

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD

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PART ONE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

That biblical theology is at a point of crisis has been stated so often as to have almost lost its vital quality of meaning.

In fact the crisis is no new phenomenon, but the result of powerful intellectual movements stretching back over several centuries. The post-Reformation period of history is bursting with movements of vital importance to the Christian faith, many of which challenge the premise on which biblical theology is built. Some of these movements have arisen within Christian thought and have been theological in content, others have been the outcome of the clash of Christian thought with the products of other disciplines.

Theology and philosophy have a long history of development together, but it was not alone from a clash of ideas at this level that the modern confrontation for Christianity has come. Its secular empiricism and radical existentialism are important, but are not alone in their influence on Christian thought.

For a long period the clash with science seemed to be the best-known and most momentous collision of ideas. Many accepted forms of interpretation concerning the origin of man and of his world and his relationship with God were to be challenged as wrong and outmoded. This made its contribution to the modern cauldron of ideas seething and bubbling in modern man's mind. It was, however, from yet other and newer disciplines that contributions we have to consider flowed.

Psychology, sociology, and perhaps more importantly anthropology brought to the fore ideas concerning man and his life and community which added a whole new section of vocabulary to language and demanded fresh interpretation from biblical scholars. When anthropology moved into the interesting field of study called "cultural anthropology" it brought into sharper focus many problems previously only vaguely sensed.

The interpretation of culture, the new understanding of its role in man's community life, the place of religion in this framework of living so important to primitive or sophisticated man, raised many new issues. How does the doctrine of revelation of God in Scripture relate to the writers of the various books within their own day and to the reader in various cultures in the twentieth-century?

The great upsurge of interest in translation of the Scriptures during the last two centuries has unveiled a great many problems and has brought to light many solutions which have enriched thought, but above all have revealed the accretions of culture to the Gospel. The question

is being asked in so many different ways and demands an answer: "Is this the message of God in Christ, or is this some Western development that the messenger of the Gospel had best forget?"

While cultural relativism and secularism owe something to this discipline we ought not to be afraid of the consequences of facing the issues raised. Some interpreters of culture see faith in God as the very antithesis of man's effort in his culture; Marxists believe that men make history and culture and that religion is a sleeping pill, yet these ideas are only part of the case we examine.

Nowhere in the Gospels do we find Christ dealing specifically with the problem of culture as such. All he did and said was oriented to the immediate context of people's lives, it was a continuation of the message of the Old Testament, and this was culturally oriented.

On the other hand, E. Nida points out, "In Jesus Christ there is a break with the past, a discontinuity with culture, his followers were to be in the world but not of it." Richard Niebuhr points up the same problem when he quotes from Klauser who claims, "Judaism is a national life. . . . In their stead he set up nothing but an ethico-religious system bound up with his conception of the Godhead."

Niebuhr goes on to draw attention to the difficulty the Graeco/Roman world faced when it tried to understand Christianity. In some ways, he declares, the cultural problem was possibly greater than the political or economic one. Pliny in his letters to Trajan helps make this point — his query is much more in the field of culture than any other.

Williams takes up this theme as he describes the early Church theologians facing the culturing difficulty of Christianity which began on Jewish soil and had to become part of the cultural milieu of the Gentile world. Yet he can go on to report the transformation of European thought by this new intruder. For some scholars, Christianity and Western culture are so inextricably entwined that there is no way by which a Christian can talk to a member of another civilization. For others, who do not venture so far, the need is to identify what are cultural accretions as compared to what are the fundamentals of God's revelation.

The problem can be stated quite simply as E. Wright has done, "How are we to outline the present biblical theology? . . . In the Bible these doctrines are so inter-related in historical context that they cannot be separated and examined entirely as independent objects of reflection."

In facing this study we have to accept the problem of terminology. It is difficult to be certain of the use of words from one scholar to another; this is particularly the case when we use technical words to describe some new theory or school of thought. For example: "demythologize" no longer is used simply as a term to describe Bultmann's development of Form Criticism in his New Testament studies. It is used more widely and can quite satisfactorily be used in this study — we can evaluate attempts to demythologize cultural accretions. Whether this is the best term to use is debatable — it is an emotive word and would require considerable effort by some to escape their normal

emotional reaction to Bultmann's theory. Further, so much would depend on the definition of "myth." It would seem best, in this study to limit the term to describe one of the modern methods — namely Bultmann's and to summarize other methods by their own chosen terms.

In attempting an evaluation of current theories and then finally to try to determine cultural forms usable by modern man it is essential that we recognize the "reality of God is still the central problem." Sooner or later it is fundamental to all questions about man and society. Man cannot understand himself and answer questions about himself without reference to God.

Michelsen sums up the situation well, "But if he is preoccupied with history and culture, the interpreter can treat the content as secondary to the reconstruction of the original setting. History and culture, then, as secondary elements, are essential for the understanding of content. Out of a complex maze of events and into the agonizing pressures of daily existence, God's message came and confronted men with God himself."

Barr in the search for the real question for theology rejects the "Level of cultural patterns, inherited presuppositions underlying thought forms," and sees it in "relation of groups and individuals as they stand within or without the people of God." This is enough to warn us to use our topic with care, to examine and evaluate modern theories of cultural accretion, and to seek to come to our own concept of the medium of communication from the central position of "God's revelation of himself."

Where do we start in our brief attempt to cope with those who deal with cultural assertions? It could be done by a chronological summary of the details of theology in the twentieth century. However logical this may seem let me lead you in another way and select theories at random. Not select on popularity or danger to a true understanding of biblical theology — but more in the light of the interest they have aroused. Not all theories can be evaluated, the selection may reveal something of the writer's own areas of interest.

1. *Myth and demythologizing*

Many modern theologians are attempting to deal with the problem of the Bible by the use of the word "myth." The assumption is that myth and history are so interwoven that the Bible may be described as mythical. For some the Bible is regarded as essentially untrue and foreign to modern men; for others it is acceptable, provided modern man can unravel the "ultimate questions" behind myth by separating all such from the sequence and causality in empirical data.

Bultmann believes that most of the biblical terms are not usable as they stand, they require re-interpretation. He calls this process of interpretation, hermeneutic, and his method, demythologizing. He does not intend to get rid of mythology, but to reinterpret it to the man of today. W. Nichols believes that the definition of myth is not of great importance to Bultmann, "It would appear that his program of demythologizing would hold good for him, whatever sense of myth were agreed on."

Myth is meant to express man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives and should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still existentially. This is not the way the liberal predecessors of Bultmann dealt with myth — they eliminated it. Bultmann, like Barth, does not; he retains the myth. It cannot be accounted for in terms of culture and yet when the first-century cosmology is removed by Bultmann, are not the objective statements bound up with the cosmology removed also?

The core of his theology is "kerygma," the proclamation as a human event in which God speaks — it is not the product of human culture, but the Word of the transcendent God, and it is here that his existentialist analysis cannot apply. Analogy is used, but not very convincingly.

Bultmann seeks to separate salvation and the Gospel from any sort of world view and the question is immediately apparent: is it possible to be free from such a world view and to see it divorced from faith? Bultmann minimized the importance of the historical aspects of Jesus' life as unimportant for faith, and stressed the importance of the kerygma.

In all of these matters the border between mythological and non-mythological tends in practice to be somewhat blurred. The Bultmannian language may be intelligible when it deals with human experience and existence. But it does not come nearer an explanation of God. Why can the Holy Spirit be demythologized? "Biological man cannot see how a supernatural entity like 'pneuma' can penetrate within the close texture of his natural powers and set to work within him" and yet God can be described as "God is incomprehensible, enigmatic power that surges through my concrete life and sets limits to it."

This has been a continuing problem for Bultmann and he later used analogy as a means of demythologizing God. "He does not show the relationship between the two ways. There is a logical difference between existential language which refers to its proper subject 'human existence,' and its existential language which is said to refer analogically to God as its subject. Bultmann nowhere seems to have paid sufficient attention to this logical difference."

In closing this sub-section, attention needs to be drawn to the danger of subjectivism in the method of existential interpretation of myth. All ideas are taken to refer to elements in our own inner life. Attempts to escape from this conclusion lead to a further idea of myth that then includes a transcendent reference, but only if history is understood as the history that everyone experiences for himself and not world history.

In his small book *Frontiers of Modern Theology*, Carl Henry lists the theological groups who have taken the place of Bultmann — our interest, however, lies in examining other efforts to deal with cultural accretions.

2. *Secular theology*

The glamour word at the moment would seem to be "secular."

Theologies of the secular-Christian type ante-date the Death of God theologies. Its warrant from Bonhoeffer is clearer than the latter.

In secular theologies, Bonhoeffer's concept that God allowed himself to be edged out is the usual starting point. This leaves the initiative with God, in comparison to Christian atheism which demands that the Christian should will the death of God. Secular Christianity flows in two streams: E. Van Buren demands that the word "God" be cut out of the vocabulary and so seems to be one with the Christian atheist; the other stream just remains silent on this issue.

Harvey Cox argues that secularization has its meaning in the first place in "desacralization" first of nature then of politics. The creation and exodus stories show both of these processes in the Bible. Cox does not deal with man's relationship with God. Biblical faith desacralizes the cosmos — to achieve this concept Cox has to place an evolution of religious consciousness in the Bible. This is difficult to sustain from the biblical theme of human response to revelation and also from Andrew Lange's work on "high gods."

Cox reads the Bible in developmental and sociological terms; he identifies the secular city with the Kingdom of God. Here the promise of new life is offered, here conversion offers a hope that cannot fade — outside the secular city there is no salvation for man.

Cox conceives of creation without the fall; he imagines partnership with God to be sufficient Christian description of human existence. The acts of God are what increase "human freedom." For Cox, secular Christianity lays bare the real meaning of Christianity and so is another modern attempt to clear away accretions. The supernatural Christianity fitted the needs of the time of ignorance, secular Christianity is a religion fitting the needs of maturity. This shows an acceptance of Bonhoeffer's world-come-of-age, but not of his willingness to make room for God and the world in the heart.

Professor Saran in *Religion and Society* sets out the aim with great clarity. "Secular theologians feel deeply concerned about making religion (church) individually and socially relevant and significant to the industrial, technological modern man . . . he therefore strives for a reinterpretation of the Christian tradition which will be consistent with modern knowledge and consciousness."

In summing up his opinion of secularism, John Macquarrie writes, "The secular has its legitimate claims and rightly condemns all false religiosity. But we have seen too that the secular has possibilities for exaggeration and distortion that are incompatible with Christian faith." In the final assessment we can record Macquarrie's quotation of Cragg's criticism of Van Leeuwen, "We would be either strangely naive or incredibly arrogant if we supposed that a technology of which our hemisphere had been the matrix sufficiently represented the world obligations of Christian faith or fulfilled them in the only feasible contemporary form."

3. Cultural relativism

Among the many strands of thought in radicalism is that of cultural relativism. Its importance requires some time and space in our study.

The position has been well presented by Barr, "The Bible, like all other literary works, is dependent on the cultural milieu in which it was written. Our modern culture is different, and it is not possible that the same book, the Bible, can have the same meaning as it had in its own cultural milieu. Any work or text composed in an ancient time and in an ancient culture has its meaning in that time and culture, and in our time and culture may have a different meaning or indeed no meaning at all."

Cultural relativism has no place for biblical authority, that is, at least in its extreme forms. Any effort to update for modern man is a waste of time. Much is made by this school of thought of whether human nature changes, or not, also of what are described as "apparent absurdities," e.g., women wearing hats in church and finally of the problem falling on the translator to show the Bible is right. The accidental nature of much biblical material is also derided.

In trying to assess this movement the following points of criticism seem to be valid:

- (i) They encapsulate man in his own culture.
- (ii) They assume that cultures do not borrow or adapt.
- (iii) They place religion in a one-way traffic with culture, when in fact it is a two-way movement.
- (iv) In rejecting the "human nature does not change" thesis, this school of thought overplays the position; there is a degree of similarity. Ancient drama reveals character by its acting with many of the emotions, feelings and problems of modern man.

In conclusion, it would seem that a great deal more thought is needed in examining this thesis, especially in the light of translation success as achieved by Nida, Pyke, Smalley, Larson, and others. Cross-cultural communication is difficult, but achievement by the methods being successfully carried forward to modern man in multiple cultural situations is an indication of a line of development for biblical theological thought by theologians in relationship to the "culture-relativists."

4. "Religionless Christianity"

The above term also is popularly linked with modern man's attempt to analyze accretions in order to rediscover the genuine Gospel. The movement against religion received its emphasis from Barth. Bonhoeffer felt that Barth started in the right direction but did not go far enough. In his *Letters*, Bonhoeffer claims that Barth gives no non-religious interpretation of theological concepts.

His demand is not to do away with false religion, but to do away with religion. Leon Morris quotes from the *Letters* and comments, "God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him," writes Bonhoeffer. This does not mean that religion must be kept in its place. It means that there is no place for religion."

Bonhoeffer sees Christianity religiously conceived for 1900 years, its view of God conditioned by religious expectations — now the false god of religion must give way to the true God. The *deus ex machina* of false religion is present when men want him, the true God is present

through the Cross by suffering and powerlessness. The distinction is one of power and weakness, true transcendence is not a metaphysical notion, it is the presence of a "person who is for others."

In concluding his article on Bonhoeffer in *Interchange*, Klaus Runia writes, "But these exceptional circumstances do not give us the right to posit a religionless Christianity as the ideal situation for our day." He goes on to suggest the need for a radical re-thinking of religious language and Christian activity if we are to present a viable alternative.

In analyzing Bonhoeffer's concept, Leon Morris adds, "But religionless Christianity appears to mean the abandonment of any real emphasis on Christian doctrine and worship. The question then arises, what contribution have Christians to make to the new world that is to arise? It seems to me that the logic of religionless Christianity is that the Christian Church has no great role to play."

5. *The death of God*

This is most dramatically set forth by Altizer and Hamilton in what they call "Christian atheism." Their assertion is that the God who once was alive is now dead — the death of God is an historical event, God died in our time, in our history. Nietzsche's phrase is taken over; Hamilton claims that the difference between a Christian atheist and a secular atheist is "not the absence of the experience of God but the experience of the absence of God."

Van Buren, who belongs in this category although quite far removed in some ways from Hamilton and Altizer, says, "The word 'god' is dead, he goes on to point out that we are no poorer for this loss, all we need we have in the man Jesus Christ." Francis Schaeffer comments, "But Jesus here turns out to be a non-defined symbol. They use the word because it is rooted in the memory of the race. It is humanism with a religious banner called Jesus to which they can give any content they wish." Altizer and Hamilton write of the aim to liberate man from God and from the struggle of faith, "To be free from God as the meter of needs and solver of problems."

It would seem that this concept of God is far removed from that of the Bible where God is the very ground of freedom and hope, the God through whom men have found themselves. He is the one by whom we make sense of life. The revelation of God in the Scriptures is not tyrannical but creative, who sets life in the context of grace and judgment. The atheist makes himself or human society the measure of all things, and claims that belief is a survival from the past — the sign of immaturity.

Van Buren's use of the sentence analysis of Wittgenstein where meaning is determined by how the phrase functions allows for any amount of religious doctrine. Along with other linguistic positivists this thesis will be difficult for Van Buren to validate and is one of the factors to be examined in assessing the value of this method of dealing with cultural accretions.

One other concept, from Altizer, needs a brief mention. He sees modern man living in the chaos of nihilism, of a new meaninglessness,

"The new humanity lying on our horizon can be reached only by means of a voyage through the darkness which has fallen with the breakdown of our past." Altizer demands that contemporary Christians forsake their faith in order to remain with secular man. "We must recognize that to cling to the Christian God in our time is to evade the human situation in our century and to renounce the unsuitable suffering which is its lot. Already a Kierkegaard and a Dostoevsky knew that no suffering can be foreign to the Christian, not even the anguish that comes with the loss of God, for the way of the Christian is to bear with Jesus all the pain of the flesh."

These theories pervert the essence of New Testament Christianity and make claims that will not bear the test of analyses by true biblical theology. Modern man does not see Christianity becoming respectable by dispensing with God-talk, but is hungry for the reality of the transcendent God.

6. *Ground of being*

The last representative to be added to this list is Tillich who perhaps goes further than any others in trying to give the Christian faith an expression that will render it intelligible to the world while preserving its unique substance.

Tillich interprets man in a religious way — man has a "God-shaped-blank" in his soul, a religious *a priori* assuredly exists. This man is very much in the dark and certainly has not "come of age." His awareness is constantly invaded by despair, finitude, guilt, suffering, loneliness, estrangement, doubt, and meaninglessness. These factors throw man beyond himself to God-being itself. Man is essentially religious, aware of his finitude which drives him towards the infinite.

When we turn to Tillich's teaching on God we find a very radical departure from the doctrine of God as it is set forth in biblical theology. God is that which ultimately or unconditionally concerns us. God is Being itself, he is not a being, consequently God is not a person, but he seems to say God is personal. God's existence is not relevant, being itself does not exist. God as Being — itself and as ultimate concern are the two themes, important to the understanding of God. Tillich objects strongly to supernaturalism, which incidentally is not identical with supernatural; over against supernaturalism he puts "self-transcending" or "ecstatic naturalism."

All descriptions of God, other than "Being itself" he regards as symbolical and non-literal. The central symbolic descriptions are that he is "living," "personal," "creative and abysmal ground of being," "spirit," "love." God is living inasmuch as he is the ground of life. Ground here does not mean "cause" or "substance," but something which underlies all things in some way or other which we can describe only by means of some such symbol as cause. This, of course, led to the popular term "ground of our being." God is creative because he is God and it is meaningless to talk of creation as a necessary or contingent act of God. Creation is not the story of an event, it is identical with God's life.

Tillich employs the symbol of "depth," to indicate that God is in the world, not out beyond it. God as Being itself within which

human self and all other beings have their being is Tillich's contribution and yet even he is not certain. He conceives his vocation as "on the boundary," an attempt to explain to modern man the Christian's relation to the reality of God. The tentativeness of the idea surely cuts into the reasonableness of the proposition. "At almost every point, I have to stand between alternative possibilities of existence, to be completely at home in neither and to take no definitive stand against either." Even if this is defined as the meeting point of two dimensions belonging to one world, it still leaves man without the certainty which the biblical teaching implies.

He accepts much crucial biblical material as "myth" which he conceives as the "language of faith," and although he takes a different line of approach to Bultmann, it nevertheless does not help "biblical theology" to bring a true message to modern man. While using biblical terminology, Tillich so changes its meaning as to finish up with another message; or to use the criticism of one modern scholar, "He has interpreted the Gospel into a language nobody is speaking." Modern man cannot be blamed for asking whether he is not left with something nearer Eastern Pantheism than the Christian faith.

These summaries are brief and have been limited to analyses only in relationship to our theme. They could be described as the major, but not the only, attempts by Christian scholars to remove what are called the "cultural accretions" which have caused inquiries in Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world to ask whether Christianity is a "Western" religion.

While these theories have thrown up many ideas worthy of consideration, none are satisfactory as the answer of modern man's dilemma. They do not answer the despair of philosophers like Heidegger, Jaspers, Camus, and Sartre. Nor is the existential experience as attractive to the man on the street as some forms of Eastern transcendentalism, or the charismatic attraction of modern Pentecostalism. The demythologized Bible is no more readable to modern man than the King James version. God as the "ground of my being" falls short of the traditional doctrine behind Christ's prayer, "Our Father." The rediscovery of the Jesus of history gives no brighter light than in the original discovery. A better view of man related to history and of biblical history as part of world history is emerging, but as our second portion of study reveals, evangelical scholarship has an unprecedented opportunity to point man to the true message of God.

We cannot neglect the world in which we live, nor ignore history, nor is it valid to reject the Bible as revelation of God. Other disciplines have contributions to make and can only be assessed against the background of God's initiative towards man.

PART TWO: CULTURAL FORMS AND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

In a very stimulating article, "The Relevance of Scripture Today," Montgomery Watt says, "It is the firm conviction of the writer that the Bible does not need to be 'made relevant' to twentieth-century man, any more than it needed to be made relevant to fifth- or seventeenth-century man."

This assertion leaves a lot to be examined: the understanding of God and man and the whole gamut of Christian doctrine as conceived at this point of time is the product of how the various centuries realized the relevance of the Word of God in their own day. Each interpreted and in so doing added its ideas which are part of the tradition which inevitably we have to examine. While the evidence Montgomery Watt adduces is correct, in each case the message has come to each recipient and has been decoded in the light of his own day and environment. When twentieth-century man reads God's Word, how does he decode?

We have reviewed what the writer believes are the failures of some Christian scholars to decode correctly the Eternal Word in the light of current disciplines of thought. Does this mean there is no alternative? Certainly not! Many evangelical scholars are producing material which interprets for modern man the timelessness of God's Word. At times, in so doing, some disciplines have been shown to be the victims of defective logic or of incomplete scientific truth, or of unproven theses. But frequently the interpreter of the Christian message has to recognize and point out that certain concepts held to be Christian are not part of the "core" of Christian truth. The alleged infallibility of the bishop of Rome, denominational emphases in the sacraments, methods of church government, all drawn from Scripture plus, are but a few of the cases that could be compiled. Modern man asks the question Montgomery Watt answers later in his article, "Is the Bible relevant today?" Can a fully authoritative Scripture, as attested by historic evangelical Christianity, speak as clearly to the needs of the present and the future as it evidently did to the needs of the past?

The attempt to answer this question is made in four areas of life: the church's worship, ethical behavior, evangelism, and service in the world. Before we deal with each of these, a few thoughts at a general level are called for.

Our world is a place of rapid change and due to the spread of the mass media one area of change is that brought about by the impact of various cultures on other cultural groups. Our title restricts us to the Anglo-Saxon world, but it could legitimately be asked if this is clearly identifiable today. For this reason the writer is thinking more in terms of the "West" as that is loosely understood today.

Who could adequately measure the influence of radical thought on the university campuses of the West and in the forms of the trade union movement, the effect of rock music, and the drug culture? How can we assess the influence on twentieth-century man of some modern theological catch-cries? "God is dead!" "The Church is an Anachronism." "The influence of situation ethics for man come of age."

What is the result of modern man's thinking about problems of ecology and the growing wave of brutality and violence? Or perhaps more important, the vast effect of theories of education now permeating secondary schools? Population explosion, racism, urbanization, are further pressures molding the thought patterns of modern man. Many other movements, political, economic, sociological, and religious could be added to the above. All reveal the complex culture patterns of the modern man to whom we are seeking to reveal the core of the Christian faith as given by God.

a. *The church's worship* — This is a vital area of Christian life and experience, and yet one in which the vitality of reality seems to have disappeared and "form" or "tradition" have taken control.

The role of worship must be to reflect the believer's response to the truth of God. It must be vertical before it can be horizontal. Marx wrote of man's alienation from man (the Scripture talks of man's alienation from God), and worship, irrespective of its liturgical pattern must first give opportunity to express man's gratitude and joy that God has taken the initiative in the restoration of this relationship. It must be objective before it can be subjective. It must also give expression to the wonder of faith, i.e., the personal trust of the individual in God through Christ.

Further, worship must be intimate enough to develop the "fellowship" of the Gospel in the way that bridges race, social status, education, and even language. The church has failed lamentably at this point.

Cultural forms become the by-product of these basic essentials. The form a service takes will vary from culture to culture. So long as it helps the worshiper in the problem of values and meaning in life, and helps him to relate to the only source whereby these can be evaluated, it is functioning as it is meant to do.

Worship can bring to man the recovery of the dimension of transcendence, and this helps man find the significance of faith in its cognitive, emotional, and volitional aspects. Certain sociological trends indicate a new place for worship (see Henry Rach and his *Twentieth-century Spirituality*, where the author discusses the significance for worship of the sociological trend noted from communal groups to associational groups).

In a study of the history of worship it is noteworthy that there was a radical change from Middle Ages to the post-Reformation era. Changes in music in response to changing times have left the church with a vast heritage by which to praise God in worship. The music which is popular in the secular world today is having its influence on sacred music, not however without conflict and controversy. The question is raised, "What is wrong with it if it speaks to the modern man as older forms of music no longer do?" The confusion of thought here is intensified because frequently the champions of old versus new sit on either side of a generation gap. Do those who cling to the conservative ways represent a cultural phenomenon? We have to recognize that the music of the early twentieth-century church is very different from that of the church of five hundred years ago. Is change then wrong, or does it merely represent change in culture reflecting itself into our emotional response to God? Do we need to discriminate between "beat" and ordinary music forms?

Does a change in architecture reflect anything for worship, or are we simply in the hand of the technician? Is the sermon-centered form of worship viable for our day, or is it a relic of an age now gone? These thoughts only begin to reflect the immensity of the question.

When a Christian worships, he is expressing in community action the corporate nature of all spirituality. The people of God are not simply a collection of individuals, but a gathered people needing to meet together to break bread and to pray. Christ took flesh to become the head of the body, the new people of God, and at worship we have an encounter

in faith with Christ and with each other. If this experience is to be real to the member and the outsider, somehow the expression of its "worth" must be clear. It must say what we know about the meaning of life and what we are trying to be because we are the people of God.

The so-called "symbol collapse," whether referring to verbal symbols or ordinary ones, can be reversed by interpreting afresh in the language of our day the depth of meaning in the original. This will come about by careful research linguistically oriented along with a renewal of spiritual power. The Holy Spirit, as teacher, awaits in each generation those believers through whom he can bring the newness of wonder — this must be in the pew as well as in the pulpit. Thus worship would precede evangelism and evangelism would be the fruit of worship (Acts 2:47). Always the vertical must bring about the time-line for the horizontal, then the form of the horizontal can change from group to group, age to age, and remain vital and relevant.

b. *Ethical behavior* — Joseph Fletcher's book *Situation Ethics* is a typical example of modern attempts to find an answer to behavior questions when the authority of God is removed. Nothing is universally right or wrong; goodness and badness are not built in, essential, unchangeable qualities of anything; only one thing is intrinsically good — love, and it is the same as justice.

A very clear statement about this relating of Christian ethics to the secular world is set out by Professor Barclay in his book *Ethics in A Permissive Society*. The issues are dealt with by Lutzer in his *The Morality Gap*. There are others who have written on this theme, perhaps the small book by Martyn Lloyd-Jones should be added as it is a book of "biblical theology" — a study of Romans, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*.

In this section there is not the simplicity noted in the previous study. Here we have biblical principles as a cogent part of revelation and no amount of cultural relativity can be used to escape the implications of the revelation. The marked change in behavior patterns of the last fifty years can be traced back to the movements of thought which have reduced the Word of God to an outmoded piece of literature, to theories which have put man at the center of religion and ethics. Instead of religion being the source of behavior, it became an appendage. Godliness is essential to ethics — this is the message of both Old Testament and New Testament.

Biblical principles leave us no choice — we are absolutists and can have no relationship with either the situationalists or the hierarchialist. Having said this, we have dealt with an issue of vital importance. However, another issue remains to be considered: are all the codes of behavior, dress, etc., always related to these absolutes? Once again we will be called on to note a variety of answers from different cultural groups. Many patterns of behavior are good; they are the oil that helps the machinery of a society to continue to function — but they are not essential and can be changed. Study needs to be carried out to try to show where certain matters are fundamental and where others are cultural and can be done away with. Too often biblical truth is saddled with concepts which are purely social and yet people cling to them eagerly.

Many people have been turned away from God's Word because its

message has been encumbered with cultural and social shibboleths. The intrinsic value of the moral laws of Scripture needs to be made clear to our contemporaries and given the opportunity to be seen for what they are.

The true nature of God must be proclaimed along with the following great themes to rescue them from becoming lost as appendages of prior cultures. To attempt a list is to invite criticism and yet to fail to do so robs this portion of the study of its realism.

- (i) The right of life (homicide, euthanasia, abortion, suicide.)
- (ii) Sex as God-given in marriage (homosexuality, adultery, premarital intercourse, prostitution, lust).
- (iii) Freedom (racism, slavery, worship, expression of opinion).
- (iv) Truth, honesty (stealing, false witness).
- (v) Envy, jealousy, hatred (the sins of the spirit and of motive).
- (vi) The community responsibility, the strong help the weak, place no cause of stumbling.
- (vii) Marriage, divorce.

It must be admitted that some of these are open to interpretation (e.g., when does life come to the foetus?), but the basic norms are there and relate to the being of God and man's relationship to God.

c. *Evangelism* — The vehicle which carries God's truth to man is evangelism, the proclamation of God's existence, of man's relationship to God, of man's destruction of that relationship, of God's initiative to deal with man's revolt, of God's offer to man of his salvation.

Christ told his disciples that he was "truth," he taught that the Holy Spirit was the "Spirit of truth" and would lead his followers into truth; this is part of the Bible's testimony to God as the source of all truth. But today man is busy trying to forget that this is so.

Modern theologians say God is dead, truth is relative, the masters of propaganda, both political and commercial, have taken words and twisted and warped their meaning. George Marsden entitled an article on this problem "Evangelicals in Wonderland." He sets forth the danger of the attack on words. We have to use them for the message of evangelism, we can convey truth, even its ultimate truth about God. Carl Henry takes this up trenchantly, "Nothing is more foundationally important for the world and for the church in the twentieth-century than a recovery of truth. Truth-famine is the ultimate and worst of all famines. Unless modern culture recovers the truth of truth and the truth of God, civilization is doomed to oblivion and the spirit of man to nihilism."

It is against this backdrop of a cultural state of worldwide confusion of terms and truth that evangelism must stand and declare God as the judge of culture and as ultimate truth.

The task of evangelism is greater than ever; it must declare the whole truth of God, on a world scale. Man must be given back a new clarity which only God can give. The forces arrayed against such a project are immense; the powers of evil see man in their grasp and have the media to increase this hold and will yield nothing in the battle for man. Evangelism is God's weapon of proclamation (I nearly wrote counter-proclamation, but that would be wrong). It is the purveyors of "untruth" who make the counter-proclamation. The confusion on this arises because

at present these forces seem to have all before them and the church seems unable to compete. But this is an illusion — among the confusions of the twentieth-century nothing is worse than the confused state of man's own thought about himself, his destiny, and his relationship to ultimate authority.

Evangelism has power at its disposal, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts 1:8); "the Gospel is God's *dynamis* (dynamite) unto salvation" (I Cor. 15:3-4); "so that your faith might be built, not upon human wisdom, but on the power of God" (I Cor. 2:1-5).

These comments do not relate to the "methodology" of evangelism — it is here that culture can and should play a part. Some time ago Bishop Chandu Ray reported on the new life which was coming to evangelism in Asian countries when the concept of using Western patterns was no longer regarded as binding. This is the result of the Congress on Evangelism held in Singapore in 1968. Proclamation in some areas became a "family" matter, because the family was the basic unit of the community.

There is a lesson here at a wider level; the sub-culture of every community will respond to the evangel if it is brought in meaningful ways. The content of the message has an amazing capacity to be translated to different cultures, the methodology needs to recognize the cultural challenge. When this is accepted, the timeless, God-given message begins to pulsate with life — the spoken and written word becomes potent. When this is allied with the biblical requirement of demonstration of the truth in life, then the deadness of orthodoxy is circumvented and faith has the opportunity to demonstrate its power.

Man has the right to stand by God, made in the image of God, justified by faith in what God has done for him, to stand over and against all else in nature, and thus to find God's purpose and satisfaction.

Francis Schaeffer has recently published *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. This is evangelism's message. The words may be updated to bring meaning to modern man, but the centrality of this message must be flung out to mankind. Os Guinness in his *Dust of Death* calls for evangelism that takes the message of the Bible to man in its totality — what God says in the world, what God says in man, what God says in the Bible, what God says in Christ. Put these concepts together and we have evangelism expressed in biblical concepts in a way understandable by modern man.

d. *Service in the world* — Biblical theology shows both individual conversion and social justice to be indispensable; personal holiness of living and social responsibility are closely linked.

The Bible reveals "a new man" who is immediately committed to love of neighbor. The biblical doctrine of man, made in the image of God, and of God's ceaseless activity of redemption, opens up an area of responsibility which the early church accepted. Gibbon, the historian, acknowledges the importance of Christian benevolence in the triumph of Christianity. The continuing history of the church saw this line of practice fluctuate a great deal, but always there was the evidence of concern for the needy.

Marsden lists the nineteenth-century concern of evangelicals in his

article "Dusting off the Heritage" in *Christianity Today*. That this declined during the twentieth-century, probably due to the influence of the "social gospel," is a factor which needs to be recognized as we examine the present confrontation. We have also to check and assess the claim of the radicals that even at its best this is "a doctor at the bedside of capitalism."

Is service in the world to be restricted to the individual, to treating social symptoms rather than removing the causes of the ills of society? David Claydon writes, "But in this generation the absence of a developed strategy on the community front stands out in stark contrast to the highly geared programs for ministering to individuals."

That problems of race, poverty, war, over-population, ecology, and many others need overall strategy is only just being rediscovered. The area to be researched is vast. Max Weber claimed that Protestantism was largely responsible for the birth of capitalism and the shape of the modern world. Marx, Engels, and Lenin had proclaimed a similar thesis when they attacked the one-dimensional society largely shaped by Christian authoritarianism. Whether such claims can stand investigation, whether the process of preparing a Christian strategy for true service in the world is feasible — these are areas for discussion and thought.

Evangelicals in education face a herculean task as they face the challenge of service in their own field. *The Journal of Christian Education* has shown that positive and fruitful work goes on. This is true also in other disciplines. However, it seems that any concept of a concerted attack is far from being realized.

Our task then, rests in both areas of activity mentioned above. "The cup of cold water" must be given in greatly increased ways to meet the need of the individual at the moment of suffering. The greater strategy to help eradicate or reduce evil calls for vision and planning of those trained to see the need and capable of response. This must not be separated from the fact of man's greatest need — the vertical must be proclaimed before the horizontal can be projected, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself."

Bangkok is a symbol of failure because true concern for strategy and achievement at a world level has been rooted in man and his ability. To ignore the biblical pattern, or to select out of context, as so often was the case, biblical material to give an air of biblical faith and theory presents man with as great a source of future disappointment as can be imagined.

Carl Henry writes, "Social action must not be viewed as an independent and detachable concern, nor may the preaching of the Gospel be aborted from the whole counsel of God. Fundamental to biblical theology is the revelation of the true and living God, the God both of justice and justification."

J. N. D. Anderson has set out seven points to develop broad biblical principles in the matter of social responsibility:

"(1) That God originally created man in his 'image' and after his likeness' (Gen. 1:26). It is this which gives man his initial worth.

(2) That when man had fallen into sin Christ died to save him.

(3) That God made the material world, and must have a purpose

for it as such. 'Everything created by God is good' (I Tim. 4:4), and we must accept all that God has given with gratitude, even where it is ministered through unbelievers. One way in which we give glory to God is by using created things rightly, that is in accordance with the creator's revealed will (I Cor. 10:31).

(4) That in the new creation all things are to be summed up in Christ as head (Eph. 1:10), for his Cross has somehow reconciled not only the world of men but the whole material and spiritual universe (Col. 1:20).

(5) That in the meanwhile the world is still under God's government and is still the object of his love and concern.

(6) That Christ taught that every man is our 'neighbor' whom we must love and serve; that the prophets passionately proclaimed God's demand for social justice; and that the apostles unequivocally stated that such human institutions as the family and the state are God-ordained, designed to fulfill particular functions and purposes for the welfare of the race.

(7) That Christ said that his servants were not only to be the 'light' of society but also its 'salt' — presumably in the sense of a preservative from evil."

There can be no Christian doctrine of service in the world which is not God-centered, which does not reach out to meet total man's total need, which is not empowered by the Holy Spirit, which does not express true compassion. This grows out of true understanding, out of outrage that sees wrong and evil as God sees it, out of identification fired by love, forceful, practical, effective.