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interpreting the Christian faith for contemporary
living.*

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So we need a picture of the *church*. And I don't mean a building or a hierarchy or even a preacher. I mean a group of people who are together to support each other, love each other, nurture each other, challenge each other. The church is people using their gifts to serve one another. As we jointly use our gifts to build each other up, we will bear fruit fit for repentance. Then we will begin to overcome the [p. 269](#) sin in our lives. That doesn't happen in a blinding flash the moment we decide to follow Jesus.

That means that at the very heart of any deeply Christian work must be church or community building. Whether we emphasize evangelism or development or justice, we are not doing it in a Christian way unless part of what we are doing is forming a community of believers.

The Bible repeatedly makes it clear that this is central to God's plan for our age. Consider what Paul says in Ephesians: "His gifts were for equipping the saints in the work of serving and in building up the body of Christ. That way we can attain mature adulthood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. When each part is working properly, the body grows and builds itself up in love" ([4:11 a](#), [12](#), [13b](#), [16b](#)).

So if we want people to grow to maturity, we will have to get beyond relief, technological development, community organizing, and work for justice. We will also have to evangelize and build church-communities.

WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO?

But even all these pictures combined will not be enough. They are good—as far as they go. But we must go farther.

We must recognize that we are not adequate to solve the problem ourselves. Our own sinfulness and weakness are too great—not to mention the enormous forces arrayed against us. We are hopelessly outnumbered and outfinanced. What chance do we have against massive corporations like G + W, McDonnell Douglas, Castle and Cook? Against brutal dictatorships sponsored by the Kremlin or the Pentagon?

We have no chance. And that is grounds for despair—except for Christians. For us, it is grounds for hope, for that is when God chooses to act. Any work among the poor must *expect God to act* or it is not deeply Christian. Work for development or justice which does not expect God's intervention is practical atheism even if it is done by Christians.

Of course we are outnumbered. But so was Israel when the Syrians surrounded Elisha's city: "His servant said, 'Alas, my master. What shall we do?' Elisha said, 'Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire" ([2 Kings 6:15b](#), [16](#), [17b](#)).

All we need to do is to open our eyes.

John Alexander is a co-editor of *The Other Side*, a magazine designed to help Christians grow in their commitment to justice rooted in discipleship. [p. 270](#)

Our Evangelical Social Responsibility: A Personal Response

By Bruce J. Nicholls

PREAMBLE

The WEF Theological Commission Study Unit on Ethics and Society sponsored a consultation on Theology and Development at the High Leigh conference centre at Hoddesdon, England 10–15 March, 1980. Forty evangelical theologians, relief and development agency executives, church leaders and practitioners drawn from every continent met to seek God's guidance in a fresh understanding of their social responsibility. During the last night of the consultation I prepared a statement to express what I believed was the intention of the participants and which for me was a personal response. At the request of others I share it with you recognising that it bears the marks of the anguish of the moment.

STATEMENT

As members of the body of Christ set apart for the ministry of evangelism, service and justice we sought to identify ourselves with the world's poor and oppressed whose numbers and degree of suffering is increasing year by year. We are appalled at the estimate that seventy million are in imminent danger of starvation and another 400 million chronically undernourished and at the forecast that the number of hungry people in the world will double by 1995.

We are distressed at the massive unemployment throughout the world resulting in severe hardships, a spirit of hopelessness and despair and the fact that the drift to the cities is resulting in deterioration of basic life support systems in food, water, sanitation and housing. For example, we are told that the population of Mexico City, now 11 million, is expected to grow to 31 million people in the next twenty years.

We feel our hopelessness before the dramatic expansion of global arms expenditure which has risen from \$350 billion to \$425 billion in the last three years, increasing the danger of global conflict while using vast planetary resources that could be used for human development.

As participants we feel the shame of the greed of the rich industrialised nations, mostly Christian, whose wealth and exploitive power is growing at the expense of the poorer nations. We feel the pain of learning that during the recent tragic famine in Sahel, Africa, the export of food to the West actually increased, and again that the increasing beef exports from the Central American countries to the U.S.A. have contributed to the growth of malnutrition and hunger in these regions. [p. 271](#)

As evangelical Christians we confess our lack of compassion for the suffering of mankind and our lack of holy indignation at the injustice and selfishness of our so-called Christian societies. Further, we acknowledge our tacit support for ruthless dictatorships particularly in countries in Latin America, our unbiblical eschatologies that lead us to fatalism and selfish escapism.

We confess that all too often we have allowed the world's spirit of consumerism and easy believerism to penetrate our Christian thinking and in closing our eyes to suffering and injustice we have caused many to block their ears to our preaching of the Gospel.

We not only confess and repent before God of these our sins of omission and commission but resolve in faith to dedicate ourselves afresh to our high calling in Christ Jesus.

The intent of our consultation is to call for a theology of servanthood and to take up the Cross to which our Lord calls us, even unto death. By God's grace we covenant together "to love God with all our heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbours as ourselves". We have heard afresh our Lord's call to incarnate our service for the poor, the sick and the hungry, the orphan and the widow, the depressed and the oppressed and to witness openly and faithfully to Christ as the Saviour, liberator and Lord in word and deed, doing all to the glory of God. We have been stirred to identify with the ministry of God's prophets, with Moses, Jeremiah and Nehemiah and with our Lord himself in denouncing sin and rebuking all manifestations of evil and demonic power in the lives of individuals, communities and nations. We join together with all believing Christians in seeking through our service to restrain evil men and institutions of power and in working together to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God.

We intend personally and together with our churches, missions and development agencies and through the ongoing structures of this consultation to study the Scriptures as the Word of God in the context of our culturally conditioned situations. We will give special attention to the Bible's teaching on God's concern for the poor and oppressed, on the cosmic work of Christ, in creation and redemption and on the Biblical patterns of *diaconia*, and socio-political justice and the relationship between them. Accepting the Word of God as normative we are especially concerned to understand the Bible's teaching of the effect of Christ's victory on the Cross and his resurrection from the dead for the life and work of the Church as the people of God and the implication of Christ's work in the world outside of the Church, but without blurring the distinctions between salvation p. 272 and ethical righteousness and falling into the errors of universalism in salvation.

We desire to understand the significance of the relation of Law and promise as fulfilled in Christ for our social responsibility and the relationship of judgement and grace in society. Further, we desire to seek afresh the teaching of Scripture on the sovereignty of Christ in the world over all principalities and powers in the context of every appearance of sin and evil in our respective societies.

In the Spirit of the Lausanne Covenant's affirmation on Christian social responsibilities we desire to bring the totality of our life styles, our ambitions for our work and institutions under the Lordship of Christ. We affirm the centrality of the Church in all social service and political involvement and resolve in mutual interdependence to share our resources of life, goods and talents in the service of the Gospel and the expansion of the reign of God's kingdom.

In our relief and development programmes we will not act independently of God's people in the vision that God has given us nor establish structures that weaken the independence of the churches and fragment their unity. We are grieved to learn that in one state in India, for example, there are "more than 120 church-related agencies each voicing its own missiological triumphalism". We will endeavour by God's grace to resist all temptations to cultural and material imperialism, paternalism or empire building for self-gratification. We will identify with God's people so that the church may truly become the sign of the Kingdom of God on earth in judgement and hope.

We give thanks to God for the outstanding contribution of evangelical relief and development agencies in situations of great need and for the dedication and identification of their workers with suffering people. We pledge to support their ministries and to work together as partners in the Gospel. But we also recognise that sometimes our development programmes have become agents of secularising the life of our churches, resulting in divisions and malpractice in the handling of funds and have weakened the churches' evangelistic vision. Therefore, we will give greater priority to the regular evaluating of our projects, and to the ministry of education in our churches in the socio-economic and

political realities of our lands, in understanding the violation of human rights and religious freedom and in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit in the several ministries to which the Church is called. We will support the Christian education programmes of our churches and agencies and those theological associations committed to evangelism, social service and to socio-political [p. 273](#) justice. We will seek to evaluate the means we use to bring about social change in the light of the Word of God and we will reject using resources that have been accumulated unjustly or that have led to increasing suffering of the poor through economic power structures.

We will support the programmes of local churches both rural and urban that seek to develop training programmes in vocational skills, trades and farming in order to alleviate unemployment, to restore human dignity and to create true community and interdependence. We will support comprehensive development programmes that effectively relate evangelism, social service and the use of appropriate technology in development and that result in justice in society. We are encouraged and challenged by models of such programmes in Chaco, Argentina and Chhatarpur, India that were described to us. We will explore new programmes, such as providing legal aid to protect the poor and powerless against the misuse of law by unjust and corrupt men. We will encourage those whom the Lord is calling to exercise political power to do so in dependence on God and in ways that do not lead to a loss of spiritual vision and power.

Above all we declare our intention to be subject to one another in the bonds of love, to be motivated by the glory of God alone and in love and holiness to proclaim and live the Gospel and in every project and programme to look to the Spirit of God for guidance and power to persevere to the end ever looking for the coming of the Lord. [p. 274](#)

Christian Response to Gay Liberation

A Statement by the Evangelical Alliance, Victoria, Australia

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The pastoral concern of this issue of the Review is the restoration of homosexuals to the will of God for their lives. The statement of the Evangelical Alliance and the concerns of the group of students call for clarity on the scriptural teaching on human sexuality, courage to resist pressure groups in the church and in society and compassionate counselling for those enslaved by sin and guilt. In the next issue we will make available information on counselling services and literature.

Editor

The rise of "gay liberation", by which the right is claimed to practise and propagate homosexuality as a legitimate life-style, represents a serious challenge to Christian faith and morality. Of particular concern is the development of "community churches" catering largely for practising homosexuals (both male and female). The first such "church" was formed in Los Angeles in 1968. Subsequently more than one hundred have been formed