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chairman of the committee on co-operation. The immediate problem lay in Ritchie's belief that the comity arrangements applied to the missionaries but not to the national Christians. At a deeper level lay the problem why two tiny denominations, one still in the process of formation and both still suffering persecution, should find it necessary to compete with each other when vast tracts of country were still unevangelised. The reason was the same as that which made united theological education impossible, namely, the incompatibility between church-based and faith missions. The Congress report clearly mentioned this problem, but evidently it was felt that it could be overcome. The fact is that although in other countries developments may not have been as dramatic as in Peru, nowhere was this barrier really overcome in Latin America. In view of the fact that the compilers of the Panama reports were basing themselves on the experience of the Edinburgh Conference, it is justified then to ask why they were so naive on this point.

The answer lies in the difference between Latin America and the non-Christian mission fields with which Edinburgh was dealing. In non-Christian countries, Christian groups with differing interpretations of the Bible still found it possible to co-operate because the differences among themselves were small compared with the differences with the religions surrounding them. In Latin p. 58 America, however, the various Protestant groups found themselves confronted with a Catholicism which in theory accepted the Bible as the rule of faith just as they did. The major differences between Protestant groups were thus of the same order of magnitude as the differences between the Protestants and the Catholics. In other words, the situation in Latin America at the time of the Panama Congress resembled much more that of Europe at the time of the Reformation than that of the non-Christian countries being studied at the Edinburgh Conference. The incompatibility between the Lutherans and the Calvinists on the one hand and the Anabaptists on the other should, therefore, have been a warning to the compilers of the Panama reports that the lack of co-operation between church-based and faith missions was a major problem indeed, and that it was useless to emphasise 'the essential oneness of evangelical churches'.

A by-product of the Edinburgh Conference was the formation of the 'Faith and Order' movement to study and analyse the differences between Christian churches with a view first to understanding these differences and then to overcoming them. It is a pity that the Panama Congress did not recommend the same thing for the Protestant church in Latin America.

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Ethics and the Old Testament: a Functional Understanding of Law

by CHRISTOPHER WRIGHT

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In this three-part article Chris Wright examines the ethical use and abuse of the Old Testament by evangelicals.

In the first part (5 May, 1977), he lays bare as 'Cut-price hermeneutics' inconsistencies of the 'random relevance selection' of O.T. texts to prove or support a favourite viewpoint. He then discusses the dangers of overstressing the view that the 'creation ordinances' are of universal relevance while the Mosaic material has only temporal relevance. He suggests creation theology can be understood only in the light of Israel's redemptive faith.

The validity of the common evangelical practice of dividing the Law into moral, civil and ceremonial categories is questioned. This view that the moral law based on the character and will of God is universal and permanent, that the civil law as the temporal legislation of Israel is no longer relevant, and that the ceremonial law of cultic rites and sacrifices as fulfilled and abrogated by Christ is also obsolete, is an oversimplification and an arbitrary division of the laws of the Pentateuch. This thesis is expounded in greater detail in Part II, reproduced below.

In Part III (2 June, 1977), the example of the Jubilee institution is discussed in detail against the background of Israel's socio-economic, theological, literary and historical context.

Editor.

Unlike the 'moral, civil, ceremonial' division, the following classification is not designed to answer *our* 'A.D.' question: 'Which laws are still relevant?' Rather, it is a functional description of the p. 60 different kinds of law and their spheres of operation, from the 'B.C.' perspective of Israelite society itself.¹

I. CRIMINAL LAW

A crime is an offence which a state regards as contrary to the best interests of the whole community and accordingly punishes in the name of the highest authority within the state. Criminal law is therefore distinct from civil law which is concerned with private disputes between citizens, in which the state may adjudicate but is not the 'offended' party.

1. Israel as a Theocratic State

Now Israel attributed their very existence as a nation-state to the historical activity of God, and therefore accorded him supreme authority within the state. They also knew that they depended for continued security as a nation upon the preservation of the covenant relationship established at Sinai between God and themselves. Therefore, any action which was a fundamental violation of that covenant relationship presented a threat to the very security of the nation and was treated with appropriate seriousness as a 'crime'. Because Israel was a theocracy, the social and theological realms fused into one in the delineation of criminal offences.

2. The Importance of the Decalogue

It is in this context that we must see the central importance for Israel of the *decalogue* as an expression of certain fundamental kinds of behaviour which were required or prohibited on the authority of the Lord, by whose redemptive grace the nation was now a free people ([Exodus 20:2](#)). The decalogue itself was not a 'criminal law code' in our sense

¹ This analysis is partly based upon the work of A. Phillips: *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law* (Oxford, 1970), particularly as regards the distinction between criminal and civil law in Israel. But though the analysis is his, the views expressed in this article arising from it are my own.

(it does not specify punishments), but it set out the boundaries and obligations of the relationship between Israel and God, and thus defined the nature and extent of what, for Israel, would constitute serious crime. It stated, as it were, the [p. 61](#) overall policy, of which other laws provided practical implementation.

It is significant, therefore, that all the offences for which there was a statutory death penalty in Old Testament law can be related, directly or indirectly, to the commandments. These cases are not examples of a primitive judicial system fired by a vengeful religious fanaticism. They are rather *socioeconomic* with which the covenant relationship was to be regarded, and a measure of the importance attached to protecting it from violation which could endanger the whole community. The national interest was bound up with preventing and punishing crime against the covenant.

Not that every commandment was sanctioned by the death penalty. The tenth (coveting) was not, by its very nature, open to *any* judicial penalty—a fact of profound ethical importance, since it showed that a person could be morally ‘criminal’ before God without having committed an overt, judicially actionable, offence (a principle applied to other commandments by Christ). The eighth (stealing) dealt with property offences, none of which was capital in Israelite law, but they were still treated as more than merely civil matters ([Leviticus 6:1–8](#)).

II. CIVIL LAW

Many of the laws in the Pentateuch begin with ‘If’ or ‘When’, and then describe a *case*. There are cases of damage, assault, negligence (see examples in [Exodus 21](#) and [22](#)). Then follow instructions concerning remedial compensation, or some form of punishment. This civil law of Israel has much in common with other more ancient codes of law, particularly the Mesopotamian Code of Hammurabi. Occasionally, however, there are significant differences which seem to reveal the influence of Israel’s theological convictions.

1. Slaves

The most striking of these concerns *slaves*. Three O.T. civil laws are quite unparalleled in any other ancient Near Eastern code: [Exodus 21:20](#) and [21:26](#), which make a man’s treatment of his *own* slaves (as opposed to injury to someone else’s slave as in other [p. 62](#) codes) a matter of public judicial concern; and [Deuteronomy 23:15–16](#), which requires that asylum be granted to a runaway slave. This last is contrary to all the other codes in which harbouring runaways was an offence liable to quite heavy penalties.

There can be no doubt that this ‘swimming against the stream’ in Israel’s civil law on slavery is the result of her own historical and religious experience. ‘Is it not extraordinary—not to say amusing—that the one society in the ancient Near East that had a law protecting runaway slaves was that society that traced its origin to a group of runaway slaves from Egypt?... The point is that Israel has experienced God as the one who is sympathetic to runaway slaves. So this law is not just an ethical or legal principle in defence of human rights, but a reflect of Israel’s own religious experience—a fundamental characteristic of Biblical ethics,’ says David Clines.

This illustrates the point that Israel’s ethical attitude to slavery arose from her historic-redemptive traditions and was not founded primarily upon a creation principle of the rights of man. Admittedly, the latter emphasis is found in [Job 31:15](#), which asserts the created equality of master and slave, but in a context (v. [13](#)) which refers to a civil law dispute. We have here uncovered a powerful ethical principle by a study of Israel’s *civil* law. You will not find a section of ‘moral law’ denouncing slavery. But in studying and

comparing the civil law we come upon interesting and significant theological and moral factors at work.

2. Human Life and Property

One feature that emerges from both the criminal and civil law is that human life and material property are treated as qualitatively separate and are not to be equated with one another in human judicial procedure. Like parallel lines, they have no common intersection.

Thus, no offence involving property (including theft) was punishable by death (in contrast to many ancient law codes, and our own until comparatively recent times), whereas theft of a person for gain (kidnapping) was a capital offence ([Exodus 21:16](#)). On the other hand, if some one committed a capital offence, he could not get off by paying money ([Numbers 35:29-31](#)); neither the victim's life nor his own was to be valued in property terms. The only exception [p. 63](#) to this was the case of the fatally goring ox, where a ransom could be accepted because the homicide was indirect ([Exodus 21:28-30](#)).

The sanctity of human life—the upper line—is a well-known O.T. principle that needs little emphasis here. Children, as well as slaves, were legally regarded as the property of their father, but the practical effects of this property status were carefully restricted and their rights as human beings protected in ways that could also be contrasted in some respects with the legal codes of surrounding states.

Turning to the lower line—property—the question arises as to whether it has a sanctity of its own as well. Is the phrase 'sanctity of property' a valid expression of O.T. thinking?

It is, of course, the creation belief in the O.T. that provides the widest basis for an ethical view of property and material things in general. There are two complementary principles. First, since God, as Creator, is Lord and owner of all created things, *human* property rights are derived, and not autonomous. Secondly, since man, as part of the consequences of being made in the image of God, has been given dominion over the rest of creation, his ownership and use of material things is morally and theologically legitimate. But insofar as it can be called 'ownership', it can only apply to the common ownership by mankind of all the material resources of the world. It does not seem exegetically possible (though it is done) to rest arguments for the legitimacy of *private* property on the 'Creation ordinance' to 'subdue the earth ... and have dominion' alone. But it did have a very solid basis elsewhere.

The Israelites believed that the land was ultimately owned by Yahweh who had given it to his people and required that it be divided up according to families. The family head owned the land of his patrimony, not simply by the technical legality of his inheritance, but ultimately because he held it from Yahweh; therein lay his inalienable right—theologically sanctioned and legally protected.

So 'property rights' in the O.T. are not concerned with an abstract, impersonal principle, not with the sanctity of property *per se*. To speak of the rights or sanctity of property is in fact misleading; they belong only to the person and his family as members of God's people. Rightful possession of landed property was the symbol and guarantee of the covenant relationship, and it was surrounded on all sides by responsibilities—to God himself, to the whole family line, [p. 64](#) and to neighbours in general. In other words, the responsibility for material wealth in the O.T. is more than a general stewardship of creation; it includes a host of specific duties arising from the historical and socio-economic circumstances of God's people living on God's land.

3. Present-Day Application

Now in applying the O.T. perspective on material wealth and personal property, we need to keep the balance that it presents. We may certainly wish to employ the vehement *prophetic* denunciation of the *abuse* of wealth, the amassing of land and capital at the expense of the economically powerless. In the present state of society this is undoubtedly the right place to turn up the volume. But it is a mistake, in my view, to pursue that emphasis to the extreme of denying the legitimacy of private property altogether—something the prophets do not do even at their most radical moments. I have never yet heard a convincing argument from the O.T. that property ownership is something intrinsically wrong. What is more, having studied in some detail the depth of the bond between Israel's theological self-understanding and her economic system of multiple family land-tenure, I do not expect to hear one.

Yet one senses a certain embarrassment in Christian circles today on the subject of 'property rights' (even allowing for the ambiguous misnomer)—an embarrassment often mixed with feelings of guilt at our own material prosperity which feeds upon the economic oppression we verbally condemn. But our condemnation of sinful abuse ought not to spill over into a rejection of legitimate and responsible use. Otherwise we may end up in company with some early Christians whose horror at the sinfulness of sexual excess led them to regard marriage itself as evil.

III. FAMILY LAW

In ancient Israel, the judicial role of the household was one important aspect of the central place in society that was filled by the family and larger kinship groupings. The head of a household had the primary responsibility for and legal authority over all his dependents—which could include married sons and their families, **P. 65** of which the protection of Gideon by his father's house in [Judges 25–31](#) is a good example. So on some matters he could act on his own legal authority without recourse to civil law or the external authority of a court. Such matters included serious parental discipline (exclusive of the right of life or death, which lay only with a court of elders, [Deuteronomy 21:18–21](#)), divorce (for which no civil 'permission' was required, [Deuteronomy 24:1–4](#)), and the making permanent of voluntary slavery ([Exodus 21:5–6](#)). There were also laws and institutions designed to protect the family and its ancestral property—such as levirate marriage ([Deuteronomy 25:5–10](#)), inheritance laws ([Deuteronomy 21:15–17](#)), redemption procedures for land and persons, and the Jubilee institution (Leviticus:25).

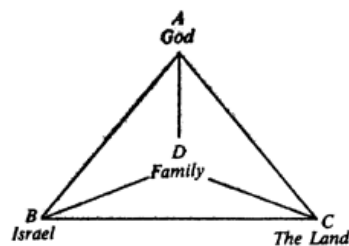
1. Three-Dimensional Relationships

Now under the old 'moral, civil, ceremonial' scheme, all this would be subsumed under 'civil law', but it really merits a separate category since, sociologically, it is a different kind of law. The importance of it is that it underlines heavily the social, economic and theological centrality of the household-plus-land units in Israel. It thereby adds a three-dimensional richness to the familiar 'sanctity-of-the-family' motif, which is otherwise usually attached to the fifth commandment alone.

Recognition of this 'family law' and of its complex socio-economic setting in Israel performs another salutary hermeneutical function. It should prevent an oversimplistic emphasis upon the role of the family in modern society. There are those whose zeal for a Biblical model of the centrality of the family leads them to champion the family as at once the bedrock, bricks and cement of a healthy society. I have no hesitation in agreeing that Biblically and ideally they are right. But modern society is neither Biblical nor ideal and the position of a family in today's world is scarcely a shadow of what it was in ancient Israel. Is it fair then to lead upon it the same high expectations and responsibilities?

The family of Israel stood at the centre of a triangle of clearly defined relationships between God, Israel and the land.

The outer triangle represents the three major relationships of Israel's theological self-understanding; the primary relationship [p. 66](#) between God and Israel (AB); God as the ultimate owner of the land (AC); the land as given to Israel as an inheritance (CB). The family was the basic unit of Israelite social and kinship structure (BD) and also the basic unit and beneficiary of Israel's system of land-tenure (CD). Thus it was that these family-plus-land units, the lower triangle (BCD), constituted the socio-economic fabric upon which Israel's relationship with God was grounded, being channelled through the vertical relationship (AD). Social, economic and theological realms were thus bound together inextricably, all three having the family as their focal point.



2. Questions About the Nature of Society

Now it was within this conceptual framework and with the economic and social *support* of these relationships that the Israelite family could perform its vital role in the moral and religious life of the nation. So if we want to assert the importance of the family in society along truly Biblical lines, we must surely ask serious and critical questions about the nature of society itself. Granted, of course, that we are not a redeemed theocratic nation, as Israel was, we can still aim to produce a society which reflects in *some* senses the triangle of relationships within which the family was set in the O.T. This would mean a society in which families would enjoy a degree of economic independence based upon the rightful ownership of an equitable share in the nation's wealth; in which a family could feel some social relevance and significance in its [p. 67](#) community; in which every family had the opportunity of hearing the message of divine redemption in a culturally relevant and meaningful way, and the freedom to respond to it.

Idealistic? Perhaps; but at least it is a Biblical idealism that strikes me as more realistic than that which seeks a morally revitalised society simply by calling for greater family cohesion without tackling the economic forces that undermine it. Evangelicalism on the whole seems to be realising the inadequacy of the 'domino theory' of social action—*i.e.* the view that if only we convert enough individuals, society will be transformed without changing the structures. I wonder if the 'support-the-family' line may not be in danger of the same inadequacy (only with bigger dominoes), unless at the same time we are striving to create social conditions in which family cohesion is economically possible and socially worthwhile.

The witness of O.T. history was that economic forces, partly created and partly accelerated by greed and oppression, led to the social break-up of the lower triangle (BCD), and that this in turn was a major factor (though of course not the only one) in the moral and spiritual dissolution of the relationships BA and DA. The sheer powerlessness of ordinary families in the face of such forces is poignantly expressed in the plea of impoverished fathers to Nehemiah: 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax upon our fields and our vineyards ... We are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves ... *But it is not in our power to help it*, for other men have our fields and our vineyards' ([5:1-5](#)). This is a cry with some very modern echoes.

IV. CULTIC LAW

Because the ‘cermonial’ category of the standard division is said to prefigure Christ and to have been fulfilled by him, many people’s concept of it is controlled by the letter to the Hebrews and limited to the blood sacrifices, priestly regulations and the Day of Atonement rituals. But though these are certainly vital parts of it, the cultic dimension of life for an Israelite embraced much more. As well as such matters as dietary and hygiene regulations, festivals and holy days, it included very practical areas with social effects—such as material gifts, tithes, and harvest first-fruits.

Even the major economic institution of the sabbatical year for p. 68 the land had a cultic rationale, based upon the concept of the divine ownership of the land. Both [Leviticus 25:4](#) and [Deuteronomy 15:2](#) speak of the requirements of the seventh year as being ‘unto the Lord’; *i.e.* the material sacrifices involved in the sabbatical institution were an obligation to God himself. But the practical point of it was clearly humanitarian concern for the impoverished, the debtor, etc. ([Exodus 23:11](#)). Thus it is here, in this unlikely-looking *cultic* corner of Israelite law that we find spelt out in concrete economic terms an ethical pattern familiar elsewhere in Biblical thought, namely the fulfilment of one’s duty to God by means of responsible, sensitive and sacrificial care for one’s fellow-men.

V. CHARITABLE LAW

This is a category which would not usually be regarded strictly as ‘law’ at all, and indeed it could not have been intended as enforceable legislation in Israel. Yet Israel’s theological awareness is so interwoven with the practicalities of life that we find hosts of these humanitarian injunctions sprinkled throughout the Torah, side by side with the plainest case laws and the most awesome criminal statutes.

The human concern of these injunction p. is familiar: the protection of the weak, justice for the poor, impartiality, generosity, respect for even an enemy’s property, care for strangers and immigrants, prompt payment of wages, even care for animals. (For instance, see [Exodus 22:20–27](#); [23:2–11](#); [Leviticus 19:9–10](#); [13:18](#); [Deuteronomy 15:12–14](#); [24:10–18](#)).

But it is the theological motivation and sanction behind all this that is ethically most significant—namely that it is a response to what God himself has done for Israel and a reflection of his character as revealed in his historical dealings. Social charity, therefore, is not based upon the humanity of the recipient or his inherent human rights; nor is it only because this is the kind of thing God commands; nor is it even because that is what God is like, in some abstract, ethereal sense.

No; the primary, repeated, and compelling reason why the Israelite must behave in these ways towards the weak, enslaved or impoverished, is because that is how God has actually behaved towards him, when, in the historical experience of the nation, he was p. 69 in the same condition. ‘You shall remember that *you* were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there: *therefore* I command you to do this’ ([Deuteronomy 24:18](#)).

There is here a prefiguring in principle of that great commandment ‘that you love one another *as I have loved you*’ ([John 15:12](#)). It is here that we come closest to that two-dimensional *love* which is at the heart of the law—as indeed it is of Biblical ethics as a whole: ‘You shall love the LORD your God’ ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#)); ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ ([Leviticus 19:18](#)). p. 70

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Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice

by RONALD J. SIDER

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The fundamental question of our time is: What is Salvation? Attempts to understand and re-interpret the mission of the Church in the world and, in particular, the relationship of world evangelisation to social service and justice in society has become the pre-occupation of all traditions of the Christian Church in recent years. The World Council of Churches Department of World Mission and Evangelism Conference at Bangkok in January 1973 on 'Salvation Today' adopted a holistic view. In November of the same year a group of evangelicals promulgated the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern. In July 1974, the Lausanne International Congress of World Evangelisation offered the Lausanne Covenant. During the same year the Third General Assembly of the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops discussed the issue in Rome, and Orthodox churches held a consultation on 'Confessing Christ Today' at Bucharest. The WCC, in the Fifth General Assembly in Nairobi 1975, took up the issues raised at Bangkok, especially in the sections 'Confessing Christ', 'Seeking Community—the common search of people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies', and in 'Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation'. Then on the 8th December 1975, two days before the conclusion of the Nairobi Assembly, Pope Paul, in response to a request by the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, issued Evangelii Nuntiandi, his apostolic exhortation on 'evangelisation in the modern world'. Since Lausanne, several regional congresses on world evangelisation have been held. At the All-India Congress at Devlali in 1977, co-operation in cross-cultural evangelism and Church-planting and the relationship of evangelism to social action were the central concerns of the participants
Editor. [p. 71](#)

DR. SIDER opens his essay by contrasting four conflicting views in evangelism and social justice:

1. Evangelism is the primary mission of the Church and is distinct from social action. He cites Billy Graham as the best known representative of this view. The Lausanne covenant and its exponent John Stott also belong to this category, although Sider notes that these representatives also have a passionate concern for justice.

2. The primary mission of the Church is the corporate body of believers, a view which might be called 'radical Anabaptist'. 'By their words, deeds and life together, Christians announce the Good News that by grace it is now possible to live in a new society (the visible body of believers) where all relationships are being transformed.' The Church is part of the content of the Gospel. As John Howard Yoder puts it: 'The primary social structure through which the Gospel works to change other structures is that of the Christian community.'