Holy Spirit; The Story of Salvation; Scripture; A Holy People; The Church; Baptism and the Lord's Supper; Discipleship and Mission. The whole Statement is reformed in its ethos, and salvation is presented as the sovereign work of God. This comes out clearly in the statement on the church. "The Church consists of all those in every age chosen and called by God to be his believing and obedient people". In the section dealing with the Incarnation there is an explanatory paragraph on Mary our Lord's mother, included, we must suppose, to counter both the Mariolatry of the Roman Church and the occasional disparagement of Mary by evangelicals. The historical nature of Revelation and Redemption is expressed very well under the heading of 'The Story of Salvation'. "The divine drama of salvation-history is set forth in words given by God in the books of the Bible, which were produced at different stages in its progress. By predictive prophecy and retrospective explanation the words interpret the drama of God's self-revelation to us. The provision of this written Word of God is itself an act in salvation-history". A whole section (seven paragraphs) is devoted to Sanctification - stating positively the main Biblical principles of Christian holiness whilst at the same time countering false views. The statement on Baptism and the Lord's Supper will be acceptable to most Christians, with the possible exception of an explanatory paragraph in smaller print which says, "By analogy with the practice of the Old Testament people of God, the majority of Christian communions baptise the infant children of Christian parents as members of the covenant community". The final section is on Mission. I was pleased to see the task of evangelism recognised as "the Church's primary responsibility towards the world", but I would have liked

an affirmation of the truth of Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved".

One of the aims of the Statement is "the exclusion of known heresy", and certainly this is diligently pursued. Let me give some examples. The Bible is not simply a witness to revelation; it is itself revelation - revelation and scripture are inseparable. "All human beings possess equal dignity before God... from the earliest beginnings of life to the moment of death", - thus euthanasia is excluded, if not abortion also. So too is 'feminism' - husbands and wives are equal before God but have different roles and responsibilities which are complementary to one another. "A similar complementarity obtains in the ministry of the Church". The deity, humanity and sinlessness of Christ are carefully stated so as to exclude modern heresy. The substitutionary and penal nature of the Atonement is affirmed, as is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Annihilation is excluded - the unrighteous are "condemned to everlasting destruction". The great redemptive acts of God are not only recorded in Scripture but explained to us. Progressive revelation involves no contradiction but each successive stage harmonises with all that precedes it and all that follows. The Scriptures are both human and divine and are entirely trustworthy and without error; inspiration extends to both its verbal form and content, and thus Scripture is itself objectively the Word of God. Sanctification is both definitive and progressive, involving the active participation of the believer. Thus, passivity and 'the Higher Life' teaching are excluded. The challenge of charismatic teaching is countered - "All members of the body of Christ which is the Church are called to share in the work of the ministry and receive gifts (charismata) from the Holy Spirit to do so. In this sense the church of Christ is always a charismatic community of faith".

Neither I nor the authors of this "Statement of Faith" would suggest that the work is all that it could or should be; nevertheless, it

does have many excellent qualities, and should it find a wide acceptance amongst evangelicals then it may serve a unifying purpose as an expression of the faith which we hold in common.

Rev Neil C Richards

Wheelock Heath Baptist Church

Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament

Gerard Van Groningen

1990, 1018 pp, £39.95 Baker

This is a book to get enthusiastic about. It addresses a genuine need, and meets it in an impressive fashion. For some time now there has been no extended presentation of the Messianic content of the OT. This volume ably meets the deficiency, and is worthy of a place alongside Hengstenberg's *Christology* and Gloag's *Messianic Prophecies* on any minister's shelves.

After an introduction to the Messianic Concept (78 pages), Van Groningen surveys its presentation in the OT. Genesis is treated in the course of 91 pages, followed by the rest of the Pentateuch (67 pages), the Former Prophets (68 pages), and the Poetic books (95 pages). The Latter Prophets, including Daniel, merit a treatment extending to 515 pages, including four chapters on Isaiah; The Son of the Virgin, The Ruling Son, The Servant-Son and The Suffering and Ministering Son. Such lengthy discussion might raise suspicions of possible tedium. But the style is crisp and clear. Frequently in looking at the book to consult its interpretation of a specific passage I found myself being drawn into reading even more.

That was not, however, just a matter of style. It reflected principally the congeniality of the contents, especially the author's presuppositions. The book is deliberately written from within the perspective of a reformed approach to Scripture. This is not just a matter of conservative dating of individual books and attribution of authorship, though these are of great significance in determining the framework of a study which traces the historical develop-

ment of Messianic prophecy. It is more crucially a matter of the origin of those prophecies. *Revelation* is not an accidental addition to the book's title. The author does not consider himself to be probing the story of evolving human religious insight, or of hopes dreamed of for a better day to offset the gloomy present. The author correctly and consistently brings out the difference between a prophet projecting his mind forward, and God granting a prophet knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible to human consciousness. What is being traced is God's on-going revelation of the dimensions of his covenantal purposes for his people, as he has determined they should be recorded for our learning and benefit.

At all points Van Groningen shows a serious desire to evaluate recent trends of thought, from whatever quarter. Indeed he criticises the on-sided treatment that prevails in most liberal works, where conservative scholarship is not referred to. His book does not, however, degenerate into a summary of recent liberal thought. While showing an awareness of what has been said and written, he does not refer exhaustively to it, but critiques major representatives of various positions. Where his work also scores is that he integrates present discussions with those of the past. In a work as long as this there are of course minor niggles. The footnotes contain many minor inaccuracies. Authors and their works are not referred to in consistent fashion: annoying to the bibliographic purist, but probably unnoticed by many. There is an Index of Persons which mixes authors and Biblical personalities so that Moses is listed between Leon Morris and J A Motyer. There are occasional lapses such as *synthetic parallelism* for *synonymous parallelism* on 33, and the American commentator of last century T V Moore is treated as a Puritan on p 572, presumably a too quick inference from the fact that his commentaries were republished by the Banner of Truth! The discussion of 2 Samuel 7: 19b, though not directly germane to the main theme, is rather cursory

and does not even notice the work done on this text in recent years in conservative circles. It is also surprising that the discussion of Isaiah 53:11 on p 640 does not mention the evidence of the Qumran scrolls. But such minor quibbles do not detract from the impressive scholarship of the book.

But if one already has Hengstenberg and Gloag, and a number of conservative commentaries, why add this book? After having read and used it for several months, it seems to me that apart from those features already mentioned it has two outstanding emphases.

1. When looking for OT prophecies of Christ, we are apt to think first of all of passages such as Isaiah 53 or those involving sacrifice and priesthood. Van Groningen emphasises that *Messiah is primarily a kingly title*, and that the basic model for such kingship is not to be found in David (and certainly not in earlier Canaanite or Mesopotamian concepts of kingship), but in Adam. He stresses the royal role accorded to mankind in Genesis 1. "The royal couple were established in their responsibilities in the garden (earth) with its wide-ranging forms of life. The royal couple were in fellowship with their sovereign Lord" (p 105). The emphasis is on covenant kingship, vicereagents under the sovereign Creator and Ruler. But the Fall disrupted this relationship. "Rejecting their royal status, they lost it; refusing their royal position, they became prisoners of sin and Satan; disobeying the Sovereign's expressed will, they became slaves to Satan, the master of deceit and evil. Fallen mankind had become dethroned and enslaved royalty" (p 106).

This provides the basis for a distinction Van Groningen employs throughout the book, between wider and narrower views of the messianic concept. The narrower concept focuses on a royal figure, who is in essence a Second Adam. The wider messianic concept takes within its purview all that has to be accomplished by the Messiah so that he is not alone in enjoying paradise restored, as well as what sets forth

the character of that final state of blessing. Hence, in discussing Genesis 3:15 Van Groningen acknowledges that the passage is not messianic in a narrow sense because there is no direct reference to a single royal person whose task has been delineated in detail, but will not on that account say the passage is non-messianic. Rather, by using the broader conception of messianic prophecy he points out that there is "(1) an agent arising from a 'royal' source; (2) a task performed which demands sovereign and royal authority and power; (3) a substitutionary victory to be gained on behalf of others; and (4) the setting of the stage for the full restoration of the fallen royal image-bearers of God to their original status, position and service" (p 114).

2. The other dimension of messianic prophecy that Van Groningen addresses more directly than older conservative works is hermeneutical, and particularly *the use of typology in discussing figures in Old Testament history*. The main discussion is to be found on p 153-167, but there are extensive references elsewhere. The distinction is made between correspondences that are typical and those that are not. It is also emphasised (to what I find a surprising extent) that an ancestor of Christ is not necessarily a typical person, nor is a typical person necessarily an ancestor of Christ. Van Groningen argues that, among others, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and Solomon were types of Christ. Indeed, he goes so far as to say, "What Esther and Mordecai did was, to some degree and in various ways, analogous to what Christ was to do and did do. Thus, one could conclude that there is some evidence for considering Mordecai and Esther as messianic types by analogy" (p 920). This seems to resemble the distinction between narrowly and broadly messianic prophecy. Van Groningen's discussion might perhaps be improved by focussing more explicitly not on typical persons who were in God's providence assigned *roles that were typical* in that they foreshadowed the work

of the Messiah. To this could be coupled a distinction like that of Vos, that such persons would have to have been intended as illustrations to the OT church of the saving work of God that would be ultimately and completely achieved by the Coming One. All in all, this work is one which I can highly commend. It is readable and useful. Especially, it meets the challenge of making one want to preach, and of providing solid Biblical fare to be shared with others.

Prof John Mackay, FC College Edinburgh

The Lives of Robert and James Haldane

Alexander Haldane, £12.95, 1991, 706 pp

This hardback is an irresistible bargain for those eager to learn from church history. The lives of James (1768-1851) and Robert (1764-1842) Haldane are certainly interesting, challenging and, at times, exciting. Robert's plans to involve himself in missionary work in Bengal were frustrated and, in the Lord's providence, he preached the gospel in his beloved Scotland and further afield on the Continent. 1816 marked his famous visit to Geneva which in turn resulted in an extensive revival as well as the later publication of his commentary on Romans. He was involved in controversy, too. Having an important position in the British and Foreign Bible Society, Robert Haldane fought successfully to keep the apocrypha out of the English Bible. Along with his brother James who was an itinerant evangelist and pastor in Scotland, he seceded from the Church of Scotland in an attempt to reform church life on a more consistent New Testament pattern. There were mistakes and wrong attitudes at times but the biographer is honest in describing this important period in their lives. Altogether, this is an excellent book containing principles and lessons relevant for our contemporary situation.

Dr Eryl Davis, ETCW

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