

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

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obedience of faith*

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all, on the Trinity—is central. Some of these seem to be part of an unbroken Celtic Christian tradition—most notably Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*, consisting of prayers and blessings collected from the outer Hebrides a century ago. Many others are a contemporary mining of the same rich vein: for example, the prayers and devotional writings of David Adams, and, most recently the devotional guides prepared by the Northumbrian community, published as *Celtic Daily Prayer* and *Celtic Nightly Prayer*.

5. Finally, it is important to recognize the contribution which the Celtic Christian vision has made to twentieth-century artists and writers. Some of these deal with explicitly Celtic material, such as George MacKay Brown, Edwin Muir, R.S. Thomas, and David Jones. I think it likely as well that the rich vein of Christian fantasy in the twentieth century—particularly in the works of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien—has Celtic Christian roots, through a variety of sources, but most notably in the highlander George MacDonald, where it was not quite suppressed by two centuries of John Knox’s Calvinism. We should mention as well the fascination with Celtic visual art. The Celtic cross remains a symbol which cannot be emptied of meaning. More subtly (as Ian Bradley notes above) the fascination with knot-work, interlacing, interconnection, can be seen as a kind of meditation on distinctness-in-relationship, characteristic of the created world but rooted ultimately in the Trinity.

H.J. Massingham was probably claiming too much when he wrote, half a century ago in *The Tree of Life* that, had Celtic Christianity not been so thoroughly assimilated, the ‘fissure between Christianity and nature, widening through the centuries, would not have cracked the unity of western man’s attitude to the universe’. Nevertheless his words point to the value of thinking seriously about these glimpses of a Celtic culture transformed by the Christian gospel. For we live today in the collapsing structure of a modernity built upon that fissured foundation: whence ‘postmodernity’.

Neo-paganism is an ultimately futile attempt to escape that ruin by a return to nature as the pagan Celts are thought to have perceived it. It is an important task for Christians to show that while nature is not divine, there is no ‘fissure between Christianity and nature’<sup>15</sup>. For this task a rich resource may be found in Celtic Christianity: that vision summed up by the image of the circles of creation given their true centre and meaning by the cross on which was crucified Jesus, the Word made flesh, ‘in whom all things hold together’.

Only through that cross may contemporary neo-pagans find the centre that they seek.

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## **In Search of Post-modern Salvation**

**R. Daniel Shaw**

*Reprinted with permission from Stimulus, August 1995*

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<sup>15</sup> H.J. Massingham, *The Tree of Life* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1943), p. 40.

The author compares the distinctives of Hebrew, Greek and modern cosmologies and analyses the nature of the widening 'excluded middle' between religion and modern science. In the post modern search for salvation, the author sees the need for a 'supra culture' perspective that incorporates God on one hand and his creation on the other. He looks to the church to offer faith answers to the rationalistic questions raised by dichotomistic worldviews, enabling people to live in harmony with God, their neighbour and themselves. Only in Christ does this integration become a reality.

Editor

The original presentation of this material came as the inaugural Clyde Vautier Memorial Lecture at the Wellington campus of the Bible College of New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> It was an honour for me, as an American, to be invited to set the tone for this lecture series.

I seek to delineate the issues as they pertain to what I consider to be a significant moment in world history—the transition to a new century in coincidence with a worldwide shift of what I call a 'culture type'—a way of thinking and living. This new type has been loosely called 'post-modern' (an already abused term that is rapidly losing specific meaning while gaining a broad reputation for representing change) and I will delineate its meaning for the church in society later in this paper. As in the inaugural lecture, this is only a tentative exploration into the issues while seeking to ground the presentation in a theological structure. In the tradition of the one for whom this lecture series is a memorial I seek to exegete Scripture and in so doing allow God's Word to dwell among us.

## THE MESS WE'RE IN

Headlines scream impending doom as they chronicle genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda; earthquakes, floods, and fires impact people around the globe; crime and lawlessness are rampant in the streets; and daily we witness a dying culture to which many still cling. *Newsweek* magazine, while no intellectual resource, is a repository of cultural presentation. Recently<sup>2</sup> the magazine featured the moral decline impacting so-called 'modern' societies. The editor going back to Aristotle (everything in the West begins with the Greeks) noted that core institutions which used to promote 'virtue' are increasingly shaky—'the family has fractured, neighbourhoods have disappeared or turned surly, many schools can barely educate, and even many churches wonder what to teach'. How, he asks, 'do we get back to basics'—read how do we restore that which we know and are comfortable with? Robert Kaiser, commenting on this same issue notes, 'We live in an age of moral relativism: since we can't know truth . . . notions of right and wrong are reduced to matters of personal taste, emotional preference or cultural choice'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, everyone does what is right in their own eyes ([Judges 21:25](#)). Hence a recent television news report, discussed 'recreational murder' and focused on the difficulty police have in tracking down the perpetrators who engage in such sport. All this, of course, leads to 'a coarsened, even savage society' that affects every member no matter what their beliefs and values.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my appreciation to Ossie Fountain who set up the programme and took care of all the details. He and the staff at the Wellington Campus of the Bible College of New Zealand are to be commended for all their efforts. For me, it was an enjoyable occasion, for them it was a lot of work—thanks!

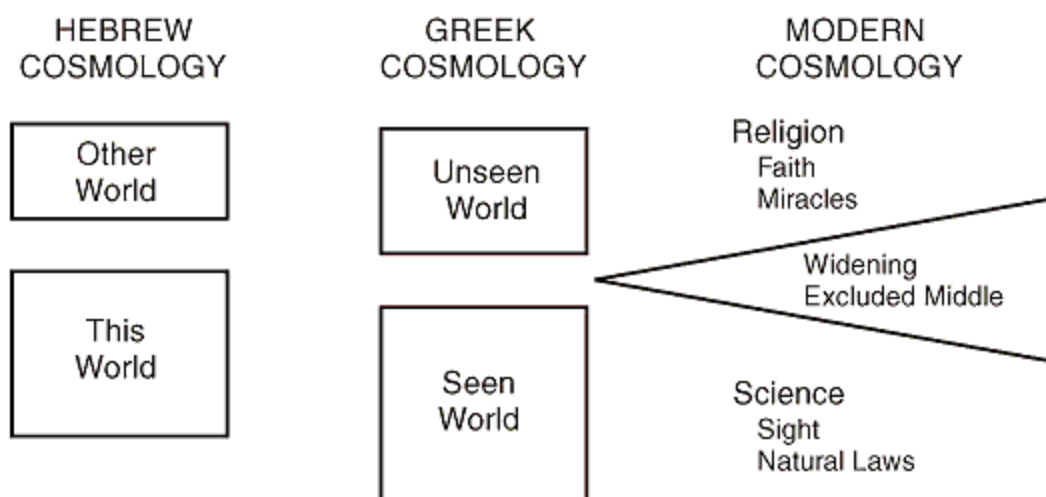
<sup>2</sup> *Newsweek*, June 13, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Blair Kaiser, *Star-News*, Pasadena, California (June 16, 1994).

A. F. C. Wallace, an anthropologist, addressed issues affecting societal change in a now classic article.<sup>4</sup> He suggested that all societies go through cyclical stages. In discussing the stage he calls 'cultural distortion' he notes that a society experiences increasing stress and is unable to satisfy the needs of its adherents. Quarrelling, irresponsibility and the rejection of traditional values characterize this stage. People are increasingly demoralized and the cycle continues to exacerbate itself until there seems to be no way out. It is at this point of despair that Wallace suggests a society is more open to the impact of a saviour or prophet who can instigate a revitalization process that will return the society to what he calls a 'new steady state'. I want to suggest that modern industrial culture, drawing heavily on Greco- Roman world view, and impacted by the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment, has strayed from its moorings to the point of growing exasperation and a recognized need for change. The post-modern paradigm with its globalization, unity in diversity, and desire for individual quality of life in the context of community interaction is seen, by many, as this 'saviour'—a new cultural model that will lead us out of the morass.

## HOW WE GOT THIS WAY

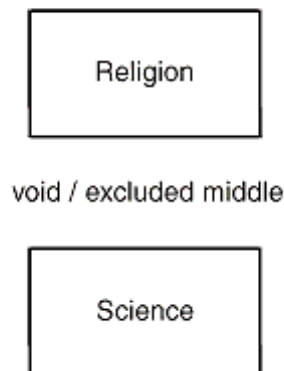
In the course of the last three centuries, modernity, encouraged by the Age of Enlightenment, has produced a rationalistic world view increasingly distancing religion from science. Whereas the Hebrews viewed creation as divided on the basis of the creator and the creation, the Greeks shifted their perspective to an emphasis on the heavenly in contrast to the earthly based on perceptive reality. Similarly the Enlightenment went one step further to contrast matters of faith and miracles with issues governed by sight and natural laws.



This contrast of religion and science created a strongly dichotomistic view of the world—matters of faith characterized by religious concern were distinct from scientific laws. Religion, then, was what people turned to when things could not otherwise be explained. In contrast, science provided the explanation for what was considered to be reality. Reality, by this definition, was explainable while the unexplainable was relegated to the cloistered halls of theological institutions where mystical specialists mused about

<sup>4</sup> A. F. C. Wallace, 'Revitalization Movements', *American Anthropologist*, 58:264–281 (1956).

what could not be known because there was no rational explanation.  
The Widening Excluded Middle



This widening gap between reality and irreality (to borrow a linguistic term) created what Paul Hiebert calls the 'excluded middle'.<sup>5</sup> Things can either be rationalized and scientifically explained as pertaining to matters of this world where that which we can see reigns supreme, or they are sacred and have to do with other worlds where faith must be exercised—there is nothing in between. However, many other societies around the world fill this 'middle zone' with spiritual forces and practices they cannot explain in naturalistic terms. Thus a freak wind storm may be attributed to demons or ghosts prowling around at night, or an illness may be attributed to having upset a local god or goddess. While we may explain the storm as a passing weather front or treat the illness with medicine, others see these as manifestations of a natural imbalance. For us, since the cause can be explained scientifically, the results can be treated—the mess cleaned up (often at great expense) or health restored because the prescription worked.

For many living in the majority world<sup>6</sup>, the issue is not naturalistic and not, therefore, correctable by scientific means. Rather the focus is on the first cause—the reason behind the storm or illness—which is often considered to be nature out of balance with supernatural. The supernatural is seen to react to the natural and effect a cause which informs human beings that a correction is necessary. Thus the reason for imbalance is considered the result of human inadequacy—a disruption of relationship with other humans, with the realm of nature or with divinities. Often the supernatural is viewed as responding to attitudes or behaviour patterns which have deviated from the societal values or expectations—its virtues. The way to correct the problem is to engage in some form of restitution, thereby bringing new balance to the universe so that things can work properly again.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Hiebert, 'The Flaw of the Excluded Middle', *Missiology*, 10:35–47 (1982). Variations of Figures 1 and 2 as well as the concepts on which they are based are detailed in a forthcoming book co-authored by Paul Hiebert and myself, *The Power and the Glory: A Missiological Approach to the Study of Religion*.

<sup>6</sup> I use this term to draw attention to the overwhelming proportion of the world's non-western people in a non-pejorative manner. It designates those who are emerging as a significant segment in a changing world. It is an attempt to recognize the internationalization present in what Alvin Toffler calls the 'third wave'.

<sup>7</sup> Lesslie Newbigin in his book, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966) maintains that it is this contrast regarding the nature of reality and control of the universe that has made missionaries the greatest secularizing force in history. The first reaction was to resort to science and only later, almost as an after thought, was God brought in. A perfunctory and powerless prayer prefaced by 'if God wills' was often the result. While this might still be considered spiritual by many (an attempt to recognize God's omnipotence) it is actually an application of a culturally conditioned epistemology which inadequately places God in a position of importance. This incorrectly reflects a god who has nothing to do with the natural workings of the universe.

Without a 'middle zone', we who are the minority population in the world have little or no ritual to establish a relationship between religion and science—they operate independently of each other and the former is invoked only when all efforts of the latter are exhausted. While the majority of the world's people have rituals and ceremonies to connect this world with other worlds and thereby solve many of life's problems, we in the west are left with little recourse when science fails us. Hence all our efforts to reduce the pain of an increasingly sick society for which science cannot provide a panacea leave us with increased stress and a sense of hopelessness. The media report it, as is their duty, but little happens to improve the long term effects of the slippery slide into despair. Governments seek to enact laws that will control individual volition to the stagnation of those who hold to the laws and the liberation of those who ignore them. Justice is not the issue in modern courts, only the letter of the law.

Our cosmology suggests that until things are desperate we cannot bring God in; only when rationalistic efforts have been exhausted can we turn to religious solutions. So we continue to put our hope in economic, social and political solutions, all the while ignoring the religious solutions which God waits for us to implement. Many Christians in this dilemma multiply their efforts to find natural solutions while giving lip service to biblical values. Yet the plausibility of their cultural expectations leads them to ignore the creeds they espouse. These creeds assume the eternal nature of God who created the world and everything in it who is the first and the last, the sustainer, the saviour, the source of power applicable for daily living. We, however, do not really believe it or at least do not act on what we believe.

Many in modern cultural contexts have determined that the rationalistic stance is not working and cannot provide the answers to spanning the 'middle zone'. They are turning to eastern religions for fulfilment of personal self-worth. In some places the current boom in building temples and mosques is the 'salvation' for depressed economies. The essence of the New Age movement is to create an awareness of the value of the individual. Such beliefs feed on modern assumptions as people seek to determine their identity. In contrast to the prevailing world view, increasing numbers of people are seeking to identify the life force that brought them into being. By so doing they attempt to connect with a reality not explained by the merely materialistic, natural world. In this view, each person's reality is different from that of any other, thereby reinforcing modern relativism on the one hand but establishing contact with a life-giving force on the other. May the force be with them; it may be all they have. The emphasis in these New Age-type movements remains on the ritual. It is on what individuals can do to create personal salvation.

Despite maintaining the validity of Scripture, few modern Christians believe most of what is in the Bible because it represents a cosmological view (emerging from a Hebrew or Greek perspective) that is contrary to their own. Most believe that 'God helps those who help themselves' is a quotation from the Bible. Their focus is on what they can do before being forced to turn to God as a last resort rather than determining what God has already done and accepting it by faith, not works. These folk religious beliefs reflect the prevailing culture and impact Christians as much as non-Christians. How then can we as Christians depart from our culturally informed world view and introduce God's view in order to lead our society out of the mess? The answer demands that we take a new look at what God has already said and implement it to fit into the prevailing cultural shift.

## **THE WAY OUT OF THE MESS**

We must recognize afresh that Scripture is a demonstration of God in the human context. This is true of his word—what he said through human authors about the contexts into

which he entered. He did this further in the incarnation where he became embodied as an actual human being in an actual culture. This necessitates that we seek for solutions to ‘the mess’ by appropriating both biblical perspectives (from above) and cultural understanding (from below). The solution to our modern problem is not reversing the focus of rationalism, that would only take us back to the pharisaical focus on the heavenly to the exclusion of the earthly, an approach that greatly frustrated Jesus. Rather, we need a ‘supra-cultural’ perspective that incorporates God on the one hand and his creation on the other. The apostle John does this admirably in his writings.

### **A biblical attempt to span the middle zone**

In his gospel the apostle John deals with both the word and the flesh in order to contrast neatly Hebrew and Greek world views. The first five verses of John closely parallel the first five verses of Genesis. As a Bible translator I have an image of John examining a copy of the Hebrew Torah as he penned his famous prologue in Greek. First listen to John and then note how he paralleled Moses.

*Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to human-kind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out ([John 1:1-5](#))<sup>8</sup>.*

This, to a degree, fills in the prior knowledge of what was before creation. The Hebrews were willing to accept that God created, but the Greeks wanted to know the rationale behind the creation. John tells them that God was there and his Word provided the reason behind reality. In other words, through Christ everything that is came into being—a point the apostle Paul makes so well in [Colossians 1:15-20](#)—God, through Christ, served as the creator and everything else is the created, both the seen and the unseen (see [Figure 1](#)). Now note the parallel structure of the first five verses of Genesis where the emphasis is on the word and importance of light—God’s first creative act.

*In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the water. Then, God commanded, ‘Let there be light’—and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness, and he named the light ‘Day’ and the darkness ‘Night’. Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day ([Genesis 1:1-5](#)).*

Notice that whereas John metaphorically uses the concept of light to describe who Jesus was ([John 1:9](#)), Moses speaks of light in the literal sense. In both cases God spoke and light happened, one to see by, the other to live by. By presenting Jesus as ‘the light’ John connects the physical Jesus with the first act of creation—God spoke and there was light, while Jesus, the light of the world, spoke and drove away the darkness. In Genesis, nothing could happen without God’s word. Jesus was that Word and the first thing he spoke was light. Similarly without Jesus there is only despair and hopelessness in the human condition. John describes that condition in chapter [3:19-21](#):

*The light has come into the world, but people love darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil. Anyone who does evil things hates the light and will not come to the light,*

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<sup>8</sup> All biblical quotations are taken from *Today’s English Version* published by the United Bible Societies.



*because he does not want his evil deeds to be shown up. But whoever does what is true comes to the light in order that the light may show that what he did was in obedience to God.*

Despite the religious context of his day, with the temple, sacrifices, feast days, and a recognition of the importance of religious practitioners, Jesus judged them: The above passage is prefaced by the statement, 'This is how the judgment works'. John was trying to show that despite their religiosity, the society was operating in the dark. Later John contrasts light and heavenly truth with darkness and earthly falsehood ([8:31](#)).

As John used darkness to characterize the society in which Jesus lived, so we continue today to emphasize what we can do in the natural realm rather than place our trust in the power and glory of Christ in the realm beyond the natural where light rules. If Jesus were to come into our context I think he would castigate our over-emphasis on the natural even as he spurned Israel's focus on the supernatural.

Through his writing John is showing human beings that both the supernatural and the natural realms are necessary and dependent upon each other. By using the incarnation principle (God with us) John patronizes the Greek world view of an unseen versus a seen world. Through Jesus the unseen was made plain—a theme that permeates the gospel. Jesus, John maintains, came to span the gulf between the two realms and be both God and human at the same time. As John expresses so well, 'We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son' ([John 1:14b](#)) but that was possible only because 'the Word became a human being and . . . lived among us' ([John 1:14a](#)). John brings this all together in the introduction to his epistle:

*We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it . . . What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ . . . Now the message that we have heard from his Son and announce is this: God is light, and there is no darkness at all in him ([1 John 1:1, 3, 5](#)).*

He continues the theme of light established in the gospel, and argues that believers live in the light of Christ. If they accept his sacrifice he will forgive them of every sin (manifest as darkness that comes from the earthly context) and cleanse them by implementing truth (which comes from the light of the heavenly context). John maintains that for us to have fellowship with God we must interact with Jesus. Jesus, then, becomes the means of spanning the chasm because he is the only one who is both fully God and fully human. He is the only one who can mediate between the two realms ([1 Tim. 2:5](#)). Religion in the world today is an attempt to replace Christ with other ways to bridge the gap. From God's perspective, then (his world view if you will), our human, culture-bound, word view is out of balance with his. It is this perspective of culture, which needs to be transformed, that now draws our attention.

### **The need to transform culture**

Not only must we appreciate the biblical perspective from above, but also the cultural context from below. Lengthy is the literature detailing the relationship between God and culture.<sup>9</sup> As people who share culture we use this knowledge to our daily advantage without thinking about it. Societies around the world group their behaviour into the guiding principles of three archetypical behaviour modes: group-oriented consensus and

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<sup>9</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), and Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979). See also Sherwood Lingenfelter's excellent discussion in *Transforming Culture* (Baker, 1992).



corporate lifestyles, hierarchical structures which emphasize ascribed status and family orientation and those that emphasize an individualistic alignment regularized by personal accomplishment and control. Elsewhere<sup>10</sup> I have called these Kinship, Peasant, and Industrial culture types. People living in each type have radically different ways of perceiving the world, impacted by their focus on groupness, structure, or individuality. While, obviously over-reductionistic, such categorization helps us talk about the involvement of people in each type of society and the implications of Christ entering into such cultural contexts.

The shift in culture type noted in the introduction to this paper is a product of increased interaction between the types through increasing globalization. There are few isolated people today and the success of each culturally identified group depends on effective interaction with those around them. Thus an increased awareness of interdependence and common cause characterizes the shift to a 'post-industrial' or 'post-modern' culture type which incorporates elements of the other three types. There are many positive and negative aspects to this shift, even as there are strong advantages and disadvantages to living in any cultural context. The issue is not a dichotomous right or wrong, good or bad, but rather a recognition of what is and the fact that, despite being different, cultures serve to enable people to live their lives in conjunction with an established set of principles. It is to this issue of cultural adequacy that I address my remarks.

We in the industrialized west have seen our culture as superior because it enabled us, in a way never before possible, to live anywhere and do almost anything (including going to the moon). We took our technology with us and reduplicated a comfortable lifestyle based on our cultural standards wherever we went. The history of colonialism is the tale of how the world was impacted by this set of assumptions. In the doing, many others (living in ways that adequately reflected their time and place) saw apparent success and began to buy into assumptions learned from the bearers of a very different world view. Sadly this has resulted in considerable cultural disorientation and much increased stress. This has been manifest not only in material culture but in the area of beliefs and values as well. If medicine can take care of physical problems perhaps the need for maintaining contact with the spiritual realm which controls issues of health and welfare may not be as crucial as traditional societies once assumed. Hence there has been an increasing secularization as western civilization has spread.

Yet, despite a knowledge of science and the use of technology to solve problems, there is increasing stress as people live their lives, whatever the cultural context. The impact of increasing urbanism, global economics, scientific breakthroughs and the digitization of communication results in new ways of interacting. It is producing a new culture type that requires new ways to understand the relationship between the natural and the supernatural realms. In fact, a new epistemology is being formed, one that will impact all human beings as they interact in our changing world.

Understanding biblical truth in such a cultural context is the challenge for missions as well as for local churches as we approach the 21st century. It is a challenge we must take up as we seek to reduce stress on the one hand and revitalize the world to a greater understanding of God's place in the human context on the other. I do not wish to imply that so-called 'post-modernity' will produce the revitalization Wallace indicates is a natural part of reducing cultural stress. Rather, as Wallace also notes, the very establishment of what he calls a 'new steady state' implies the cycle will begin anew and

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<sup>10</sup> R. Daniel Shaw, *Transculturation* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1988).

soon repeat itself. Each wave of change, as Toffler points out in his trilogy,<sup>11</sup> is considerably shorter than the one before. (Agriculture lasted the longest, industry has served us well since the mid 18th century and we can anticipate that the technological age, implemented by a rapid expansion and availability of information, will be considerably shorter.)

How then, can we, empowered by the Holy Spirit, reduce the stress of the world we live in and enable a dark world to perceive the light? To do so we must follow John's example and understand the relationship between the God of the universe and God in the universe. We must seek to provide the whole gospel to the whole world, for if the 'post-modernists' are right, what affects one impacts all—we live in an increasingly interdependent world. Our search for salvation in this post-modern world must reflect such wholeness. We must, however, avoid seeing post-modernity as the salvation (many, as noted earlier, are in danger of doing this) and seek rather to interject the creator into this new context. In short we must seek a transformation of culture through an implementation of the incarnational approach to this new cycle. As others throughout history have followed this principle in previous cycles so must we. This brings us to the role of the church in society.

## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

As the body of Christ in the world, the church must begin by interpreting Scripture in light of the new culture type. What is a post-modern gospel? Or, more correctly, how must the gospel be presented in a post-modern context? Given the characteristics of holism and interdependence, I see a turning to issues that are more reflective of the Bible than was often the case in the industrial (modern) context. Perhaps this is the time to do all we can to reduce the gulf between the material and non-material world, to narrow the gap between natural and supernatural. The church needs to strive for an understanding of a whole gospel. As God entered cosmic history through creation and the provision of redemption, so the church must seek to present a gospel that connects our present understanding of reality to God's cosmic reality. As God entered human history not just through the Word and the incarnation but also through providing guidance, healing (to body and soul) and equipping for the life that is to come, so the church must demonstrate how God can provide practical solutions to the problems of today. The church needs to be seen as actively reducing the stress people feel as they live their lives in a time and place. As God created and sustains natural history, so the church must increasingly have answers for the phenomena which impact our lives today—the natural and social disasters with which we began this discussion.

The church, in consultation with the Word, needs to begin developing a theology that departs from the modern world and addresses the post-modern. It needs to strive for a belief system that fills the middle zone with God's power on the one hand and the marvels of scientism and high-tech solutions on the other—a combination of the Holy Spirit and science. Contrary to the rationalistic approach of modernity these need not be mutually exclusive. We should depart from the dichotomistic world view so much a part of the culture we have known if we are to fit into the cultural milieu of a post-modern world.

The church must avoid a separation on evangelism to the exclusion of relating to human misery—both need to be part of ministry. God works through both nature and super-nature. Evil is not manifest only in human departures from cultural mores, it can

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<sup>11</sup> Alvin Toffler's trilogy (*Future Shock*—1970, *The Third Wave*—1980, and *Power Shift*—1990, New York: William Morrow & Co) explicated the impact of the post-modern shift as it relates to western societies.

also be a product of demonic intervention. A change in culture type does not put the devil to rest; in fact, he may be more active than ever as an eclectic world view recombines the realms which modernity sought to separate. Perhaps the recent interest in 'power ministries' within the church is a product of the shift to a post-modern paradigm.

As Christians become aware of spiritual forces (both good and evil), they must avoid replacing the modern, rationalistic perspective with a new magic based on ritual rather than faith. Because we in the west have tended (as a product of our culture) to be action oriented, we emphasize (as noted earlier) 'doing'. This may result in our entering into confrontation with spiritual forces rather than allowing God to wage the battle on our behalf. Our old 'take charge' approach from the individualist model now affects our behaviour as we develop a more holistic view of the spiritual forces that impact our lives. Perhaps we have much to learn from those in kinship or peasant contexts that are less dichotomistic and therefore more aware of and involved with supernatural power. An analysis of the way Jesus approached these issues in his cultural context may not be helpful as we seek to implement a Christ-likeness in the new post-modern situation. The attitude of Christ must be in us ([Phil. 2:5-11](#)) but the manifestations of that attitude will vary radically from one culture type to another. Hence his operative stance in the peasant context of 1st century Palestine was very different from what is required in 21st century post-modernity. We dare not legalistically apply his 'methods' to our own conditions.

The propensity for manipulating God for the benefit of individual prosperity, success, and even healing that has prevailed in modern Christianity still affects behaviour as we are in transition to a post-modern perspective. These benefits of relationship to God must be seen as his blessing upon those in whom he delights because of their faith, not as redemption itself.

The church, as always, must guard against heresy. There is a great need to recognize God's Word as the sole source of faith and practice and allow it to critique our every activity. At the same time, because of the variety of cultural manifestations around the world (and these will continue despite the change to a more post-modern perspective), we, as members of Christ's body, must be sensitive to differences in world view that impact religious behaviour patterns, not to mention styles of worship, and wide manifestations of ways to appropriate God to living in the human condition. Cultural differences will result in a wide variety of cultural expressions of Christianity. Such diversity should be welcomed as expressions of the creative image of God, not avoided or viewed as syncretism.

Finally, in this post-modern view, the church must focus on faith and recognize that the emphasis must be on how faith is manifest to impact the lives of others rather than on phenomenological tests. The focus must be on what God has done (on his redemptive act through Jesus Christ and a recognition of the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives), not on what we do. Faith, not works (the creator, not the created) is the prior question. Once that is settled, manifestations in a post-modern world will incorporate a holistic concern for people in every aspect of their lives. Jesus fits the whole, not just some of the parts that cannot be explained by science.

Thus the church, like the culture it seeks to influence, must become post-modern. People today are seeking meaningful, enlightened answers and increasingly these answers should imply supernatural influence. In this sense, people are asking religious questions which in many cases the church cannot answer because it has not made the paradigm shift from a modern to a post-modern world view. I often hear what I consider rationalistic answers to supernaturalistic questions. As the people of the world make this shift, so must the church or it will be quickly left behind and considered out of date and irrelevant. Recent adjustments in the area of spiritual power are a step in the right

direction and a sign that the church can assist society as it seeks to move beyond a highly dichotomistic and segmented response to holistic spiritual influence.

Increasingly the church, in order to relate to an interdependent world, must become interactive and relational in its approach to what Christianity means within a society. Increasingly the focus needs to be on God in relationship with human beings and human beings in relationship with other human beings, both within a social context, and across societies to a plurality of interactive behavioural patterns. The church needs to emphasize its relationship to God through Christ, not religion per se. It must be increasingly global (focusing on human need in general, as well as its manifestations in specific contexts). The concerns of the people are by definition concerns of the church. The church must also be inter-relational (communicating the gospel through life not just words) and through it all following John's approach to be light in dark places. In short, the church needs to develop an approach that connects this present reality with God's reality, the natural with the supernatural. It must fill the middle zone.

All this is an attempt to answer the religious quest of the human soul as my original assignment suggested. The church must perceive real need and connect with people at the point of need, not supply esoteric answers that sound scholarly or sophisticated but do not connect with real people in a real and needy world.

## CONCLUSION

Human beings, created in the image of God, but now living in a fallen state, will always search for salvation. That salvation has been provided for them (and the whole creation) through Jesus Christ. The shift to a new culture type does not change the human condition, merely the way it is manifest in daily living. It is in relationship (wholeness, harmony, unity—to use post-modern concepts) with Christ that we realize salvation—relevant and necessary now as well as in the future, as Christ noted when he taught his disciples to pray ([Mat. 6:9–13](#)). The post-modern search for salvation is realized in Christ who is the head of the church. Therefore the church has the job of fulfilling Christ's role in the world. It must manifest him in relevant ways within particular contexts. In short, it must incarnate.

Jesus said that he came in order to give life—life in all its fullness ([John 10:10](#)). People cannot live full satisfying lives outside their cultural context. The church must take up the task of enabling people to fulfil their cultural expectations and live as their society was designed to enable people to live. How might Aristotle's virtues, so lacking today, be manifest in a new post-modern way? Like Scripture, these virtues seem somehow pan-human, above and beyond mere cultural consideration. But how they are implemented in various contexts is culture specific and will impact the way others in that societal complex perceive those who exhibit them.

The church (including all who make up its membership as the body of Christ on earth) has the responsibility to assist people in their search for salvation. This can happen only as Jesus enters into relationship with people and the light of his glorious gospel shines on their dark souls. Whatever the cultural context or how this relationship is manifest, Christ must always be at the end of the search. As he did in Palestine long ago, however, he (through his ambassadors) will apply the incarnational principle to revelation. As Dr Clyde Vautier sought to understand what God revealed through his Word, so we must translate that Word into the reality of life. Through our lives, lived commensurate with the issues society dictates as being important, we must seek to bring an end to the search for salvation. The good news is that as we enter into relationship with him, we cease our searching and recognize that we, like the lost sheep, have been found ([Lk. 15:3–7](#)). Our searching, our striving, for God is over. How that understanding in a post-modern context

is manifest, however, must, be continually revised. Salvation should be recognized as a dynamic process within a particular context ([Philp. 2:12, 13](#)). As people appropriate God's Word in their own lives, they can encourage others to accept the salvation God has offered through Jesus Christ, the light of the world and the end of the post-modern search.

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# **The Relationship Between Development and Religion**

**William van Geest**

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(abridged)*

This paper was given at a workshop on Churches and Development held April, 1997 in Toronto, Canada and sponsored by the Strategy and Christian Mission agency of World Vision International. It gives a good analysis of the theological and practical issues faced by churches, missions and development agencies in development programmes among poorer communities and the relationship of evangelism and church planting to them. It earths the issues of Christ, modernity and post-modernity for millions of people who struggle daily to survive. The four models outlined challenge evangelical agencies to critique their own mission statement and practice. Excerpts from the round table discussion at the workshop follow on from the paper. Editor

## **THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

What is the nature of the relationship between development and other religious activities, such as evangelism and church development? Can religious activities be separated from development? How compatible are they in practice? Does the implementation of one enhance or hinder the effectiveness of the other? What models of this relationship are most likely to result in effective development?

The key purpose of this paper is to promote discussion by offering definitions on various concepts in the relationship between development and other religious activities, and by identifying alternative models of the relationship.

Two contexts relevant to the topic should be noted before proceeding.

1. The ongoing impact of western colonialism and the beliefs that motivated it. The western cultural tradition (essentially, the indigenous European tradition), including its Christian components, has become a focus of considerable criticism and even embarrassment over against non-western traditions. Fear of repeating past mistakes haunts the relationship between development and activities such as