NO MORE THAN A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR? EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

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Earlier Neglect

The story has been told, a good number of times over, of how the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time when evangelical social involvement tailed off at a significant rate. David Moberg's *The Great Reversal*[1] was, if not the best known work at a popular level, at least among the most significant of early works charting the decline of evangelical social involvement in that period. In particular the title of his book summed up recent evangelical awareness that the neglect of social concern was not part of the essence of Evangelicalism, but in fact was contrary to its basis and heritage.

In explaining the decline, a handful of factors are generally mentioned as behind the move away from social engagement: a reaction against theological liberalism producing a kind of backs-to-the-wall mentality; an avoidance of social issues, as that was the ground taken by the social gospel movement; the rise in popularity of pre-millennialism which portrayed the decline in the social order as an indication of the nearness of Christ's return (and hence, in a perverse way, almost something desirable); the growth of Evangelicalism among the middle classes who were distant and distanced from the most acute social needs. To these we might add, for the UK at least, the fact that at least some of the agreed areas of involvement of the church became part of the functions of government. The great efforts of Thomas Chalmers (amongst others) to provide for the poor of the parish declined after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1845 took responsibility out of the church's hands.

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1 D. Moberg, *The Great Reversal* (London, 1973).

Recent Re-emergence

I referred to Moberg's book as 'early' as it came out at a time when Evangelicals were only slowly emerging from the assumed and/or cultivated position of non-involvement in worldly matters such as politics, social care, arts, sport ,*etc.* In fact Carl Henry had produced his influential *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*[2] twenty-five years earlier, and things had been changing gradually. There had been significant shifts in the mid-1960s – such as at the World Congress on Evangelism at Berlin in 1966, and the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission held at Wheaton the same year, and the National Evangelical Congress at Keele in 1967. However, a more significant turning point was the International Congress on World Evangelisation at Lausanne in 1974, a gathering of 2,700 participants from over 150 countries. Here a statement was produced, 'The Lausanne Covenant', which had 'Christian Social Responsibility' as its fifth section – after the Purpose of God, the Authority of the Bible, the Uniqueness of Christ and the Nature of Evangelism.

It was not that these conferences created the interest in social action so much as that they gave confidence to those already involved; they were part of a growing movement. For other Evangelicals, it was not conferences but the rise of evangelical organisations such as TEAR Fund (British launch in 1968) which drew attention to social issues, so creating more interest and concern. Magazines began to appear such as that which became *Sojourners.* Many people on the ground, at grass roots level, were longing for an alternative to the narrow versions of Christian faith they were experiencing in their churches, but they did not know one another.... People from many places saw the flag, and met one another around the flagpole.[3]

There was not only change and development within American and western European Evangelicalism. Other international influences were at work, and as Evangelicalism became more heavily affected by these, *e.g.* the weighty contributions of Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar at

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2 C.F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids, 1947).

3 J. Wallis, *The New Radical* (Tring, 1983), p. 72.

Lausanne, the massive international significance of poverty, racism, cultural imperialism and so on became more highlighted and therefore bigger issues. It is also the case that Evangelicals were being influenced and affected by a general trend in society at large towards greater awareness of international needs and shared responsibility – for instance, how we in the rich north through trade were continuing to exploit the poorer countries in the southern hemisphere. A more recent example of this is the increased attention to environmental issues.

The increase in attention to social concern took deeper root in the 1970s and 1980s and spread to different wings of the evangelical church. Through events such as Spring Harvest and Festival of Light, social involvement issues have been given wider prominence in the church. Specially convened conferences have been arranged to bring together people in the charismatic movement with others involved in social action.

Biblical Basis

One of the things to have clearly emerged from the by now large number of books, conferences, magazines and study packs from different organisations, is that the Bible has a good deal to say about social concern. God is concerned with all of life. He cares deeply about all areas and aspects of life. Theological principles have been expounded such as those in the early chapters of John Stott's *Issues Facing Christians Today* calling for a fuller understanding of the biblical teaching: Stott calls for a fuller doctrine of God (as God of nature as well as religion, of creation as well as covenant, of justice as well as justification); a fuller doctrine of man (surely only a matter of time before he uses less exclusive language); a fuller doctrine of Christ (who entered others' worlds, and served); a fuller doctrine of salvation (which cannot be separated from the kingdom of God, which includes Jesus as Saviour and Lord, which does not separate faith from love); and a fuller doctrine of the church (involved in and seeking to reform the world).[4]

The Scriptures give us a wealth of material and references on social involvement. God is celebrated as the Creator and

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4 J.R.W. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke, 1984), pp. 13-25.

defender of the oppressed. God destroyed first Israel and then Judah because of their oppression of the poor. Repeatedly the prophets warn that God hates religious ritual that is separated from concern for justice. A tender compassion for the poor and marginalised was a central concern for Jesus and evidence that he was the Messiah. Jesus said bluntly that if we fail to feed the hungry and clothe the naked we are condemned.

Because there is by now plenty of material on the biblical basis for social involvement and because there are fine outlines available, I am not going to offer a biblical basis overall or in depth. Rather I want to point to a main area of contention in the evangelical debate, and to come to what I think is still the main reaction of many Evangelicals, that social action has its place, is important, is biblical... but.... However, before moving on to the first of these, I want to spend a few moments on another point.

Cause of Neglect: Decline of Reformed Theology

One reason generally not cited in the list of contributory factors to the 'great reversal', which I deliberately omitted from above in order to raise it here, is the decline in popularity of Reformed theology. Prior to the Reformation the medieval world-view was one of acceptance of the social order as something divinely ordained: God was in his heaven, the bishop in his chair, the lord in his castle; this was to medieval man and woman part of the very nature of things.

To the Reformers and Puritans the social structure was not something natural and something static. It was the result of human decision and therefore was infected with sin and so could be in need of reforming. Furthermore this was part of one's Christian duty. Knowledge of God was in acknowledging him, in serving him, in applying his Lordship to all areas of life: the emergence of original Calvinism represented a fundamental alternation in Christian sensibility, from the vision and practice of turning away from the social world in order to seek closer union with God – to the vision and practice of working to reform the social world in obedience to God.[5]

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5 Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 11.

So Calvinism was marked by a systematic endeavour to mould the life of society as a whole... it lays down the principle that the church ought to be interested in all sides of life, and it neither isolates the religious element over against the other elements, like Lutheranism, nor does it permit this sense of collective responsibility to express itself merely in particular institutions and occasional interventions in affairs, as in Catholicism.[6]

One of the most revolutionary insights of the Reformation was its teaching that 'vocation' is not the preserve of the elite few, but the privilege of every Christian. 'Worldly' occupations are blessed by God and form the sphere in which God may be glorified. This empowerment of ordinary people took effect not only at the personal and individual level, but also in institutional and social life. Although Lutheranism spoke of being called by God to all sorts of occupations, what someone did in their occupation was thought of not so much as a matter of obedience so much as a matter of social necessity.

Therefore the whole occupational structure was a given, God-ordained, rather than something created by us and to be rearranged if need be. But in the Reformed view obedience was not about remaining in one's given role, but about what one did in that role. And if it did not serve the common good, as it ought to, then something must be done to change things.

The Reformed tradition, then, was a liberating, prophetic theology that provided a basis for social involvement. Many attempts were made to follow this through into practice and in a number of ways it was clearly shown that social involvement was an integral part of the Christian calling. For instance, in the Church of Scotland's *Second Book of Discipline*, 'distribution' was one of the marks of the church. This was to say that ministry to the poor was of the very essence of the church – and by 'ministry' was meant financial support. It was part and parcel of the life of the church, and not an optional extra activity, that there should be some kind of social witness, some kind of transformation of the social order. If a church lacked it, it was no church at all, no matter how sound its constitution.

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6 E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York, 1931), vol. II, p. 602.

I mention the Reformed tradition here because it seems to me that it was with the relative strengthening of a more pietist approach within Evangelicalism, that a further factor emerged to contribute to 'the great reversal'. This is not to say that we could easily solve our problems in this field today by a re-reading of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvinism has its flaws in social involvement: its all-embracing approach was taken by some and subsumed into a secularised version of the kingdom of God. Also it remained stuck in a Christendom model, and so contributed to the legitimation of colonial conquest. It was also, not always unfairly, accused of an intolerant approach: the Westminster Confession says that the civil magistrate is to use his powers to proceed against those whose opinions of practices are 'destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in his church'.[7]

A case is made that the policy of some Calvinists of trying to enforce their opinions and beliefs on others has backfired. In his study of the roots of American secularism, Gary Smith says

> Calvinists believed that alternative ideologies to Christianity had no right to exist in the public arena; thus they sought to prevent proponents of non-Christian world-views from participating in public questions of politics, education, and morality. They wished to force those who disagreed with their Christian values nevertheless to live under these values as citizens of the state, especially in the education of their children and observing the Christian Sabbath.... If Calvinists and other Protestants had not tried to force their values on society during the late nineteenth century and instead had supported the concept of cultural pluralism, the contours of contemporary American culture might be quite different.[8]

Nevertheless, though there are flaws and blemishes in Calvinists' record of social involvement, Calvinism does give a strong theological undergirding for such involvement. One question which bothers me about my own denomination is how it has come about that this church within the Reformed

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7 Westminster Confession 20.

8 G.S. Smith, *The Seeds of Secularisation* (Grand Rapids, 1985), pp. 6-7.

tradition has still such a small fraction (relatively speaking) of its Evangelicals committed to the importance and relevance of social involvement. How is it that this sizable grouping of Church of Scotland Evangelicals, so openly enthusiastic about Calvinism, is yet so hesitant about social and political involvement by the church? Is it no more than a knee-jerk reaction against what is perceived to be the over-politicisation of the gospel by other wings of the church? If so, is that any reason to maintain what is clearly a view at odds with our professed Reformed heritage?

Area of Contention: Kingdom v. Creation

Calvinists, like other Evangelicals, have not found it easy to enter the public and political arena and work out their Christian faith. It is not an easy task, perhaps especially today in a secularist and pluralist context. How then do we take Christian values and Christian principles into the public arena? If we are not to do nothing – and thereby let society get worse, let darkness reign as we hide our light under the bushel, or let the meat go bad as we keep our preservative (salt) in the jar – and not to impose our views on others, then we must seek to persuade: but on what basis?

Here we find a major debate among Evangelicals on social involvement. Some seek to base their arguments on creation, and others use the kingdom as their basis. This is a more recent debate, for it is not all that long a time since the theme of the kingdom was almost unheard of amongst Evangelicals.

George Eldon Ladd, in his *Jesus and the Kingdom*,[9] stressed that the kingdom of God is the rule or reign of God over all of life and that it is present as well as future. That the kingdom is central to the message of Jesus was a revelation to many Evangelicals brought up on a theology which focussed on the individual's relationship with God brought about through justification by faith in Christ. The kingdom was not a theme that was much discussed or emphasised by Evangelicals. When two major missionary conferences were held within six weeks of each other in 1980, it was not difficult to guess which of the two – the Evangelicals of the Lausanne movement or the WCC's Conference on Mission

9 G.E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom* (New York, 1964).

and Evangelism – was to have its Bible readings from the Gospels and which from Romans.

John Howard Yoder's book *The Politics of Jesus*[10] was very influential. Some have described it as 'seminal' and as a 'landmark in biblical social ethics'.[11] Yoder, who is a Mennonite, argues that we have read the New Testament assuming 'that Jesus is simply not relevant in any immediate sense to the question of social ethics'.[12] Instead we have largely based our ethics upon natural theology and the natural order of things. In contrast Yoder argues that our understanding of the example and teaching of Jesus should be our basis.

On the other hand, Oliver Barclay, writing as A.N. Triton, *Whose World?*[13], based involvement on our understanding not of redemption, but of creation. This was the predominant line: indeed Michael Green had to put in a plea for the other at Lausanne:

> How much have we heard here about the kingdom of God? Not much. It is not our language. But it was Jesus' prime concern. He came to show that God's kingly rule had broken into our world: it no longer lay entirely in the future, but was partly realised in him and those who followed him. The Good News of the kingdom was both preached by Jesus and embodied by him.... So it must be with us.[14]

The Lausanne Covenant tried to cover both aspects in its final draft:

> We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex, or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited.... When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek

10 J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, 1972).

11 Chester, *Awakening to a World of Need* (Leicester, 1993), p. 55.

12 Yoder, *Politics*, p. 15.

13 *Whose World?* (Leicester, 1970).

14 M. Green, in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis, 1975), p. 176.

> not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world.[15]

This was not enough to satisfy some who were calling for a more radical response.

> Because this group made the kingdom of God central to social action they were more inclined to advocate radical change (in line with the radical nature of the kingdom) than those who made the doctrine of creation central and who thereby tended to be more politically conservative (inclined to preserve the created order).[16]

Those who take the kingdom line, as well as inevitably calling for more radical change, are also more inclined to make the social aspect part of the gospel itself,[17] whereas those using creation as a basis see it as something more general, not part of the redemption message *per se*, though obviously connected with it. Indeed it is one of the main criticisms of the 'kingdom-ethics' school that the 'creation-ethics' school leaves Christ and the gospel out of social action.

Therefore the two groups have differing emphases in terms of the changes sought, and they divide on the content of the gospel. The two also differ over the issue of structural or social sin. The kingdom school are in a number of ways trying to move away from the individualistic approach that has dominated (and weakened) evangelical thought and teaching, and this has included their insisting that sin is not just an individual matter, but can be talked of as social and structural. The creation-ethics school point out that repentance is only ever called for from individuals in Scripture: 'The gospel is addressed to the individual. Society collectively cannot be redeemed. It can, however, be reformed according to the law of God.'[18]

There is, then, this difficult question of the applicability of the Christian position in a non-Christian or pluralist society. The creation approach implies that God's commands for

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15 Lausanne Covenant 5.

16 Chester *op. cit.*, p. 81.

17 See C. Sugden, *Social Gospel or No Gospel* (Nottingham, 1975).

18 F. Catherwood, *The Christian in Industrial Society*, quoted in O.R. Barclay, 'The Theology of Social Ethics: A Survey of Current Positions', *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990), pp. 63-86 at p. 71.

society are the very best for all humanity, as we are all part of creation. If something as general as the creation can be established as the basis, then we avoid saying that the Christian ethic is for the church only, or that it is an arbitrary will of God.

However, those who hold to the kingdom model, as I said above, think that this removes Jesus and his work and words from our appeal, and believe that the creation model is not nearly radical enough. The need is not so much to nurture as to confront, and it is argued that it is the kingdom model that better provides a basis for conflict – with demons, structures and so on. Furthermore it is unrealistic to expect the upside-down values of God's kingdom to be understood and welcomed by people in general, through arguments based on general principles. What they need is to see God's way lived out and demonstrated. The kingdom is something to be lived; when enacted by Christ's followers, it will draw others in.

Another area of tension between the two approaches to mention here has to do with the activity of God. Does there need to be an open and acknowledged confession of Jesus, or can God's kingdom be built even by those who do not know Christ?

> The Kingdom centres on Jesus' Lordship and his activity through his people, but it is a fact, dependent not on people's acknowledgement of Jesus. Otherwise if no one acknowledged Jesus, the Kingdom would cease to exist.... When non-Christians express values approximating to Christian values these must be related to the revealed will of God. This preserves the unity of God's action; his activity inside the church is not separable from his activity outside.[19]

In an earlier debate on this, published in a Grove booklet, Ron Sider and John Stott disagreed over the extent of the kingdom prior to the return of Christ. Sider said that 'The kingdom comes wherever Jesus overcomes the power of evil. That happens most visibly in the church. But it also happens in society at large because Jesus is Lord of the world as well as the church.' In response Stott insisted that the kingdom of God in the New Testament is always centred on Christ; 'it

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19 Sugden, *Kingdom and Creation in Social Ethics* (Nottingham, 1990), p. 14.

may be said to exist only where Jesus Christ is consciously acknowledged as Lord.' [20]

This is the position that Ron Sider himself takes in his more recent work:

> Does that mean that we should speak of salvation when the environmental movement creates greater ecological wholeness or when democracy or economic justice grow in China, Russia, or the United States? Not at all. Nowhere does the New Testament use salvation language for what happens before Christ's return except where persons consciously confess Jesus Christ.'[21]
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> Nowhere does the New Testament speak of the presence of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus except where Jesus himself is physically present or where people consciously confess him as Messiah, Saviour and Lord.'[22]

There are then difficulties and differences when it comes to explaining and applying biblical principles in a pluralistic world. Nevertheless those who are most keenly debating the kingdom-ethics versus creation-ethics issues are united on a number of points. Not least do they agree that there is a strong biblical case for social involvement, that it is not an optional extra, that the world desperately needs involved Christian disciples and the church needs its disciples to be involved. Some are confident that a middle way can be found.[23] Oliver O'Donovan has argued that we need not be forced to choose between a creation approach and a kingdom approach. Creation and kingdom are not independent of one another:

> A Kingdom ethic which was set up in opposition to creation could not possibly be interested in the same eschatological kingdom as that which the New Testament proclaims. At its root there would have to be a hidden dualism which interpreted the progress of history to its completion, not as a fulfilment, but as a denial of its beginning. A creation ethic

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20 Sider and Stott, *Evangelism, Salvation and Social Justice* (Nottingham, [2]1979), p. 23.

21 R. Sider, *Evangelism and Social Action* (London, 1993), p. 93.

22 Sider, *Evangelism*, p. 211.

23 *E.g.*, M. Schluter and R. Clements, 'Jubilee Institutional Norms: A Middle Way Between Creation Ethics and Kingdom Ethics', *Evangelical Quarterly* 62 (1990), pp. 37-62.

on the other hand, which was set up in opposition to the kingdom, could not possibly be evangelical ethics.[24]

The Contemporary Situation: Widespread Acceptance, with Suspicion

The debate over the basis for social involvement, while producing large areas of agreement and influencing the overall fell and thrust of much Evangelicalism, has still left widespread uncertainty. Is it or is it not part of the gospel? Is it or is it not secondary to evangelism? Is it something related to but distinct from evangelism?

Some within Evangelicalism seem to think the matter is largely settled: 'It would be true to say that Manila settled once and for all that social concern was part of the gospel – and it had not pleased everybody.'[25] On the other hand, while the Lausanne movement has tried to find some kind of balance that pleases everyone, it is clear that, to some, too much ground has been given to social action; in their concern for a strategy for world evangelisation, they have been beginning to lose patience with the Lausanne movement. Arthur Johnstone in *The Battle for World Evangelism*[26] argues that too much emphasis on social action inevitably leads to an abandonment of evangelism. Outright opposition to social action is rare: more commonly we are warned that social action (good as it is) will only deflect us from our one key task – that of proclaiming the gospel. John Woodhouse, an evangelical Anglican from Sydney, who through connections with the Proclamation Trust has a growing influence in Britain, has written:

> It is right that we should be called again and again to care, but when that obligation is given the theological undergirding that belongs properly to the task of evangelism, when the evangelistic task is no longer seen as unique in importance, when evangelistic responsibility is taken for granted, and our neglect of social action causes deeper remorse than our neglect of evangelism, then the cart has got before the horse, and is trying to grow legs.... Our

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24 O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order* (Leicester, 1986), p. 6.

25 Tom Houston, quoted in Chester, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

26 A. Johnstone, *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, 1978).

> discussions of social responsibility would be far more clear if we spoke simply in terms of our duty to love our neighbour, rather than in terms of 'the mission of the church'.[27]

This, to my mind leaves us with a rather unhappy half-way house position. Social involvement in on the agenda, but... Lip service (and it is that) is paid to its importance, but when it comes to the bit, it is only an optional extra.

One effect of this is that we grant that social action is important, but when it comes to specifics we say that since it is not part of the substance of the faith we can have liberty of opinion. Therefore our influence is not coordinated, and we often find ourselves working against one another. In making social matters secondary we make it easy or convenient to disagree, and we take some pleasure in how, in Christian fellowship, we can cope with these differences on secondary matters. This removes, so we kid ourselves, a responsibility to do any very serious thinking or heart-searching. Simply put, it is a convenient cop-out when faced with some tough issues. Agreeing to differ is usually a way of saying we agree to do nothing about this.

A second effect is that although we agree that social involvement is important, because it is not our primary task we never really get round to it. Consequently,

> Although in general terms it is now securely established in the evangelical mind and conscience that we have an inescapable social responsibility, we have not yet attained the really influential unity of mind and action which the size of our constituency could command.[28]

Here, it is not that there is settled opposition to a lot of evangelical social involvement so much as a passing by on the other side of the road, because we are busy and have an important rally to attend or leaflets to distribute. To many Evangelicals it is not that we think that the Bible is silent on the subject of social involvement, it is that there are more important, eternal issues at stake, and so it is vital not to get distracted by other important, but secondary, matters.

Thirdly, while it is seen as separate from social action, evangelism will continue to be perceived as its rival. When

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27 Quoted in Chester, *op. cit.* pp. 166-7.

28 Stott, in Chester, p. 7.

much of our evangelism is ineffective this is compounded: people call for the church to turn from 'secondary' things in order to focus on what is most important, *i.e.* evangelism. But the New Testament has little to say on how and when we should evangelize. Instead it has much to say on how Christians should live and particularly how they should live in the light of Christ's coming. The talk of evangelism as primary necessarily demotes other areas of Christian life, and undermines the call to build a rounded biblical lifestyle.

Talk of priorities means that pressure is unfairly put on what are seen as non-priority issues if we think that things are tough. All we have time and resources for is concentration on that which is essential. Social involvement is sometimes dropped or avoided because it is not important enough or 'successful' enough. But how many evangelistic efforts, such as leafletting, street meetings, *etc.* are rather barren efforts, but nevertheless get concentrated upon, because evangelism is seen to be our primary work? That a particular criterion is sometimes applied to social action (how well are the pews filled as a consequence of it) which is not applied in the same way to our evangelism (or indeed used to help us re-think about, *e.g.*, how boring our worship appears), is a selective picking on social involvement. Why does that happen? Why is social involvement called upon to justify itself in terms of results in a way that other aspects of church life are not? Because it is not the real work of the church?

Merely a Spoonful of Sugar?

In all of this we betray, I think, the view that social involvement is the spoonful of sugar that helps the medicine go down. It is the gloss on our activities to help us 'win' people who otherwise would not come near us. This is not only an offence against the integrity of our compassion and service, but also an offence against the gospel – to assume that it only wins people if we can first dress it up in attractive social clothes.

The polarizing of social action and evangelism also means that we have pushed aside an important area of biblical teaching, giving it a reduced place in our lives. Our claims of being biblical or orthodox have a hollow ring at this point.

Earlier I argued that the supernatural incarnation is incredible to modern men and women. But is not costly

discipleship incredible to many conservatives? The language of losing one's life for Christ's sake may be as symbolic and mythical to conservatives as the Virgin Birth and substitutionary atonement are to liberals.[29] Unfortunately this charge sticks: why are so few Evangelicals involved? Is it really because we have not read the relevant Bible passages? I do not think so (and that is why I did not go over any of them in this paper).

Is it not rather that these things are not so important to us? We recognise that social action is valuable, but not for us who have so many prayer meetings to go to or sermons to prepare (or listen to). Perhaps in many evangelical churches it would be a profitable mid-week meeting if, from time to time, the usual sermon was scrapped and everyone wrote letters on behalf of those who are imprisoned without trial! Do we really need another sermon on Hebrews 13:3, more than we need to do something in response to it? Why are so few of us involved – in Amnesty International, in Shared Interest, in the World Development Movement, in Friends of the Earth, in Greenpeace? If part of our defence is that these groups have been taken over and dominated by people with rather cranky ways or beliefs, or by others with non-biblical influences and motivations, is that not at least partly because we have stood back and left the way clear?

Now of course the kingdom of God will not be present in all its fullness the day that Britain ceases to link its Aid and Trade Provision with major arms sales – but has the Bible really nothing to say about 'charity' that is given so that the giver benefits? Has Scripture really nothing to say about helping in order that we are helped in return? And has it really nothing to say about valuable resources being used up in ridiculous projects (like the Pergau dam), while plenty of needs go unmet, so that the rich can get further reward? Is the Word of God silent on deceit – and is it not deceitful to offer 'aid' so that we can do a bit of business in return?

'The great reversal' has at least been noticed and there are now many excellent instances of a proper biblical concern being shown in social as well as private and spiritual matters. But most of us are still suspicious, are we not? We are saying, 'Yes, but...'. As long as we talk of priorities between

29 D. Webster, in Sider, *Evangelism and Social Action*, p. 107.

evangelism and social involvement and as long as they are seen as rivals or alternatives, this will continue. It is damaging. It is damaging because we are saying one thing (social involvement is important) but doing something else (never getting round to it or leaving it to someone else). This damages our credibility and also confuses ourselves. It is not about whether or not we should care or evangelize. It is about how we witness. More fundamentally, it is about how we live as disciples. If we believe, as I assume that we do, that our lives as a whole are to be based on God's Word and lived in response to the free grace of God, we need to give social involvement more of a place than as the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine go down. It is more than a fringe activity, and more than lip service is called for.