

Discernment

So that you may be able to discern what is best. *Phil. 1:10*

Globalization and Christian Ethics

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■ Thirty years ago, missionaries home on furlough (now usually called “home ministry assignment”) displayed pictures of themselves, wearing white shirts and neckties, holding worship services with indigenous peoples, who also were dressed in white shirts and neckties. Today, missionaries display pictures of themselves wearing native apparel and listening to indigenous pastors teaching their own people, many of whom wear T-shirts emblazoned with Western brand names.

Just as Western mission organizations were learning how to clothe the gospel in local forms—to keep from transforming an indigenous culture into a Western-style church—the global business and entertainment entrepreneurs were beginning to relentlessly saturate cultures with mass-market images and products. So where does that leave Christian life and witness in the 21st century? Does Christian ethical action now require that we work to support indigenous cultures? And, if so, exactly which culture should we support? Do we support an indigenous culture that will be bypassed or potentially exploited by the march of global capitalism, or do we enable people groups, with the assistance of Christian ethical teaching, to embrace the new global culture?

These questions are not only for missionaries, but for all people who seek to live according to God’s kingdom values. When I eat Mexican food in the evening, jog the calories off the next morning in Vietnamese-made Nikes, and then on Sunday see a missionary

video of Tanzanian children with swooshes on their shirts, I am living globalization. Should I celebrate this new economic opportunity for all, or lament the reduction of cultural difference to an eclectic consumerism? Or both?

Scripture has always provided thoughtful Christians with a global perspective. In 2 Peter 3, for instance, we are urged to live holy and godly lives (v. 11) in light of the entire scope of creation history, from the world’s formation to its ultimate judgment (vv. 5-13). By placing us in an eternal context, this teaching shrinks our globe. Today’s globalization also compresses our world, but through the international circulation of capital, culture, and commerce. The world is smaller because human accomplishments are spread globally. Whereas biblical

globalization commands us to transform our behaviors in light of eternity, contemporary globalization calls us to magnify our behaviors for a larger market. Hence, today we face a distinctive ethical difficulty: Do we promote global culture from within an eternal perspective, or does the eternal perspective require us to challenge the global culture?

Fortunately, our *Discernment* authors help us to navigate these questions. We need the insights of one another; we need wisdom to live as global Christians.

Kenneth Chase, director of CACE

“Do we promote global culture from within an eternal perspective, or does the eternal perspective require us to challenge the global culture?”

The Ethical Challenges of Global Capitalism

By Ron Sider

■ I salute Michael Novak for his brilliant work in articulating the superiority of capitalism over its great 20th century rival, communism. Without in any way suggesting that capitalism is the best economic arrangement that human beings can ever imagine or achieve, I certainly agree that it is better than the only alternative of my lifetime.

Here is my understanding of the biblical norm of economic justice, derived from the Bible's teaching on land. God wants every able-bodied person and family to have access to the productive resources they need,

and He also wants the various levels of society to offer a generous sufficiency to those—for example, the disabled and the elderly—who are unable to care for themselves. This norm does not require equality of income or equality of wealth. But it does require equality of opportunity, up to the point where everyone has genuine access to the capital needed to enjoy a decent life.

Capitalism and the Biblical Norm

Well, if God demands equality of opportunity, then capitalism today, both at the global and national level, is failing. This is not to deny significant progress. In 1970, 35 percent of all people in the developing world were chronically malnourished. Today, about 20 percent are. A World Bank study tells us that from 1987 to 1998 the proportion of people living in poverty globally fell from 29 percent to 26 percent. Much of that progress, I believe, is due to the adoption in many Asian countries of market economics, plus effective government activity, including state expenditures on education and health care.

At a time, however, when there is plenty of food, we still have about 800 million people undernourished. The World Bank reports that approximately 1.2 billion people must try to survive on less

than a dollar a day, and that 3 billion people must try to survive on less than \$2 a day. In the United States, the richest nation in human history, about 34 million Americans live in poverty; about 44 million have no health insurance.

A large number of the world's people lack adequate capital to participate in the global market economies. Land is still the basic capital in many agricultural societies; money and education are far more crucial in modern, capital-intensive, knowledge-intensive economies. The poorest 1 billion people in our world have almost no land, very little money, and virtually no education. Another 3 billion have very little. The poorest 20 percent of the people own just 1 percent of the world's wealth. In fact, the poorest 60 percent own only 6 percent of the world's wealth. The richest 20 percent own 81 percent. The market pays no attention to whether the purchaser wants basic foodstuffs to avoid starvation, or luxury items to parade social status. Left to itself, the market-driven economy will simply supply what people can pay for, even if millions of people starve.

Now, of course, there are complex reasons for the fact that vast numbers of poor people today have almost no capital, including wrong personal choices on the part of some; natural disasters; and the abuse of power. Surely one of the reasons that 150 million desperately poor untouchables in India have almost no capital (whether land, money or education) is because of the Hindu caste system. Surely one of the reasons many Native Americans and African Americans have so little capital is because of a long history of oppression and racism.

What the Poor Need

First, the poor need capital. If we start with the present division of wealth, the outcome of the market will be serious injustice. To operate market economies without making productive resources available to the poor is damnable defiance of the biblical God of justice. To endorse and celebrate market economies without clearly and vigorously advocating such redistribution of effective access to



Photos by Dave Witting

At the annual Penner Debate, Ron Sider said that the global market, while effective in helping some, must be evaluated according to biblical principles. He debated Michael Novak.

capital is, I believe, straightforward disobedience to biblical teaching.

Second, I think that the evidence of the last several decades suggests that economic justice comes not from a pure laissez-faire economy but from the right mix of a strong civil society and significant government activity within the framework of democratic capitalism. In my newest book on poverty in America, *Just Generosity*, I have put great emphasis on renewing and strengthening civil society, and I support a variety of measures to greatly increase the role of faith-based organizations. But I also believe that there are significant things, beyond restraining violence and operating fair courts, that only government can do to empower the poor.

Third, we need to be concerned with the way that today's market economies sometimes seem to concentrate wealth in unhealthy ways. I do not believe that equality of income or wealth is a moral requirement. Free societies that respect people's choices will have economic inequality. I am more concerned with what happens to the poor than with the income ratio between the top and the bottom. Of course, I think we need to remember that in a fallen world, power tends to corrupt.

The net worth of the 358 billionaires on the planet listed by *Forbes* magazine in 1994 was equal to the combined income of the bottom 45 percent of the world's population. Today the average CEO earns in two hours what the person working at the minimum wage earns in a full year of work.

Fourth, significant cultural decline often follows the expansion of the market. The most obvious, perhaps, is the sweeping materialism and consumerism that floods the world as country after country joins the global market. The size of one's salary and one's house become more important than God, neighbor, and the creation. It is easy to see how materialistic consumerism develops in market economies. The competitive drive to increase market share encourages ever more seductive advertising. The director of research labs at General Motors, Charles Kettering, decided that business needed to

"Today the average CEO earns in two hours what the person working at the minimum wage earns in a full year of work."

create what he called "the dissatisfied consumer." Annual model changes—planned obsolescence—was his solution. Television, of course, is the most powerful medium. Even the poorest kid in India knows that Coca-Cola refreshes.

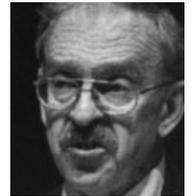
Modern folk cast aside the limits imposed on economic life by the biblical truth that Yahweh is Lord even of economics. And the result has been preoccupation with economic growth, which is now devastating family and community life and the environment. It's idolatrous nonsense to suggest that human fulfillment comes exclusively or primarily from an ever-increasing supply of material things. Genuine, lasting joy comes from a right relationship with God, with neighbor, with self, and with the earth.

The environmental crisis reveals a fifth problem with the way that today's global market economies function. Our rivers and lakes are polluted, the ozone layer is depleted, and the vast majority of our scientists tell us that global warming has already begun. Unfortunately, markets pay inadequate attention to the needs of neighbors or future generations.

People Ahead of Markets

It is empirically false to think that a market economy, if freed from all government interference, would create what the Bible means by justice. Masses of poor folk lack capital, and they're unable to afford even basic necessities. Concentrated wealth threatens democracy and undermines justice. Materialistic messages and practices corrode moral values, family life, and God's creation. To do these things in the name of efficiency is idolatrous. Consumption is not the sole end of economic life. The economy is made for people, not people for an autonomous, efficient, ever-expanding economy. Wholesome family life and wise stewardship of God's garden matter more than economic efficiency. Yahweh is Lord even of economics.

I think all of these problems can be solved within a basic market framework. However, that means hammering out the best—or at least a good—mix of civil society, markets, and government.



Ron Sider is founder and president of Evangelicals for Social Action. He is author of many books on Christian ethics and economics, including the controversial *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977) and the more recent *Just Generosity* (1999). He is a graduate of Yale University (M.Div. and Ph.D. in history). Sider presented these remarks, edited here, during the annual David A. Penner Debate, held September 13, 2000, at Wheaton College and sponsored by the Penner Foundation and the Center for Applied Christian Ethics.

The Ethical Challenges of Global Capitalism: A Response

By Michael Novak



Photos by Dave Wittig

Michael Novak said that economic development flows from the Judeo-Christian worldview. He debated Ron Sider at the annual Penner Debate.

■ Our idea of God is expressed beautifully at the end of Dante's *Paradiso*: "the love that moves the sun and all the stars." While none of us has seen God, He is more like the love between persons—dependent persons—bound in community. The Trinity is a communion of persons. This God wants to bring human beings into the circle of His communion, of His friendship, and this is what leads us to think about all the others in our time who are called into that communion.

So it is no accident that we think of those billions who are unnecessarily poor. There is no reason for the poverty that people are today enduring. It does not have to be. What happens in the next 20 years with the 2.8 billion people whose average income is \$2 a day or less will say a lot about the moral quality of our generation's Christians—and our generation of human beings.

In the poorest countries, many people are unemployed or underemployed. In Latin America, there are about 90 million people aged 15 and younger, and every year millions are fleeing the countryside for the cities. The only way they can use their creative capacities is to find creative and productive employment, and they must either invent that employment themselves through their own enterprise or become an employee of someone else.

The vocation of enterprise, of business, is strategically the most important vocation of Christians, of Jews, of Muslims, of all people who want to help the poor. In Latin America alone, as many as 20 million small businesses need to be established in the next few years. Where else are people going to find work and income? Not in the major corporations or the farms. In Latin America, Africa, and Asia there is an enormous amount of work to be done and an enormous supply of laborers. The electricity of enterprise brings these two cold wires

together. The role of the entrepreneur is not just to have a vision, which is an intellectual virtue, but to make it happen, which is a moral virtue.

Biblical Religion and Economics

Historians of economics point out that it's no accident that the Jewish and Christian part of the world has led the way in economic development. Judaism and Christianity have taught the world that the Creator made every man and woman in His image—that is, to be creative. And He gave us the calling to create more in our lifetimes than we consume. That is the basic principle of economic progress.

America has shown the world the possibility of lifting a majority of people in a nation out of poverty. The so-called population crisis is happening because today, unlike in the past, people are living longer. Since World War II, Bangladesh has grown from 33 million to 99 million people—and every one of those children has the capacity to create more wealth than he or she uses.

What is it that enables economic systems to help people to create more than they consume? To sacrifice today so that the world their children live in will be better and newer than what they have? To invest, rather than just spend, in industries and technologies whose benefits they won't share but their children will? It is self-sacrificing, and if you lose that capacity for invention and discovery, you lose it all. A free society is the most fragile kind of society on earth, because any one generation could decide to turn out the lights. That's what freedom means.

This impulse to be creative, to fulfill the vocation our Creator gave us—and the confidence that we can do it—comes from Christianity. It's not a sin to inquire into nature and unlock the secrets hidden there by the Creator. Once I heard my priest bemoan the fact that in America 6 percent of the world's people are consuming 40 percent of the world's energy. Of course, when my grandfather left Slovakia, energy was horse-power. The first oil well wasn't dug until the early part of the last century.

Electricity was tamed here. Think of it this way: Six percent of the world's people have invented 100 percent of what the world means by energy. And we're not done yet.

The Building Blocks of Wealth

Capital, therefore, is not something you have access to, like fruit on a tree. You have to invent it or discover it. Who knew that sand had silicon, and that silicon had the enormous potential to give us a whole new electronic age? Remember that when Ronald Reagan became president, the largest industries were mechanical. Today we have personal computers, faxes, cellular phones, e-mail, and the Internet. That's enormous wealth, and people had to invent it, and to invent it, they had to have the rights to it. This is what is called live capital. A home with a mortgage is one example. You have not only the land but also some money you can use to invest in invention and discovery elsewhere.

By contrast, all over the former Soviet Union you see land, but it's inert. No one can have a sure title or take out a mortgage on it. The vast majority of people in Latin America, for example, work as entrepreneurs, trying to sell you things. But most don't have a license and can be shut down any minute.

Another thing people need is access to credit, which is the mother's milk of enterprise. Without the capacity to borrow, you can't make things, you can't borrow, you can't hire. There is no credit for the poor in Latin America. Following the model of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, I would make cheap loans universal. Many Christians are specializing in microloans throughout Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere to get people started in business. We need to stop criminalizing economic activity between consenting adults and give people cheap access to credit so you don't have to be rich to borrow money.

People also need education. Brazil is probably the richest country on earth as it came from the hand of God—more wealth, more minerals, more oil

than any other country, rivaled only by the United States (including Alaska) or Russia (with Siberia). There is no reason it has to be one of the poorest countries on earth, except for the fact that the human capital there is so underdeveloped. It's a crime that over half the population has fewer than three years of education. The No. 1 social program there should be education.

The wrong question to ask is, "What are the causes of poverty?" Once you have the answer, you simply know how to make more poverty. Poverty is what is natural and what the vast majority of human beings has always known, before the United States. The right question to ask is, "What is the cause of the wealth of nations?" In a single word, it is wit—human *caput*, or capital. Practically every source of wealth in the United States was invented by someone.

The Job Ahead

Globalization is not just economic, of course. A moral revolution is also happening all over the world. For the first time, people are awakening to the fact that they are active human subjects with dignity of their own and with rights that don't come to them from the state. They may not be Christians, but they are already getting the Jewish-Christian

idea indirectly, that their rights are endowed by God. There is also a political revolution with the spreading of democracy, particularly in the largely Catholic countries.

Finally there is the economic dimension, transforming in my lifetime places like South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore from some of the poorest places on earth to some of the richest. Most of it happened by enterprise, by hard work. It can be done in a generation; it doesn't take forever. We in this country don't know everything, but we do know how to move people out of poverty. The job of democracy and capitalism, and indeed on the earthly front, of Christianity and Judaism, won't be done until we give everyone on earth the opportunity to escape poverty.



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"We need to stop criminalizing economic activity between consenting adults and give people cheap access to credit so you don't have to be rich to borrow money."

Ethical Questions Concerning the Global Market

By Martin E. Marty



■ Christian ethical thinkers must realize that no set of economic arrangements will be simply congruent with the Kingdom of God, nor are they simply to

be seen as fulfillments of prophetic faith. This implies the need for realism among both defenders and critics of aspects of the global market. To label critics of the market in practice as utopian on one hand, or defenders of the market in practice as idolaters, on the other, will render conversation impossible and argument uncivil.

While in the eye of faith the Lord of history works and can be served in a world that has seen many economic arrangements, for the foreseeable future Christian thinking will occur within the context of the global market. How address it? I will take my first clues from Glen Tinder, whose writings on the political meanings of Christianity and the Christian meanings of politics can translate to economics.

The “Exalted Individual”

In such a framework, the origins, the ethical concern, and the constant focus is “the exalted individual.” This is not Nietzsche’s man-as-God but is instead the human as seen in the light of God-made-human in Jesus Christ. In our time ethical thinkers from Pope John Paul II across a spectrum of religious figures have spoken *dignitaries humanae*, “of human dignity.”

The market allows for marvelous expressions of human dignity, inventiveness, imagination, and enterprise. Fine. It also robs individuals of dignity when they are victims of the downside of market life, left out, given no opportunity even to enter the market. And it can rob them of dignity when they are agents of market life, if this means that they become nothing but competitors who must “do in” the other; consumers who lose all purpose in life

except to purchase, display, consume, and exhaust resources and products.

The “Prophetic Community”

The second context for framing Christian meanings, again borrowed from Tinder, is “the prophetic community.” Just as there is no single philosophical, ethical, biblical, or specifically Christian consensus that covers the front for the individual, so too the concept of the prophetic community cannot mean one single form.

Not to address the implications of agencies such as the market from the viewpoint of what it means for human community is to deny the prophetic and critical role. But there will be different words for such a prophetic community to employ in rich worlds than in poor, or when relating the two sets of worlds from above, where the wealth is, and from below, where the poor are left out of the market.

Other Issues

Add to these two a set of ethical concerns as ancient as the scriptures and as urgent as the headlines, including some of these:

The market as it exists relies upon necessary, constant economic growth, which means more producing and buying and selling, which also means exploitation of natural resources and, with that, waste. These challenge concepts of stewardship of the earth. The market as now conceived shares the capitalist instrument of “creative destruction” to make way for the new.

While the communisms and socialisms failed utterly to produce economic equality in the systems where these were related to authoritarian government, the market, for all the positive features it may present, does not have in it sufficient instruments for addressing gaps between rich and poor nations and rich and poor citizens in rich nations. Simply to invoke the biblical utterances against the rich is not likely to inspire change. So ethicists have to address the complexities of the market to help narrow gaps

and fill gulfs, with full awareness that the equality promised by the social-isms have little or no promise of delivery today.

Market life has been and often is destructive of various social forms that offer dignity and freedom. The stresses on family life, the distraction from other interests, the loss of leisure and the sabbath, the personal stress that comes with constant competition, need to be addressed by all who want to make ethical sense of the market world. At this point also the prophetic community addresses the greed, commodification of the person, and materialism that come with the world of the market (as they do also with the various social economic systems, if in different ways).

Monopoly has been and remains a corollary of market existence, and with monopoly comes a host of ethical challenges, both to those who hold the power that comes with monopoly and those left out.

Reappraisal of the role of governments in a world governed by markets implies ethical considerations. How do we regard “the state”? When is it right for the state to intervene? How do we assure that some measure of justice comes with such intervention? How do we relate human rights to the economic order? We have found it difficult to discuss human rights on a global scale, since in so many places in the world reasoning about such rights differs vastly from that which gave rise to the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights more than a half century ago. Must there first be rights in order to have a productive economic order? China does not think so: It has “capitalism” within “communism,” the encouragement to be economically productive along with the discouragement of all political liberties. In the vestigially “tribal” and much of the poor world, we hear, people look for group and not individual rights. But group rights do little for the market.

The Search for Bases

It is as easy to criticize the social forms of the century past, the communisms and socialisms, now that their failures are so evident, as it is easy to laud

the social forms that go with the market, especially in those times when it offers much to so many. It is easy to criticize the market if and when one acquires the perspective of those who live where the benefits and opportunities that go with market life are almost impossible to discern and obtain.

What attracts the energies of ethicists on the global scene is the need to find bases for adjudication of instances and programs in the real world, in which the market cannot fully deliver while it can blind those who should criticize it, but also in which the market has led to prosperity, comfort, security, and opportunities for service for so many.

The search for such bases, difficult as it has been in nations with philosophical and religious traditions that have some tradition of coherence, is even more challenging on the global scene. If the one-third of the world population that is Christian exists in more than 30,000 denominational forms and is disorganized into myriad ethical patterns, dealing with the rest of the world with its many divisions seems almost beyond reach.

Thus in the one-fifth of the world in which Islam is regnant, and where the interpretation of sacred scriptures leads to strictures against taking interest, how should agents of the market outside Islamdom relate, since such interest-taking this side of usury is at the heart of the system? One cannot play off scripture against scripture and emerge with consensus.

What else is available? “Natural law”? That does not even provide the base for consensus in the West where it has long played a role. “Convergence of religions”? Not likely. There can be ecumenical and interfaith relations for centuries without realization of unity about faith sufficient to have it serve as the scaffolding.

That being the case, one might argue that the most urgent ethical issue is the search for a way to address ethical issues. The voices of faith will speak and the ears of the faithful will listen to those of other faiths and no faiths in pursuit of human dignity and a more realized human community, as those of Christian faith greet the new global market.

“One might argue that the most urgent ethical issue is the search for a way to address ethical issues.”

Martin E. Marty is Fairfax M. Cone distinguished service professor emeritus at the University of Chicago. Marty directed, with R. Scott Appleby, the Fundamentalism Project, a series of volumes on fundamentalist movements within major religious traditions. Together they edited *Fundamentalisms Observed* (University of Chicago Press, 1991). Formerly the editor of *The Christian Century*, he is the author of the multivolume *Modern American Religion* (University of Chicago). He is also a Lutheran minister.

Living With Christian Integrity in a Global Context

By Teri McCarthy

■ *The Chronicle of Higher Education* calls the global cultural influence of the United States the “McDonaldization” of the world. Everything from Hollywood to Coca-Cola is now known around the world. With English becoming the new lingua franca and with the advent of the Internet, continued globalization is certain. Many emerging nations and developing nations look to the West, in particular the U.S., for help in the areas of business, finance, science, technology and education. This affords North American Christians the unique opportunity to live and serve overseas. This development of global culture, global commerce, and global interests

also places new demands on Christian workers abroad. It raises an important question: What does Christian integrity look like in a global culture?

Basic Considerations

I work with an international organization that trains and sends evangelical professors to teach in secular universities outside of North America. On the first day of orientation, they begin to differentiate what belongs to Christ and what belongs to America. We tell them, “Don’t wrap your Christianity in the American flag.” Our job as Christians involved in cross-cultural ministry is to introduce Christ to the lost, not to Westernize the non-Western. The U.S. does not have the answers to the world’s problems. In fact, in spite of all the progress we have made over the past 200 years, we are not able to resolve many of our own social ills, including crime, violence among youth, and prejudice. So as Christians, who are considered to be Western experts, by working abroad we can serve the nations by sharing our expertise in science, technology, and finance, without trying to replicate U.S. culture.

Another difficulty for Christian workers abroad is maintaining a spirit of humility in spite of

the accolades and honors an expatriate often receives. The expertise of the Christian worker, whether it is in running a large corporation or teaching a class, can result in the local people putting the Christian on a kind of pedestal. A practical way of turning that status into something that will glorify God is to live and act Christianly. Christian integrity means being honest in business dealings; doing one’s work with excellence and integrity; being a good listener; soliciting and receiving advice and suggestions from colleagues.

Practical ways of showing integrity are to show up at work on time, keep promises, stand for justice, and refrain from complaining about difficulties endured in the host nation.

Many of our academicians who teach in overseas universities are looked upon as vast sources of knowledge. The university administration, the faculty, and students believe these individuals hold the answers to their nation’s problems and challenges. It is difficult to maintain a spirit of humility in such a heady atmosphere. However, humility is crucial so that a spirit of servanthood, gentleness, and meekness may be presented in order for Christ’s agenda to be fulfilled. Taking on the spirit of a servant, it is vital to reflect Christ in professional teaching, excellence in research, and in caring relationships.

Appreciating Cultural Diversity

For those of us who work internationally, it is important to realize that the nations we serve have many qualities and values equal to or even better than those of North Americans. Much of Western theology teaches that Christ is the fulfillment of the best of human achievement. Thus, we must go as learners as well as experts. For Christians, global living is not about “cultural cloning,” but about bringing glory to God through our work, our attitudes, and our lives. Then, perhaps, we may share our faith with others and make disciples for Christ. By showing respect and appreciation for the host nation, we can reflect the high value Christ places on all human



life. After I had been living in Moscow for several months, one of my Russian friends told me, “I am falling in love with Russia all over again seeing it through your eyes. You love Russia more than the Russians do.” My excitement and enthusiasm over their music, art, and ballet gave my Russian friends and colleagues a sense of pride.

More and more of Christianity is being imported to emerging and developing nations, unfortunately, as part and parcel of Western culture. Seeker-sensitive services, praise and worship styles, service times and scheduling, and even the buildings look like franchises of the church in the U.S. Throughout the 19th century and during the first half of the 20th century, missionaries from the West erroneously tried to duplicate their culture in the lives of the converted nationals. Eventually this approach was recognized by missionaries and anthropologists alike as wrong. In an attempt to correct this tendency, unbiblical practices were accepted in the name of tolerance and diversity, leading to syncretism. Neither extreme is correct. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, Christ should be brought into harmonious relationship with culture. Or as Niebuhr puts it, we should bring culture into harmonious relationship with Christ.

As Christian workers living in a global context, integrity means finding ways in which Christ’s teachings are reflected or practiced through cultural norms in the host nation and then living by them, such as respecting the elderly in Asia, practicing hospitality in Africa, or engaging in generous, sacrificial giving in the Middle East. By applying these admired cultural norms, we then can introduce honesty, integrity, chastity, and family values with much more credibility.

Paul Schrottenboer has said, “It is of prime importance that we assume an appreciative as well as a critical approach to Western culture.” In the workplace, where perhaps overt evangelism is inappropriate, we must be dedicated to a work ethic that is not only based on excellence, but is appropriate for the cultural norms of our host country. Whereas we in

the West are more task-oriented, Asian cultures will usually see that as nonrelational. We then must adapt our work style to reflect admirable qualities in the host culture.

The Challenge

Today, those of us involved in Christian work internationally face a whole new challenge. With the eagerness of the world, especially developing nations, to emulate American culture, it is tempting to export our Christianity on a cargo ship carrying all things Western. Not only is that wrong, it is dangerous.

In 1998, I worked on a curriculum reform project at a university in China. During that time the film *Titanic* was being shown nationwide. This was the first film from the West allowed to enter China uncensored and unedited. Some of my students saw this film 15 or 16 times. The Chinese press labeled the infatuation with the film “Titanic fever.” One of my students insisted that I go to see the film with her. I went. The next day I prepared an all-campus lecture titled, “Hollywood is Not Your Friend.” I tried to point out to my

students the absolutes of right and wrong. I explained that sex outside of marriage, though it looks very romantic on the movie screen, results in unwanted pregnancies and diseases. I stood before an auditorium filled with hundreds of students and tried to explain the shortcomings of my culture that they were so eager to emulate. I had to stand for truth and righteousness even though it meant public criticism of my nation’s values and prevailing culture.

Today, even though 70 percent of Christianity now exists outside of the U.S., Western Christian workers’ expertise is needed. When asked for, we should respond. But now Christians from North America face two tasks in international ministry—that of presenting Christ and that of denouncing all that is in our culture that is not of Christ. Standing within culture, knowing that it may be highly resistant to the gospel, we must continue to proclaim the redemptive grace of God in Jesus Christ, even if that culture is our own.

“More and more of Christianity is being imported to emerging and developing nations, unfortunately, as part and parcel of Western culture.”

Teri McCarthy has a Ph.D. in education from University of Kansas School of Education. She is the director of faculty development at the International Institute for Christian Studies, which sends evangelicals with doctorates to teach in secular universities outside of the U.S. and Canada. Her husband, Daryl McCarthy, is the executive director of the IICS. They live and work in Overland Park, Kansas.

Money and Power: Ethical Issues Facing the Global Church in the Third Millennium

By Stan Guthrie

■ A few years ago, several missionaries and an Egyptian were arrested in Cairo. To win a hearing for their beliefs, these Christians had taken to calling themselves “Muslims,” on the theory that “Muslim” means “one who is submitted to God.” The authorities, however, did not appreciate this appropriation of a cherished religious term and, angered that the group had upset religious sensibilities during an Islamic festival, threw them in prison.



That might have been the last anyone would hear of the group, except for the fact that the missionaries were Americans. Anticipating trouble, before they left for Cairo, they had informed several U.S. congressmen that they might require some government assistance.

When the Egyptian government turned down a formal U.S. government request to release the missionaries as a humanitarian act, one of the congressmen, who was on a committee in charge of foreign aid, threatened Egypt with the loss of all foreign aid. Egypt was forced to capitulate. The Americans were released, then expelled from the country. Their Egyptian co-worker, however, was transferred to a mental hospital, where he underwent psychological torture.

Writing about the incident in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Ralph Covell, a former missionary to China, said, “We may save our necks by an appeal to our government. But what are the consequences for God’s kingdom . . .?”

Such thorny issues are increasingly common given the globalization of the Christian faith. Christianity’s growth was remarkable in the 20th century, particularly the latter half. In 1960, an estimated 58 percent of the world’s Christians were Westerners; in 1990, just 38 percent were. Latin

America’s evangelical presence, meanwhile, has exploded from a mere 200,000 or 300,000 in 1900 to 60 million. Today, with about one-third of the earth’s approximately 6 billion people, Christians of all kinds are present in every nation state.

Incidents like the one above illustrate that Westerners face ethical pitfalls as they attempt to serve with their brothers and sisters from other parts of the world. I will highlight those of power and money in this article.

Political Involvement

At the beginning of the 1990s, a handful of evangelical Christian agencies tried in vain to generate concern for their persecuted brethren around the world, either in Washington, D.C., or from among fellow Christians. That has changed decisively. The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP) has both powered much of this newfound interest and ridden its crest. The 1999 edition linked perhaps 120 million Christians from an estimated 300,000 churches and agencies in 130 nations in prayer for the persecuted.

While IDOP is strictly nonpolitical in its orientation and practice, not everything done for persecuted Christians meets that standard. After several years of intense lobbying, religious rights advocates were pleased when the Clinton Administration signed into law the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The law requires the State Department to issue an annual report spotlighting abuses. Governments with the most systematic and egregious violations run the risk of incurring economic sanctions. Governments currently on the hot seat with religious freedom advocates are Sudan, Indonesia, and China.

Some evangelicals, however, worry about the long-term effects of punitive government enforcement of religious freedom. Historians say that the Christian church went downhill spiritually after Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313. In effect, the

church has done better as a persecuted minority than it has as part of the establishment.

How do we balance the competing biblical demands for justice and spiritual purity? Should Christians call on the wrath of government to punish persecuting regimes? Certainly, military action must be ruled out. Many in the Muslim world already project their own approach—which melds government and religion into one oppressive system—onto the West, wrongly believing that the U.S. is a Christian political state. If we want to avoid any reprise of the Crusades, we must tread lightly.

How about calling on less direct forms of government power, such as sanctions, in the name of religious freedom? Given that sanctions are a form of war on the cheap (see Iraq and Serbia) and business is sometimes war by other means, I think here, too, Christians must be careful not to be “unequally yoked” with secular power. Certainly any sanctions employed should not hurt the common people but the offending regime itself. I think the safer, though less satisfying, course, is to rely on prayer, quiet diplomacy, and well-timed publicizing of abuses. Jesus explicitly forbade the use of the sword in defending His kingdom, which he said clearly “is not of this world.”

Financial Strings Attached

Another issue Western Christians must wrestle with is whether or how to financially support fellow believers from poorer parts of the world. Many missionaries and agency executives are careful to distinguish between financially supporting overseas missionaries, a process they view as necessary, and supporting church workers, which they view with suspicion. Supporting missionaries is expected, of course, because these workers go where there are no churches that could pay them. At least one study, done in Indonesia, indicates that churches generally grow better and have fewer problems if they pay their own pastors.

At one church in Latin America with few financial resources, American missionaries chose a

gifted young Christian from the country to become the pastor. They paid his entire salary in the hope that the church would eventually be able to support him as it grew. Unfortunately, that never happened, and the pastor and his wife remained dependent on the missionaries.

Later, the pastor was found to have been involved in a moral failure. He also physically abused his wife, who said nothing. When one of the missionaries later asked her why she had remained silent for so long, the woman replied, “If I admitted that we were having problems, I feared that the mission-

aries would ‘fire’ my husband. I needed the missionaries to think well of us in order to maintain the salary. So I covered up for him.”

Missions experts say that doing missions by checkbook has other perils. Money without accountability can kill initiative and create division and dependence overseas, just as misguided government spending does in the United States. Robertson McQuilkin created a stir with his 1999 article in *Christianity Today*, “Stop Sending Money! Breaking the cycle of missions dependency.” McQuilkin, former president of Columbia International University, stated, “Sharing financial resources

in a way that is spiritually empowering and Great Commission-completing for both donor and recipient is our greatest unsolved problem.”

Resolving the problem requires careful planning and prayer, on a case by case basis. Any financial gifts should be in limited amounts and for short durations. The highly effective Friends Missionary Prayer Band, an evangelistic organization in India, for example, refuses to accept Western money, except for capital projects. The key may be one of attitude.

In his book *Building Strategic Relationships*, Daniel Rickett of Partners International notes, “In today’s global village we have to learn how to deal with each other as true brothers and sisters, while learning to obey God and advance the gospel. This ultimately brings us to very practical questions about sharing power, resources, and responsibilities.”

“How do we balance the competing biblical demands for justice and spiritual purity? Should Christians call on the wrath of government to punish persecuting regimes?”

Stan Guthrie, formerly the managing editor of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and the editor of *World Pulse*, is the associate news editor for *Christianity Today*. His book, *Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21st Century*, has just been published by Paternoster. He also served as Darrow Miller’s co-author for the 1998 book, *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Youth With A Mission). Guthrie is the editor of *Discernment*.

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