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unity be subverted by the importation of adversarial processes or thin culture-forming practices. As such it is an enormous challenge for the people of God to truly practise being the people of God—both gathered and scattered.

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Prospects for an 'Evangelical Political Philosophy'

Jonathan Chaplin

Keywords: Democracy, government, ideology, community, egalitarian, history, justice, love, power, human nature, distribution, liberation

INTRODUCTION

The leading American social activist and theologian Ronald Sider has been foremost among those urging politically engaged evangelicals to develop an integrated framework of political thought to guide their political interventions. Commenting on the explosion of evangelical political action during the last two decades, what he reports of American evangelicals probably also applies in many other regional contexts:

> Evangelical political impact today is weakened because our voices are confused, contradictory, and superficial. We contradict each other. Our agendas are shaped more by secular ideologies than divine revelation. We have no systematic foundational framework for careful dialogue about our specific policy differences or even for successful repudiation of extremists.... Evangelicals urgently need a political philosophy. It would not solve all our political problems. But it would help.[1]

Although I would not construe the primary purpose of an evangelical political philosophy as the creation of evangelical political *unity* (desirable though that is), I think Sider's judgement is essentially accurate. The incoherence and indeed disarray of American evangelical political thought, first documented by Robert Booth Fowler in 1982,[2] was just as evident by the end of the decade, as illustrated by James Skillen's

[1] 'Towards an evangelical political philosophy and agenda for Christians in the United States', *Transformation* 14/3 (1997), pp. 1–10.

[2] *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought 1966–1976* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

broader analysis of *The Scattered Voice: Christians at Odds in the Public Square.*[3] And at century's end there was little evidence that this situation was set to change significantly in the near future.[4]

Acquiring a political philosophy would not—and should not—be the most decisive factor in determining the shape and direction of evangelical political action, but it would certainly help provide a valuable source of orientation, or at least a framework for more constructive debate about what that orientation should be. In this article I want to probe further into what the requirements and contours of such a political philosophy might look like. I will do this by engaging critically with one of the most substantial attempts so far to produce one on the basis of a recognizable evangelical methodology—i.e., one in which biblically-derived principles play the leading role—namely Stephen Mott's book *A Christian Perspective on Political Thought*.[5] This work illustrates the dynamic potentials of such a methodology but also reveals some of its limitations. But first let me briefly consider Sider's own proposal.

I THE NATURE OF THE ENTERPRISE: SIDER'S PROPOSAL

Sider rightly warns that guidelines for evangelical political engagement do not emerge unproblematically from an analysis of biblical material about politics, and he is fully aware of the complexity, difficulty, and precariousness of the task of generating them. Such guidelines require, he suggests, four components:[6] first, a 'biblical normative framework' based on a 'comprehensive summary of all relevant canonical material', including both the overall biblical story and specific themes such as justice, work, or dignity; second, a 'broad study of society and the world', drawing widely upon historical and social-scientific analyses; third, a 'political philosophy', namely 'a road map, a handy guide' through all relevant material, and which should emerge from and be controlled by the first two components and not adopted uncritically from non-Christian sources; and finally, 'detailed social analysis on specific issues' (e.g. an economic analysis of the effects of raising the minimum wage). In the article cited, Sider presents outlines of the first and third. He also appends concrete suggestions for a political agenda for the U.S., on which I shall not comment. I will, however, remark later on the general relationship between biblical-theological material and the use of the social sciences.

His 'normative framework' is rooted in the biblical drama of creation, sin, redemption in Jesus Christ and final restoration, which, he rightly suggests, should shape our understanding of key biblical-theological themes including human dignity, freedom of belief, the family, justice, concern for the poor, work, peacemaking, and individuality and community.[7] The components of the political philosophy which Sider sees as emerging—in interaction with the 'broad study of society and the world'—from this framework are

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[3] Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990. I am not, of course, suggesting that American evangelicals are fully representative of the diversity of the global movement, but they are the most influential politically.

[4] A major research project based at the Oxford Centre for Misson Studies (UK) and at the Ethics and Public Policy Center (Washington, D.C.) on evangelical political action in developing countries, sponsored by the International Fellowship of Mission Theologians (INFEMIT), may, however, throw up some encouraging counter-examples.

[5] New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

[6] 'Towards an evangelical political philosophy', pp. 2–3.

[7] Ibid., pp. 4–5. Elsewhere, of course, Sider has produced valuable and extensive statements of such a biblical framework for social and political engagement.

as follows:[8] democratization and decentralization of political power; a democratic political order; the institutions of civil society; decentralized private ownership and a market economy; full religious freedom; human rights; the family; ecological responsibility; the role of government as restraining evil and promoting the common good; protection for work and workers; the priority of the poor; a consistent ethic of life; and a commitment to peacemaking.

I agree with most of what Sider recommends here, though I would want to supplement it with other components (and no doubt some evangelicals would find more to object to than I have). As a provisional attempt at a summary of a balanced, biblical political orientation, it serves as a valuable and helpful starting-point.[9] But it is misleading to describe it as the outline of a 'political philosophy'. If this term is to be used in anything like its conventional sense, a political philosophy is not a 'handy guide', nor even 'a helpful tool for navigating complex political decisions'.[10]

If a political philosophy was *no* help in the process of reaching political decisions it would, in my view, be redundant, but its primary purpose should be seen, not as shaping policy but rather as *deepening understanding*, forming the mindset with which we approach the political arena and providing a set of coherent principles with which we order our objectives and approach policy-making. Sider's seemingly instrumentalist conception of political philosophy reflects, perhaps, the continuing influence of a characterictically evangelical activism which underestimates the scope and purpose of the enterprise.[11] Nor, apart from a brief tribute paid to Catholic political thought, does he acknowledge that an indispensable element in the development of a Christian political philosophy must be a critical appropriation of the two millenia-long legacy of previous attempts to do so.

Sider's list of key components of a political philosophy in fact turns out to consist of an *ad hoc* selection of middle-range political principles plus an endorsement of some desirable institutions or political objectives, lacking any unifying philosophical or theological theme which might enable us to discern any coherence in the theoretical framework he proposes. There is, however, one leading candidate for such a theme in his list, namely 'the role of government'. This, I believe, gets us closer to the core of what a political philosophy is about, and I return to it later.

Sider's laudable objective of producing a political philosophy shaped by biblical revelation and capable of informing contemporary Christian political action is shared by Stephen Mott, whose *A Christian Perspective on Political Thought* (henceforth CPPT) is one of the fullest attempts by a thinker proceeding from an evangelical methodology to rise to the kind of challenge issued in Sider's article.[12] What happens, then, when that challenge is taken up? My argument will be that, while Mott's work goes a long way towards responding to Sider's call and represents a major advance on most earlier evangelical

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[8] Ibid., pp. 5–7.

[9] Compare a shorter summary to which selected British evangelical political thinkers were invited to respond some years ago: Jonathan Chaplin, ed, *Politics and the Parties* (When Christian Disagree) (Leicester: IVP, 1992).

[10] Sider, 'Towards an evangelical political philosophy', p. 5.

[11] Sider writes: 'It is simply impossible, every time one wants to make a political decision, to spend days (actually years) reviewing the mountains of relevant biblical material and complex studies of society. We need a framework, a handy guide—in short, a political philosophy' (op cit., p. 3).

[12] Since Mott's book was published four years prior to Sider's article, it is puzzling why Sider makes no mention of it. One would have expected him to cite it as a primary example of what he was urging.

treatments, it too is vitiated by an inadequate understanding of the constitutive requirements of a Christian political philosophy, and by a neglect of systematic reflection on the nature and purpose of the state and the scope and limits of its competence in distinction to those of other social institutions.[13]

In so arguing I will, of course, reflect the influence of particular strands of Christian political philosophy, but this, I suggest, is an inevitable element of any attempt to take up the tasks just noted. An '*evangelical* political philosophy' can never be *just* that, never merely a freestanding distillation of the fruits of biblical study dissociated from existing traditions of Christian political theorizing.

II AN EVANGELICAL POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: MOTT'S CONTRIBUTION

Part I of CPPT ('Focusing Theologically') presents the substance of a Christian political philosophy, while Part II ('Observing the Visions') employs this in critical dialogue with, respectively, traditional conservatism, liberalism, democracy, laissez-faire conservatism, Marxism, Socialism and Fascism. I concentrate on the first part, referring to the second part mainly to clarify or elaborate on Mott's systematic conceptions.

Mott seeks to ground his substantive political theory as far as possible in biblical analysis, employing a 'dialogical' hermeneutic in which Scripture interacts with experience and reason under the guidance of the Spirit.[14] However, in addition to Scripture, he utilizes the thought of leading members of the 'Christian socialist realists' writing in the 1930s and 1940s (especially Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Eduard Heimann). He also draws frequently on the American social ethicist James Luther Adams, on various liberation theologians, and on the democratic ideas of the American Puritans. This exercise in appropriating the work of earlier Christian political thinkers is commendable, though it completely bypasses most of the major classical (medieval and Reformation) and modern Christian political philosophers.

Mott uses various terms to denote his enterprise: a 'Christian political theory'; a Christian 'social and political philosophy'; a 'theological' approach to politics; a 'political theology'; a 'Christian political ethics'; and others. A standardization of this terminology would be salutary, not primarily for reasons of linguistic tidiness but because disciplinary appellations disclose what one is really about. Is Christian political philosophy really just an application of the fruits of biblical exegesis; a branch of theological ethics; a department of systematic theology? Where it is treated as any of these its relevance to students (and practitioners) of politics dealing with issues like electoral behaviour, constitutional change, party systems, democratization, citizenship, welfare policy, and so on, is limited.

Mott's *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (henceforth BESC)[15], as a work of theological ethics, is certainly valuable as a theological prolegomena for Christian political philosophy, but only a work like CPPT is of direct assistance. This is because the object of that enterprise does not stop at reflection on the Bible or on theology, but moves on to reflection on *political reality* in the light of biblical and theological insights.

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[13] Some passages in what follows draw on my review of CPPT in *The European Journal of Theology* V/1 (1996), pp. 71–73.

[14] CPPT, p. 7. I shall not directly discuss his hermeneutical method nor his biblical exegesis, but I comment later on problems in his employment of the social sciences, included under the 'reason' component of this hermeneutic.

[15] New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Mott's use of the term 'theology' is itself ambiguous. He claims that 'politics is about theology', meaning that politics necessarily betrays an 'orientation to reality, nature and human existence'. 'As this orientation is grounded in religious belief, it expresses theology.'[16] His focus would be clarified if he were to distinguish between 'religion' as a fundamental phenomenon of human experience, 'religious studies' as reflection on that phenomenon, and 'theology' as reflection on revelation. We could then certainly say that 'politics expresses religion', and also that theology has something to say about politics.

He also employs the term 'ideology', though without making explicit its relationship to these other terms. He uses it in the descriptive sense to refer to a comprehensive framework of beliefs about society, or a social 'vision', rather than in the critical (Marxist or Mannheimian) sense to refer to the distortion of social reality in the interests of the powerful.

I prefer the term 'Christian political philosophy' (or 'theory') for Mott's enterprise. His own definition is again ambiguous, however: Christian political theory 'clarifies the values of the common life and the range of legitimate alternatives in approaching them'; it contains 'criteria that Christians should use in evaluating political theory'.[17] The implication is that it is merely a framework of ethical values by which 'secular' political theories might be critically assessed, rather than an alternative political theory with a distinctive content; a filter rather than a substance. Indeed, Part II reinforces this appearance, where Mott outlines in some detail the content of alternative ideologies, and then offers selective evaluative comments on certain aspects of them. However, what he elaborates in Part I indeed begins to resemble a political theory with a distinctive substance, rather than a mere filter; this is what makes the book interesting.

Merely to stipulate that, whatever the political philosophy we adopt, it must be compatible with a series of Christian ethical principles not themselves of a distinctively political character (such as love, equality, community, etc), is of limited help to someone wrestling with the concrete particulars of politics. What such a person needs is not general principles of ethics, but institutionally particularized principles, principles of *political* ethics, concerning the nature, source and limits of political authority, the legitimacy of democracy, the purpose of the state, the nature of law, justice and rights, the political implications of liberty, equality, property, welfare, class and so forth. Mott goes some way towards providing these, but his apparatus of political concepts is insufficiently developed, making for ambiguity or lacunae at certain points, and for an uncritical appropriation of elements of secular ideologies at others, as I shall now try to indicate.

Mott's substantive argument is unfolded in terms of the successive themes of power, human nature, social groups, government, justice, love and time. However, to disclose the structure of his thought more clearly, I have opted to rearrange his themes as follows: first, human nature and history (chs. 2 and 7); second, love and justice (chs. 5 and 6); third, society (chs. 3 and 1); and fourth, justice and government (chs. 4 and 5).

HUMAN NATURE AND HISTORY

Mott distributes his discussion of the most fundamental themes of biblical faith across chapters 2 and 7, obscuring somewhat their foundational status and their intimate connections. Nonetheless, the account of those themes is a convincing one: the core of the biblical narrative tells of our creation in the image of God, our fall into sin with all its

[16] CPPT, pp. 4–5.

[17] CPPT, p. 7.

ramifying consequences for personal and social life, and the present reality and future hope of our redemption in Christ. The inextricable mixture of good and evil in human nature (ch. 2) must condition our political aspirations. Government is inherent to human community as created by God, though since in a fallen world it also deals with human sin, we may say that government 'is a necessary extension of our nature as beings with responsibility under God for creation and as beings who are sinners'.[18]

Following Niebuhr, Mott remarks that a Christian politics must be 'realist' both in the sense that it should do all it can to unlock the human potential for good, and in the sense that it should vigilantly sustain safeguards against the excesses of personal and social sin. Politics cannot remove the propensity for human evil—conversion remains permanently necessary; and sin also makes politics permanently necessary, for unchecked by politics, sin will run amok and the weak will be consumed by the powerful. The same biblical realism informs Mott's eschatological perspective, his 'politics of time' (ch 7).

We must be realistic both about the limitations placed on human political aspirations by the ineradicability of our sin,[19] but equally about the action of God in breaking into our fallen history and opening up new possibilities of social transformation. A biblical perspective must hold past, present and future together: 'The Reign of God is the new and updated force in history which makes the injustices and exploitations inherited from the past outdated as remnants of a past which is already being destroyed'[20].

I agree that such an eschatological perspective reliably grounds the meaningfulness of political struggle, though in my view Mott needs to state more explicitly here that the creational origin of politics is more fundamental than the additional remedial functions it acquires on account of sin. Yet it may be noted that this perspective has no privileged association with political activity, as Mott at times implies: God's reign is not only personal but also public, not only psychological but also political. 'If history is meaningful, then politics is meaningful.'[21] History, however, encloses *every* potentiality of created reality—political, social, intellectual, artistic, emotional—and God's historical salvation also embraces all of these, so we should avoid implying, as some early liberation theologians were wont to do, that a biblical eschatology privileges the politically active as some kind of missiological vanguard.

LOVE AND JUSTICE

In characterizing the relationship between love and justice, Mott rejects a two-kingdom model in which a gospel ethic of love is seen as operative in a realm separate from an ethically less-demanding realm of justice. Rather, justice is the necessary social outworking of love. Yet while love is self-giving, justice 'does not give; rather, it fulfills claims and rights'.[22] Justice is necessary where claims require adjudication, as is the case

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[18] CPPT, p. 58.

[19] Classical liberalism's faith in the inevitability of historical progress on the basis of rational control of nature fails to come to terms with this (CPPT, p. 140ff). For comments on Marxism's vulnerability to Enlightenment historical optimism, cf. CPPT, pp. 194–6.

[20] CPPT, p. 109. The reverence of Conservatism for historical tradition prevents it from allowing the future to criticize the present (CPPT, p. 128). Rather we should 'retain as much continuity with the past as justice allows' (CPPT, p. 130).

[21] CPPT, p. 111.

[22] CPPT, p. 91.

in most social situations beyond the inter-personal: 'more than any other concept', Mott rightly proposes, justice 'provides the positive meaning of politics. It identifies what is most essential in life shared together in community and indicates the proper tasks of the government in supporting the common good'.[23]

Three conceptions of the meaning of justice are considered: the positivist conception of justice as conformity to law; the communitarian conception of justice as what is due by the laws of a particular society; and the naturalist conception of justice as natural right. Mott rather hastily rejects the first two, but suggests, rightly I think, that the third can be adapted to a biblical understanding—but unfortunately this suggestion is nowhere followed through.

Narrowing his account still further to distributive justice, he emphasizes that justice goes beyond procedural matters to substantive ends, and notes the association in modern thought between justice and equality. But these complex concepts are dealt with summarily and superficially, as I shall illustrate later on in relation to his treatment of the concept of equality. Yet in spite of this his account of biblical justice[24] is provocative, wide-ranging, and amply documented with biblical references. It can be summarised as follows:

i. Human justice is grounded in God's character and his acts of justice.

ii. Justice is not separate from, but overlaps with, 'righteousness' understood as 'right conduct'. Hence biblical injunctions to act 'righteously' often mean act 'justly'.

iii. Justice is understood in both OT and NT as a central duty for all God's people, indeed for all humanity and is closely linked with love.

iv. Justice is dynamic not static, more a call to action than a principle of evaluation: justice 'means taking upon oneself the cause of those who are weak in their own defense'.

v. Justice is more than mitigating the consequences of oppression, rather it delivers the oppressed from their situation by releasing them from their bonds.

vi. Justice displays a 'bias toward the weak', not in the sense that the weak should receive more than their just claims, but in the sense that 'in the raging social struggles in which the poor are perennially victims of injustice, God and the followers of God take up the cause of the weak'.[25]

vii. Justice is a restoration to full participation in the community.

viii. Justice provides an equality in basic needs.

ix. Justice implies both freedom rights (or negative, or civil, rights) and benefit rights (or positive, or economic, rights).

SOCIAL ORDER

Mott's opening chapter is a discussion of 'power'. This is not a helpful place to start. The biblical-theological themes considered above are more fundamental and would have been better starting-points. Earlier I noted Mott's claim that politics is 'about theology'. But politics, he says, is also 'about power'. 'The political process is the shaping, distribution,

[23] CPPT, p. 74.

[24] CPPT, pp. 79–87. This builds upon that in BESC, ch 4.

[25] Mott is right that God's favour for the poor does not imply that they should receive more than their due, but if so, then retaining the term 'bias' is misleading. Bias is something always to be avoided, as Scripture repeatedly makes clear precisely with respect to those in judicial roles (judges and kings). The primary point surely is not that God is on the side of the poor *per se* but that he is on the side of justice, and that simply means that he is on the side of those who are the victims of injustice (i.e. the biblical 'poor').

and exercise of power'.[26] This is offered as a 'sociological' definition of power. But the assertion that 'politics is about power' is of limited value; it means as much or as little as saying that it is 'about' economics, or status, or community, or action. Power is a universal dimension of social relationships and its use must be qualified by the structural context in view.

Political philosophy is indeed centrally concerned with power, its sources, nature, types and uses, but not just any type of power. *Political* power is power employed by *political* actors, whether individual citizens, interest groups, political parties, or government agencies. Mott uses the term in an undifferentiated sense to refer to numerous kinds of social power in diverse contexts, even though what is true of one kind of power is not necessarily true of others. This leads him to advance the fundamental claim that 'the structure of unequal power leads to exploitation'.[27]

This assertion is clearly false if we are referring to the context of the family, where unequal power is a precondition for successful parenting. But it is also false if applied to the state. Mott cites OT texts (such as the 'Jubilee' provisions in Leviticus 25) which support a broadly equal distribution of productive resources across extended families, but it does not follow that *political power* can or should be distributed on an equal basis.[28] Political authorities necessarily and rightly hold superior political power, commensurate with the distinctive political rights and responsibilities arising from the very office of government. The problematic assertion that 'the structure of unequal power leads to exploitation' turns out to be a central assumption throughout the whole book. The coming Kingdom of God will be an 'egalitarian age',[29] Mott asserts—but what that means politically today requires careful examination. I will suggest that his accounts of both justice and government are weakened by a misplaced egalitarianism.

It turns out that Mott has in mind especially power attaching to material resources and to social status. He rightly observes that these and other kinds of power frequently also give the holders varying degrees of political power, and exposing the actual distribution of effective political power is an indeed an essential task of a Christian political analysis. While it is necessary and legitimate that political authorities have superior power, it matters greatly in whose interests this political power is exercised. So he is right to emphasise that huge divergences in the possession of social and economic power almost invariably distort government policy in favour of the powerful.[30] And he is able to cite ample biblical warnings against such maldistributions of power.

Alongside a 'sociological' definition of power, Mott also introduces a 'theological' definition, power as a good gift of God in creation, 'the ability of a particular existent to act in accordance with its being'[31] (a definition indebted to Tillich). The link between the two, however, is not made clear, leaving entirely open the question of whether the latter might legitimately control the interpretation of the former, or indeed vice versa, or whether the two simply stand over against each other, dualistically, as quite separate

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[26] CPPT, p. 9.

[27] CPPT, p. 19.

[28] This is in fact acknowledged in BESC, p. 71.

[29] CPPT, p. 19.

[30] On this point, he rightly notes, classical liberalism and laissez-faire conservatism fail because their faith in the naturally self-regulating mechanisms of society blinds them to the distorting impact of unequal power (CPPT, pp. 139–141; 162 ff; 172).

[31] CPPT, p. 15.

sources of knowledge. Nonetheless, he helpfully clarifies what he means by a theological perspective by interpreting power in a creation-fall-redemption framework. Power is a creaturely gift. Citing the original mandate to 'subdue the earth' (Gen. 1:26–30), Mott states: 'Carrying out power faithfully is to share in one's human heritage and destiny received from God'; the purpose of power is to serve.[32] Like everything creaturely, however, power is fallen and is thus routinely misused at the expense of the vulnerable. But God acts with redemptive power to restore creaturely power to its proper use.

Further distinctions between 'defensive', 'exploitive' and 'intervening' power flesh out this illuminating perspective.[33] Creaturely power is a positive ability but it also has negative or 'defensive' features, since a creature's power of being is also a power to defend itself against that which would frustrate its being. This is especially important for those with little power, and Mott shows how the biblical 'poor' are often referred to as those with insufficient power to confront the 'exploitive power' of the oppressor. Sin has created 'conditions of destructive differentials' in resources, and defensive power is needed to rectify this. But defensive power will often not be enough, making 'intervening power' (or 'substitute defensive power') necessary to oppose exploitive power by redressing the power imbalance. 'Intervening power is creative as it re-establishes power of being by thwarting exploitive power.'[34]

It is necessary to note, again, that Mott's three kinds of power are not necessarily political in character. His own biblical examples of intervening power are indeed mainly cases of *political* authorities intervening to secure justice. But the same threefold distinction (and the same creation-fall-redemption framework) applies for *all* institutional contexts in which power is used. Thus, for instance, parental power is a certain power of being, can be exploitive when abused, and is also defensive and intervening when it protects children against harm. Mott's analysis needs a more complex classification of types of power, but to develop that he would require a broader theory of social institutions and the relationships between them.

Pointers towards such a theory are found in his chapter on 'social groups' (ch. 3).[35] Social groups are not simply instruments by which individuals pursue their ends. Rather, humans are created as social beings to live within a variety of diverse communities or associations, each answering to particular human needs and capacities, and providing contexts of personal and moral growth. Human nature comes to expression in a richly pluralistic society, one in which the independent character and purposes of multiple self-governing social groups should be protected against undue state control.

Multiple groups ensure a wide dispersal of power, initiative, and cultural influence, which help protect individuals against domination by any one of them. 'Secondary associations' in particular, such as lobby groups or producer and professional bodies, make possible independent criticism of society and thus provide 'social space for freedom.'[36] Groups are thus an important source of 'defensive power'.

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[32] CPPT, p. 22.

[33] CPPT, pp. 16–23.

[34] CPPT, p. 21.

[35] A group is 'a structure of individual relationships that has the capacity of engaging in joint action or having common interests' (CPPT, p. 42).

[36] CPPT, p. 47. The church as a group with a unique purpose must also defend its independence from any other group. But it must use this independence to equip its members to take up their other associational tasks. Too often it has fallen into an 'associational slumber', thus failing to use multiple groups as channels of Christian influence in society (CPPT, pp. 47–49)

Following Niebuhr, Mott argues that groups display the limitations as well as the possibilities of human nature. Groups not only enhance the creative potentials of individuals, they can also intensify their evil inclinations, especially larger groups such as nations. As a consequence, social change requires the transformation of the nature of groups as well as individuals, and pursuing justice will involve conflict and coercion, requiring strong government interventions. On the other hand, the capacity of the state alone to secure justice is limited. An effective strategy of social change must 'work through the matrix of group life'.[37]

This pluralistic model of society is both plausible and promising. The necessary next step, however, is a much fuller analysis of the identity and structure of diverse types of groups in terms of a normative account of the human needs or capacities or purposes they serve. For example, the manifestation of 'egoism' is very different in families compared to corporations or business. The ethical responsibility of parents to children is much more exclusive than that of states to members of the nation; in the former case a high degree of 'exclusivism' is essential, while in the latter it is pernicious.

The sense in which groups guarantee individual liberty differs greatly according to which group is in view. Families enhance liberty by nurturing the moral and affective inclinations of children, while trade unions do so by resisting corporate exploitation. Further, a fuller account of which groups are excessively dominating others is also required, and here the relationship between political and economic types of power needs to be critically elucidated. Today the leading players are multinational corporations and global financial institutions, yet neither receives significant attention in Mott's analysis.

JUSTICE AND GOVERNMENT

Mott rightly rejects the secular liberal concept of freedom as the leading motif of a Christian political philosophy. Rather the content of freedom must be determined by the requirements of justice.[38] He shows how justice in Scripture is more than a general principle of right conduct and more than merely formal or procedural; instead, it has substantive content which favours a distinctive form of social order (summarised above in points vi-ix). Distinguishing a variety of possible distributive criteria of social justice, he claims that the one most faithfully reflecting the biblical vision is 'distribution according to needs in community'.[39] He thus takes a definite and controversial position within a complex philosophical debate—as any interesting Christian political philosophy must. What are its further implications for a modern society?

Since basic needs are broadly equal between human beings, justice calls for an equal satisfaction of such needs. Denied such satisfaction, people are excluded from the human community, and so justice does not simply distribute a package of resources to a series of discreet individuals, but rather restores their full participation in the life of the community.[40] Mott's vision, then, is not 'collectivist' but 'communitarian'. His underlying model of society could be summed up in the term 'equal community'. The basic needs of members of the human community include physical life, political protection, political decision-making, social interchange and standing, economic production, education,

[37] CPPT, p. 56.

[38] CPPT, p. 143.

[39] CPPT, pp. 88, 82.

[40] CPPT, pp. 80–83.

culture and religion. Membership implies full participation in each essential aspect of the community, and justice provides the conditions for that participation.

It might be noted that this is also the core of a socialist vision, and, not suprisingly, his own favourable definition of socialism closely resembles his account of biblical social justice.[41] He perceives 'a high degree of correspondence to biblical justice in the socialist commitment to justice'.[42] On the other hand, he qualifies this by speaking of 'socialism in the light of Christian realism'.[43] His central aspiration is a version of what political philosophers call 'market socialism': an economy of small producers, many constituted as workers cooperatives, yet competing in a free market. He claims that a participatory, decentralized market economy will not only be more ethically satisfying, but also more efficient.[44]

Mott's view of justice as 'restoration to community' is, at first sight, an attractive one, but his account begs many questions in the absence of the fuller analysis of social institutions (and social power) I proposed earlier. The term 'community' needs much greater specification and differentiation than Mott lends it. As his own analysis shows, a modern pluralistic society is far more differentiated than that of ancient Israel, so that when applying an OT conception of justice to contemporary society, we need to indicate *which* community it is to which justice is supposed to restore us: is it the political community (national or local), the economic community, the family community (or all of the above)?[45] Justice itself creates plural obligations: different communities constitute distinct spheres of justice in which different packages of rights and obligations obtain.

Mott's main concern seems to be with the rights and obligations attaching to membership of the *political* community (i.e. to citizenship), though this is not sufficiently distinguished from economic community (a term which itself demands much fuller explication). I take the core of his view to be the claim that citizenship implies a political guarantee of both freedom rights and benefit rights, especially guaranteed access to the minimum resources necessary to participate in society.

Not only does Mott's account suffer from an undifferentiated communitarianism, but it also runs into difficulties because of an insufficiently specific egaliarianism (though he is aware that equality is 'a shifty word in political science'). Biblical equality is, he suggests, a 'relative equality'. It does not mean a 'mathematical division of all property and power or a leveling of all social goods'.[46] The problem is that equality *is indeed* a mathematical, quantitative term, whereas many essential human needs are not capable of precise quantification.

Strictly, things can be distributed *equally* only if they can be *quantified*. Consider two examples of things which can be quantified, and which also should be distributed equally. First, certain kinds of rights. A right is an entitlement or claim or privilege attaching to a

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[41] Cf. CPPT, p. 199. For another sympathetic account of socialism from an evangelical viewpoint, see Stephen Timms, 'Salt to the World', in *Transformation* 14/3 (July/September 1997), pp. 16–19.

[42] CPPT, p. 204.

[43] CPPT, p. 206.

[44] CPPT, pp. 208–211; 213–217.

[45] At times Mott seems to imply that justice restores us to 'the human community'. I see his point, but it is not easy to speak of 'participation' in a community as extensive as this. We always participate in this universal community in particular ways, in specific communities, though our humanity is not exhausted by membership of any one of those particular communities.

[46] CPPT, p. 82.

legal personality: each such personality, by definition, has just one right. Rights are thus entities which are capable of an equal (or 'universal') distribution, and at least some of them should be so distributed. Many rights cannot and should not be distributed equally, such as those attaching to particular offices (civil servants, medical practitioners, police officers, etc.) or relationships (parent-child, employer-employee, etc.). Certainly we must distribute equally those 'human rights' which have come to be defined in positive law as civil or political rights. Mott refers to these as 'freedom rights'. He also suggests that certain 'benefit rights' ought also to be distributed equally, such as is implied by the OT right to family land tenure.[47]

However, clarity about the relationship between equality and needs now becomes crucial. For one thing, a universal legal entitlement—such as a social security benefit—a prime example of a 'benefit right'—does not necessarily confer an equal (identical) material benefit, since these can also depend on need and contribution. The same issue arises in regard to a second category of (more or less) quantifiable things, namely biologically determined needs, such as shelter, food, clothing. Yet even here, a *strictly* equal distribution of such goods would produce injustice, since different people need different amounts (depending on family size, climate, etc.). Of course, *each* person must have their essential needs met, though that will in fact involve treating some of them unequally, which is what actually happens in many welfare states. There are, then, limits to the applicability of the concept of equality as a distributive criterion.

It appears, however, that Mott's main position is that distribution according to need is indeed primary. Thus, for example, while 'the principle of justice does not prevent unequal accumulations after the basic needs of all have been met',[48] yet distribution according to needs prevails over other possible criteria where there is a conflict.[49] The view that justice requires unconditional satisfaction of the basic needs implied in membership of the human community is, I think, incontrovertible (and politically far-reaching), though precisely what public policy measures would be required to attain this objective is not immediately obvious; they do not simply flow out of the concept of need (nor simply out of a social scientific analysis of current patterns of distribution). Clarity about distribution according to needs requires detaching the notion from any necessary association with equal treatment.

A more important question is *who is responsible* for securing the distribution which justice requires (whatever ordering of criteria we eventually settle on)? It is certainly true, as Mott notes, that justice has a special relationship to political authority. But this clearly does not imply either that the state has exclusive responsibility for justice or that in every case its responsibility is primary (or that its only responsibility is to do justice). Indeed, he recognizes that justice is a duty of all people, and many of the biblical texts he cites are universal imperatives. For example, corporations today are directly and primarily responsible for avoiding environmental pollution or unsafe working conditions. The state's duty to protect the environment is in this case subsidiary (though potentially wide-ranging).

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[47] For a valuable discussion of this question, see Paul Marshall, 'Universal Human Rights and the Role of the State', in Luis Lugo, ed., *Sovereignty at the Crossroads: Morality and International Politics in the Post-Cold War Era* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1996), pp. 153–175, and the reply by Joseph Boyle.

[48] CPPT, p. 82. In fact he goes further, acknowledging that many basic needs are efficiently provided for by the market. In other words, distribution according to merit or ability itself helps guarantee satisfaction of basic needs. Defenders of capitalism go further, of course, claiming that basic needs can be met only if the dominant mode of distribution is merit.

[49] CPPT, p. 88.

Mott strikes upon an important principle here which invites much further reflection. While justice restores people to membership in community, it does not itself actually provide the benefits of membership, but rather sustains the conditions for people to be 'active agents of their own well-being'. This takes us to the question of the scope of the state's responsibilities, one which is at the heart of the concerns of political philosophy. Mott approaches this in terms of a discussion of how we might 'seek and distrust government' (ch.4). But before considering his view of the role of government, let us briefly remark on his view of the source of political authority.

As we saw, he holds that community is a universal feature of created humanity, and that government—the political community—is also. The specific form of authority exercised by government is judicial authority, its sphere of operation the interactions among individuals and groups making up a society. Mott suggests that authority in general is created by the voluntary transfer of the power of those subject to it. There are, however, many instances where this is not the case (e.g. family, church), and on the classical Christian view it applies to political authority only in a very special sense.

Although he rejects the contractarian explanation of the origin of government as individualistic, he comes close to endorsing the voluntaristic liberal theory of political obligation attached to it. He is indeed right to emphasize that the source of the legitimacy of political authority is the divine mandate to do justice, and that God works through various human instruments in order to select rulers. Yet it needs to be clarified more explicitly than he does that popular consent does not as such generate political authority.

The radical democratic doctrine of the sovereignty of the popular will is incompatible with the assertion of the divine origin of such authority. It may indeed be argued that citizens do have a right to participate in the selection of those who hold the office of government. That authority, however, resides in the God-given office, not in the will of the voter. Mott draws here on the American Puritans, but could have clarified his position considerably by delving deeper into the centuries of Christian political reflection on this question.

Ambiguities continue in Mott's account as he applies the democratic principle more widely: 'Because of the freedom and authority possessed by the individual, his or her communities must be democratic themselves. Democracy reflects the people's power to control every aspect of their lives and also to change the way in which they live together.'[50] This again is too sweeping, because it fails to distinguish between the different types of human community which exist, and which may require different decision-making structures to reflect their distinct identities. It is important to distinguish between participation, which is indeed a principle applying to every member of any community and is perhaps even implied in the very idea of 'membership', and democratic decision-making, which is only one form of participation and which may be inappropriate in, for example, families, or certain economic, educational or security organizations.

He does, however, recognize a truly vital point: that democratic decision-making must be subjected to the normative purposes of the political community. Democracy may be seen as one implication of justice, but is itself circumscribed by other, weightier demands of justice. Herein is found a core insight lying behind the emergence of the principles of limited government and constitutional democracy. In particular, he notes, the tyranny of the majority over minority rights must be resisted. To do this requires constitutional restraints on what democratic states may will, such as a separation of powers, or

[50] CPPT, p. 155.

constitutionally guaranteed rights to protect individuals (and, we might add, groups) against the state.[51]

What then is the purpose of the state so authorized by God? Mott suggest that its purpose is to perform certain tasks which no other group could perform, notably securing goods which can be provided only collectively, such as criminal justice, defence or diplomacy, environmental protection, water and transport infrastructure, or those which could be provided by other means but which tend not to be, or not adequately, such as social insurance, or compensation. This point is a valid one, though Mott does not link it explicitly enough with his earlier claim that the state's mandate is to do justice.[52] His account at this point resembles a 'common good' argument, but the principle of the common good is not identical to the principle of justice. Again, large bodies of Christian political thought could have been drawn upon to clarify this central point.

Mott clearly recognizes that the scope of state authority has definite bounds. Much social regulation is done apart from the state, through diverse social groups, relationships or customs; the state must avoid undue domination of group life. The state must prevent excessive power falling into the hands of any one type of group and stand ready to intervene to make up for the deficiencies of voluntary activity. Its role thus involves arbitrating conflicts between groups and also stimulating mutual group support.

This involves maintaining an equilibrium among conflicting social groups, though one designed not simply to restore order, but to fulfil the requirements of justice. This will require redressing imbalances of power where they exist, and so will probably disturb social peace by evoking opposition from those groups controlling an excessive degree of power.[53] 'The positive meaning of the state is justice. Its essence is to bear, posit and enforce justice'[54]—and for Mott this essentially means guaranteeing distribution according to the minimum needs of community membership.

Mott's proposal that the role of the state is to realize a 'just equilibrium' among individuals and social groups is potentially a highly significant one, and converges with much classical and modern Christian political thought (as well as with the ideas of the radical wing of Christian Democracy). However, by premising it on an undifferentiated communitarianism and egalitarianism, Mott curtails its potential and skews its application. I am far from suggesting that a Christian political theory should not be communitarian nor egalitarian. Indeed I would argue that the notions of community and equality are indispensable for such a theory, but only so long as their application and limits in different contexts are precisely specified.

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[51] CPPT, p. 160.

[52] Mott amply supports the claim that justice defines the task of the state with copious references to the OT figure of the ideal monarch, whose role as guarantor of justice is seen as a universal model for all kings (CPPT, pp. 66–70). This role appears to be well-established in the ancient Near East, although it is sharply contrasted with the corrupt Canaanite model of kingship, which was aristocratic, militaristic, and economically exploitative. Repeatedly, the ideal monarch is depicted as the one who intervenes to defend the poor and needy against the predatory ambitions of 'the mighty'. He was 'both a legislator of just laws and the ultimate judge to whom unjustly treated persons could appeal' (p. 68).

[53] CPPT, pp. 64–5. Mott rightly observes that the liberal notion of government as a neutral arbiter of free social interactions fails to acknowledge that justice challenges both the processes and the outcomes of such interactions; justice 'trumps' freedom (p. 169). There are, however, areas in which markets are better than state or cooperative structures at allocating productive resources (cf. 176–7).

[54] CPPT, p. 66.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

I have suggested that, notwithstanding its richness and promise, Mott's evangelically-inspired formulation of a Christian political philosophy needs a clearer articulation of the nature of political philosophy and its relationship to biblical-theological themes and to the social sciences. I have also proposed that his substantive theory invites a fuller explication of the nature and authority of the state and its role in relation to many other diverse social institutions. His employment of an undifferentiated communitarianism and egalitarianism both derive from and contribute to these deficiencies.

Part of the explanation for such deficiencies seems to derive from his hermeneutical method. I refer not to the 'dialogical' nature of this method as such (with which in principle I agree), but to the role played within it by the element of 'reason', which, as we saw, includes the employment of data and concepts drawn from 'secular' social science and political philosophy. Mott has underestimated the difficulty of using these resources critically and selectively. His problematic appropriations of the notion of equality show that such notions are more heavily laden theoretically than may at first be apparent, and indicate that the first necessary task when using them is to deconstruct their origin and content and explore whether they need to be recast, perhaps radically, if they are to serve as suitable conduits for biblically-directed insight into social reality.

This analysis of a substantial evangelical work suggests, I think, that evangelical political philosophy must become more genuinely philosophical. It must not only fulfil the conditions suggested by Sider, i.e., be grounded in a foundational biblical-theological framework (to which both Sider and Mott have made substantial contributions), and be based on a sound understanding of the relationship between such a framework and the various social sciences (which, however, neither Sider nor Mott sufficiently elaborate); it must also aspire to the formulation of a coherent and comprehensive conceptual apparatus addressed to the fundamental and recurring problems of political reality.

As I indicated earlier, these problems include the origin, nature and role of the state and its authority in relation to other social institutions, the source and scope of law, the meaning of citizenship, political power justice, equality, rights, liberty, property, representation, nationality, the legitimacy of dissent or revolution, and so on. Much valuable work is currently being done, by evangelicals and many others, on several of these themes. It is, however, perhaps not surprising that over the last century and also today much of the best and most original contributions in this area are emerging from those Christian traditions which have been associated with, and which continue to draw upon, distinct and well-established schools of Christian philosophy.

Let me conclude by suggesting that at least three such traditions have generated substantial works during the twentieth century and are proving most productive of significant Christian political reflection today: Catholicism, Calvinism and Augustinianism.[55] Among leading Catholic political thinkers from which we have much to learn are Jacques Maritain, John Courtenay Murray and Yves Simon.[56] Among Calvinist writers, Herman Dooyeweerd ranks as foremost, and a number of valuable texts have been produced by writers indebted to his thought. Emil Brunner's political writings also

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[55] An example of a work of Liberation Theology which is an exception to this generalization would be Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Interesting pointers from an Anabaptist perspective are found in Duane K. Friesen, ' Towards an Anabaptist Political Philosophy', *Transformation*, 14/4 (Oct-Dec 1997), pp. 1–6

[56] Contemporary works inspired by the writings of Germain Grisez—for example the extensive writings in legal philosophy by John Finnis or Robert George—are also profoundly significant.

represent a significant Reformed contribution. The revival of a broadly Augustinian approach to political thought has been promoted by a range of thinkers but the most substantial works of which I am aware have been produced by Oliver O'Donovan (drawing mainly on pre-modern sources) and John Milbank (drawing on both pre-modern and post-modern writers).

Philosophically-informed writing from these traditions take us deep into the territory in which creative, Christian political theorizing can be attempted. This is made possible, at least in part, by means of a confrontation with the invaluable historical legacy of Christian political reflection. Without such a critical confrontation, we approach contemporary political reality deprived of the constructive wisdom which centuries of wrestling with the political meaning of Scripture have afforded. This can only make our own necessary attempts to re-read Scripture in the light of our own political situations more burdensome and more likely to go astray. An 'evangelical political philosophy' must, therefore, be historically-grounded and ecumenical in scope and sympathy. If it thereby succeeds in disclosing the wisdom and liberative power of the biblical gospel, it will also be 'Evangelical'.

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Book Reviews

AMERICAN EVANGELICALS AND THE UNITED STATES MILITARY, 1942–1993

Anne C. Loveland
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Association of Contemporary Church Historians
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During the Gulf War, rumours of revivals among the troops thrilled American evangelicals, helping to balance other rumours about rampant immorality within the gender-mixed forces. Stories emerged of dedicated 'Bible-believing' chaplains (who were found in greater numbers than ever among the padres) effectively 'getting through' to their men, and evangelicals having great influence with fellow-soldiers. While the revival tales were nothing new to students of American wars and religion, what was new was the high profile of evangelical Christianity over there—the culmination of trends in both the United States military and society since the Vietnam War. Not since the 1860s had evangelicalism so dominated the chaplaincy—in fact the entire military establishment. How did this come to pass?

Anne C. Loveland's fine book provides a careful examination of this complex but profound and growing interrelationship between fighting Americans and evangelical Protestantism. She thoroughly and convincingly documents the growth of evangelicalism in American society after the Second World War and correlates it to the growing numbers and influence of evangelicals in both the chaplaincies and officer corps as well as the ranks of the military. Whereas other denominations increasingly turned away from war, and often became outrightly anti-military during the turbulent Vietnam years, evangelicals identified military men and women as a vital mission field, and, as loyal Cold Warriors, became increasingly pro-military in their orientation. Whereas many secular American soldiers found Vietnam a spiritually searing experience, evangelicals found it an energizing crucible of faith. Loveland provides several convincing studies of prominent chaplains, flag officers and Chiefs of defence staff who played leading roles in fostering this mutual reinforcement.

Such renewed interest in the soul of the military corresponded with the increasing stake in mainline American society held by the socially, economically and politically rising evangelical classes of American society (remember the endorsement of the Eisenhower presidency by the young Billy Graham?). Just as the Cold War and Vietnam crisis hardened