

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 24

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER



Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission

Volume 24 • Number 4 • October 2000

Almost weekly now it seems we hear of nations in social and political turmoil. This is as much true of the West where nations are passing through profound changes as they move into a post-modernist era, as it is of those in the former Communist bloc or of younger nations in Africa or indeed anywhere else in the world. It also appears to be the case that countries which have a rich history of successful Christian missions are as much subject to instability and uncertainty about the future as others.

In these circumstances, evangelical political and community leaders (as well as pastors and church members in general) are faced with the enormous challenge of developing a biblical vision and perspective that will serve this and future generations. Christians in public life often say they do not receive much help from their churches on matters of great importance and consequence which face them every day. Certainly pietistic and excessively church-centred theologies and praxis that are so common do not offer much to Christian nation builders. Furthermore, it is not easy to see how a biblicistic faith would be very successful at transferring the obviously political and national theology of the Old Testament into the contemporary world; even the New Testament has its own socio-political context that requires careful understanding before it can be applied to the 21st century.

So we present a set of articles from theoreticians and practitioners that will give some help in the complex yet urgent task before us. We turn first to Europe where Peter Kuzmic of Croatia speaks from his own intense experience in the Balkans with an urgent challenge for positive Christian witness in the public arena, and to the German Evangelical Alliance with a brief statement on the importance of participatory democracy. Then we move to Jun Vencer, who has a global view of national transformation informed not only from his perspective as International Director of the World Evangelical Fellowship but also from personal involvement in the process in his native scene, the Republic of the Philippines. We conclude with two reflective articles from Australia and Canada; in the first, Gordon Preece shows how it is possible for the people of God to have a public faith, while Jonathan Chaplin points to ways of developing a Christian political philosophy that will carry Christian witness authentically and effectively into the practical world of national life.

David Parker, Editor.

An Evangelical Looks at Nationalism and Nation Building

Peter Kuzmic

Keywords: Reconciliation, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism, communism, democracy, transition, evangelism, compassion;

What is my nationality? I am a native Slovenian. I spent two years studying in Serbia and stayed two years in Bosnia. Then I moved to Croatia. All of this was in former Yugoslavia, where former citizens now fight for 'ethnic purity'. I met my Croatian wife, Vlasta, in Germany, where she went from Serbia—although her father is half German and

her mother is fully Czech. When people ask me, 'Who are you actually?' I frequently answer in the words of the poet Robert Frost, 'I am not confused; I am just well mixed!'

That, of course, is an answer for those who don't share our biblical faith. But my primary and overarching identity is with the Kingdom of God, and with its incarnational expression in the international community of the redeemed, represented at this General Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship. We are gathered here as ambassadors of God's kingdom, in which 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' ([Gal. 3:28](#)).

My family and I still relive the horror of one night at our Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek—a town next on the list to be destroyed during the ethnic war. Our students came from more than fifteen different nationalities, including those now fighting each other.

As shells started exploding, I was persuaded to evacuate my children. That horrible night we were almost killed while running across the street to the basement of our neighbour. Thunder and lightning mixed with flying objects; the shaking earth threw us to the grounds where only a wall saved our lives. My youngest daughter, whom I was carrying, was so traumatized that six years later she still wakes us up every night.

In my last sermon before we fled, I preached to my multi-ethnic congregation about the unity we have in Christ, our Peace and Reconciler ([Ephesians 2](#)). Jesus had 'made the two one' by destroying on the cross the barrier of enmity. He would make even the Serbs and the Croats one if they would respond to his love. In God's redemption there is no room for hating the enemy. The wisdom of the reconciling power of the cross is that God actually killed the enmity.

When government leaders and international agencies invite me to participate in reconciliation, I face a dilemma. As Christians, we cannot speak about reconciliation without speaking of the cross. How do we translate these central Christian concepts to those for whom 'the message of the cross is foolishness' ([2 Cor. 1:18](#))?

On that Sunday morning when I spoke on [Ephesians 2](#), air sirens suddenly warned of an impending attack. 'Run for the basements!' people screamed. But to reach the basement they would first have to run out on the street—the most dangerous place to be.

I persuaded the people to stay and pray, trusting Christ who is our Peace. In that solemn assembly we all felt a holy atmosphere as we prayed. I opened my eyes and became a wondering observer of the presence of the Kingdom of God. I saw several Croatian families embracing Serbian families—unimaginable in Croatia! I saw a Hungarian family embracing a Serbian family, although at that time many Hungarians were fleeing.

Others were asking forgiveness on behalf of their ethnic groups, although they had personally done no wrong. Tears of repentance and joy accompanied the reconciliation. The noise of artillery fire and falling bombs could not overcome my doxology: 'Oh Lord, outside they hate each other and kill each other', I cried. 'In this place they love and affirm each other. In the world there is revenge; in your body there is forgiveness and reconciliation. Thank you for the cross!'

THREE WAVES OF NATIONALISM GIVING BIRTH TO MODERN NATION-STATES

Nationalism, nations, and nation-states developed in three major waves of nationalism which irrevocably changed the political configuration of the modern world.

1. The first wave came with the upsurge of nationalism in Europe during the 19th century, when the principle of national self-determination became a kind of ideal public

law. It was an expression of developing democracy, which ran contrary to multi-national monarchies. It arose out of earlier struggles of the first nation-states (e.g. France, England, and Spain) against the universalism of medieval Christendom. Kings claimed to be emperors, appealing to the growing national consciousness of their population in their struggles for emancipation from both emperor and pope. The Protestant Reformation significantly contributed to the shaping of this national consciousness, with its liberating impulses. The compromise reached at the Religious Peace of Augsburg (1555), with its famous formula '*cuius regio, eius religio*', authorized the princes to decide what should be the religion of their fiefdom—but in fact allowed them to impose their own religion.

Today in some post-communist nations there are serious attempts to impose the same obsolete and anti-democratic territorial principle upon entire populations. Regrettably, people whose religious liberty they aim to restrict have only recently been liberated from totalitarian regimes which tried to impose atheism as a substitute secular religion.

2. The second wave of nationalism came after World War II with the break-up of the colonial empires, giving birth to numerous nation-states in 'the Un-aligned World'. Rupert Emerson summarized succinctly these epoch-making changes of the geopolitical map in his famous book *From Empire to Nation*, 'Empires have fallen on evil days and nations have risen to take their place.'¹ In the fifties and sixties, the resurgence of nationalism was synonymous with anti-colonialism and was in most cases a legitimate expression of a longing for freedom and national selfhood. This awakening of people to their dignity and liberty was in many ways a fruit of the missionary work of sowing and nurturing biblical ideals and values.

We must avoid interpreting nationalism from western experience and recognize the moral and spiritual justification of nation-building movements within the larger dynamics of history. Nationalist movements that led the revolt against (western) colonial domination, with all of their idiosyncrasies and subsequent failures, do nevertheless witness to the human search for freedom, dignity, and equality. As a result, in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East many nations have arisen from the ashes of the turbulence of post-colonial searching for nationhood. As we in WEF celebrate over 150 years of evangelical cooperation, let us also celebrate the great accomplishments of mission and the liberty of freedom-loving nations during this significant period of church growth.

3. At this Assembly we also celebrate the more recent dramatic arrival of freedom in the former communist nations of Europe. This third wave of nationalist resurgence is related to the collapse of communism and dismantling of the totalitarian socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. If nationalism of the fifties and sixties is interpreted within the context of anti-colonialism, the explosion of nationalism in the late eighties and early nineties must be at least partially credited with the liberating struggles of nations/nationalities against communism. It is less than a decade now since twenty-one new nation-states have arisen from the ashes of communism.

I joke with my students that the most important geographical designation of this era and area is 'former': Former Soviet Union, former Czechoslovakia, former East Germany, former Yugoslavia, etc. I discourage people from going into the map-printing business at the present time! Look at the example of Poland: in less than a couple of years it has lost all of its nominal neighbours. From Baltics to Balkans, studying geography is a rather confusing task.

¹ Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), p. 3.

SOCIETIES IN A PAINFUL THREE-FOLD TRANSITION

The tearing down of the Berlin Wall and its symbolism brought about an understandable euphoria and international celebration of all freedom-loving people. Evangelical Christians were especially jubilant, for now we could freely evangelize, plant new churches, print Christian literature, use media for the proclamation of the gospel, and train for ministry. Our nations were ready for the harvest since communism created a religious vacuum and hunger, which led to a large-scale search for spiritual realities.

Unprecedented freedom made it possible for thousands of short and long-term missionaries, religious tourists, and variously motivated but ill-prepared spiritual adventurers from the West to rush into the vacuum. This was at times done in the best fashion of unrestrained competitive capitalism, bewildering their uninstructed hosts and ignoring the national churches. At the time, I felt compelled to warn of the resulting confusion. The freedom of the time was transitory, since it was due more to anarchy than design. Today we witness the restraining and restrictive consequence of the new design(s) as well as some of the backlash and bitter fruit of lack of unity, complementarity, and cooperation among the missionary enterprise in the immediate post-communist era.

East European nations are presently going through a very painful three-fold transition, marked by insecurity, societal pessimism and growing tensions causing conflict and violence and at times threatening the viability of a free and democratic future.

POLITICAL TRANSITION

Moving away from one party totalitarian regimes toward multi-party parliamentary democracies is a long and complex process. In many of these countries democratic traditions and instruments were nonexistent. The communist party elites were the only privileged class, trained in the use and abuse of political power. Many of these leaders, when they read the writing on the wall, changed 'from red to pink' to stay in power—while the people did not know the ABCs of democracy. The old mindset and its operative principles have hindered the free development of yearnings for 'liberty and justice for all'. Speaking at a university commencement in the initial stages of democratic change, I used the title, 'Perestroika is not enough—Metanoia is needed.'

ECONOMIC TRANSITION

The exchange of the centrally planned 'command economies' for a 'free' (or mixed) market economy is not a simple transaction nor can it be accomplished by decree. This transition has been painful due to a number of structural and subjective reasons. Communism killed or at least seriously stifled individual creativity and initiative, two basic human prerequisites for a flourishing free-market economy. At the same time, there was reluctance in radical restructuring and implementation of sound economic and fiscal policies. In some places huge, paralyzing bureaucracies were not dismantled in time, and state-owned companies and subsidized industries were not privatized in a timely and responsible way. A major social handicap was fear of social unrest, due to unemployment, providing dangerous opportunities for political manipulation or even military intervention.

Meanwhile, economic crime and anarchy were on the rise amidst the growing gap between the poorer masses and a privileged minority. During my several visits to post-communist Moscow, my Russian friends never failed to inform me that their city was

ruled by the Mafia. No wonder that some people, tired of anarchy and poverty, express nostalgia for the old better-ordered and more equitable socialist times.

RELIGIOUS TRANSITION

Under communism, socially and psychologically, atheism functioned as a secular substitute religion. It was state-promoted and state-supported 'national irreligion'. Wherever communists came to power they claimed monopoly, not only on power but also on truth. They have abused power and distorted truth in order to promote and preserve their cause. Their ultimate goal was not only a classless society, but also a religionless society. They considered all religion, especially Christianity, to be a dangerous remnant of the old social order and a pre-scientific, superstitious, irrational, obscurantist, and totally irrelevant—if not harmful—way of thinking and living.

With the collapse of communism, whatever communism had suppressed began exploding. The collapse of communism led to what appear to be contradictory phenomena—namely, dramatic new gains for liberal democracy and a resurgence of nationalism. Nationalism and religion are two prime examples of the 'explosion of the suppressed', of particular relevance to evangelical identity and ministry. Communists suppressed nationalism because it stood in the way of proletarian internationalism. They suppressed religion because it hindered building scientifically based and ideologically controlled atheistic societies. According to their deterministic understanding of history, religion was to wither away and the church was to disappear. They were more than willing to speed up that process by either barely tolerating or brutally persecuting believers and their communities.

Transition to free democratic societies with full religious liberties did not take place naturally because of the simultaneous explosion of nationalism and religion. The old national churches, Orthodox and Roman Catholic, and Islamic communities (in places like Albania, Bosnia, and Central Asia) were positioning themselves to reclaim monopoly on the religious life of their nations. The powerful synthesis of nationality, religion, and culture once again became the ruling paradigm of social existence and public image. Its public manifestations are very dangerous, as they threaten to derail the democratic processes and hinder the development of genuinely free pluralist societies.

The popular talk now is that if you are Russian (or Bulgarian or Serbian or ...) you are Orthodox. If you are Polish, Slovak, or Croatian you are Catholic. If you are anything else you are not a good patriot and cannot be fully trusted because of divided loyalties. Protestantism generally and Evangelicalism specifically are considered foreign intrusions, a threat to national and religious identity and unity of the people, thus impeding the process of nation-building.

In some of these new nation-states where bonafide citizenship and public identity are defined along ethno-religious lines, both democracy and freedom of religion remain vulnerable. Special legislation regulating religious affairs, and discriminating practice of both secular and religious authorities, are indicative of a fundamental lack of understanding of the principle of separation of church and state guaranteeing the life and ministry of a 'free church in a free society'.

Clergy and militant fanatics among the laity frequently work together in opposition to Protestant evangelicals, whom they view as a foreign intrusion and as disruptive sectarians involved in dangerous proselytizing and unpatriotic activities. Violent clashes, legal and illegal discrimination, and cultural marginalization are not excluded. Only a few weeks ago we read a report of Vasile Talos, president of the Baptist Union of Romania, about a violent attack on a group of Baptists on their way to church, instigated by two

orthodox priests. Six years ago, I wrote in the compendium, *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*: 'It is not inconceivable that some leaders of religious minorities (evangelical and other eastern) could become the new "dissidents" of the post-communist era in Eastern Europe.'

THE GOSPEL IN THE WORLD OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND NEW NATIONS

One of the most disturbing threats to peace in our time is the shift 'from totalitarianism to tribalism', issuing in conflicts rooted in national, ethnic, and religious differences. This is also one of the most complex, urgent challenges to Christian mission. From European Bosnia to African Rwanda, from North American Quebec to South-East Asian Cambodia, with numerous other countries competing to enter the index of fragmentation, inter-ethnic warfare promotes brutalities committed against fellow human beings (with the Canadian exception of anxiety minus violence). Yet both perpetrators and innocent victims carry the image of the same God.

TASKS

1. First of all, we must continue to evangelize and disciple the nations by using all legitimate means available, in full dependence on the Holy Spirit, the chief executor of the mission of Jesus. We have no option but to obey his Commission by going and making disciples of all nations ([Mt. 28](#)), thereby fulfilling his eschatologically conditioned prophecy: 'This gospel of the Kingdom of God shall be preached as a testimony to all nations, and then shall the end come' ([Mt. 24:14](#)). Many of us here can bear witness to the fact that faithful evangelization, by the very nature of the gospel, changes whole communities, lifting them socially, enabling them to become constructive and responsible nation-builders

2. Secondly, we must recover the whole gospel and repent of all 'half-gospels' that invalidate so much of our ministry. We will do well to listen to Peter Taylor Forsyth: 'Half-gospels have no dignity and no future. Like the famous mule, they have neither pride of ancestry nor hope of posterity.' The doyen of evangelical theologians, Carl Henry, agrees: 'Half-gospels deceive and defraud, demote and degrade, and dead-end in disillusion and dishonour.'

To be faithful to the whole gospel means, among other things, that we evangelicals as people of the Great Commission also become the people of the Great Compassion. 'Feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger and the refugee, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner...' ([Mt. 25](#)) are as much the words of Jesus as is the command to evangelize by proclamation and teaching ([Mt. 28](#)). There is only one gospel of Jesus Christ, which is both personal and social because it has two focal points: the individual person and the kingdom of God. Jesus clearly taught and consistently practised this. We have learned in Bosnia, where over 200,000 have been killed and millions have become refugees, that at times proclamation can be counter-productive because it smacks of religious propaganda and senseless proselytism. We must practise Christian love.

CONCLUSION

We must give to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and give to God that which belongs to God. But let us remember that God defines what belongs to Caesar—not vice versa. 'Fear God; honour the emperor' ([1 Peter 2](#)) is the priority of the command. Above all we must fear God, for only then can we properly honour the state. Faithfulness to God must

always be given priority over loyalty to our nation. When that priority cannot be kept, when our nation demands uncritical allegiance, we will respond like the early disciples with the uncompromising stand: 'We must obey God rather than man.'

Let us go back to our nations as carriers of hope and biblically founded faith. To quote St. Augustine, 'Hope has two daughters: anger and courage—anger with the way things are, and courage to change them.'

Dr. Peter Kuzmic is Eva B. and Paul E. Toms Distinguished Professor of World Missions and European Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is regarded as the foremost evangelical scholar in Eastern Europe and is considered an authority on the subject of Christian response to Marxism and on Christian ministry in post-Communist contexts. A former chair of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), he holds degrees from several institutions including a Doctor of Theology from the University of Zagreb and is the founder and director of the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia. This article is an address he gave at the 10th General Assembly of WEF, held in Abbotsford British Columbia, May 8–15, 1997 and published in *Global Crossroads* (WEF, 1998) the volume of papers presented at that Assembly edited by W. Harold Fuller. (Used by permission)

'Give Democracy What It is Entitled to'

*Statement of the German Evangelical Alliance concerning
the issue of political responsibility of Evangelicals (Stuttgart,
June 6, 1994)*

Keywords: Democracy, Evangelical Alliance, voting, hope;

In its past few meetings The Board of Directors of the German Evangelical Alliance dealt with the question, if and to what extent the German Evangelical Alliance should take public responsibility. These meetings resulted in the following statement of conviction:

We live in a democratic society in which every citizen is called to participate in the shaping of political life. The far-reaching possibilities of constructive-critical accompaniment and involvement which exist in a democratic state bound to a legal constitution are a gift and, at the same time, a challenge for us. The biblical testimony concerning the church of Jesus Christ as 'salt of the earth' and 'light of the world' places us unavoidably, societally speaking, within the realm of co-responsibility. The possibilities of our community for democratic involvement are no matter of purely private choice. For Christians there are, rather, challenges to practical obedience in our lives as disciples of Jesus. We thereby invite others to reflect anew with us about what actualizing the command of Jesus means under today's conditions; namely, to give democracy what it is entitled to and God what is his (cf. [Mt. 22:21](#)).

It is especially necessary in an age of increasing resignation and reluctance toward political involvement that Christians should be bearers of hope. By their tie to God's Word they have the freedom, moreover, to go against the general trend and to take responsibility. We, therefore, encourage Christians to take over public tasks at the local