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# **Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics**

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Chapter Six  
**Man in Society**  
E. David Cook

## CHAPTER SIX

# Man in Society

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THE PHILOSOPHY STUDENT SOON LEARNS THAT TRUE philosophy is all about metaphysics. Metaphysics, whatever that is, asks the nitty-gritty questions. What is true? What is there? How do we know? The second thing we learn is that every philosophy rests on a presuppositional framework. We all need a point from which to lever the world. That basic framework presupposes crucial things in epistemology and ontology. Before we can give a description of the world and our views concerning the nature of things we must make assumptions about what there is, what we can and do know and what constitutes truth and falsity. The real interest concerning epistemology and ontology comes to a head in political and religious terms with the particular anthropology each view holds. Too rarely do we examine the anthropology of the great ideologies which are competing for our attention in the twentieth century. What is man? How are we to understand him and his nature?

### *Behaviourism and Existentialism*

The modern tendency, particularly evidenced in sociology and anthropology, is to adopt the observer viewpoint. The sociologist stands on the side-lines and watches the game in progress. His task is purely descriptive. He describes the

phenomena. His special delight is to concentrate on people's behaviour. What they do matters more than what they say or are in themselves. (I am reminded of a philosophical graffito in Keele University: 'To be is to do — existentialism. To do is to be — behaviourism. Do be do be do — Sinatra.') Man is interpreted as his behaviour. Behind this lie particular materialistic presuppositions which are reductionist in flavour. Man is reduced from any psycho-spiritual, physical unity to the level of the purely physical, be that chemical or biological. Man is seen as simply a machine and society interpreted as a social mechanism.

This reductionism has evoked an equal and opposite force in reaction. 'I am a human being. Do not fold, mutilate or shred.' The anti-mechanism, anti-behaviourism views find their most natural expression in literary and artistic settings. Existentialist drama reveals this reaction at the other extreme where attention is fastened on specific moments of human experience in which the internal experience is the key to any understanding. This is what makes existentialism such a difficult philosophy to grasp. In a sense it cannot be stated, it can only be shown. Thus the existentialist novelist, dramatist and artist do not so much propound a philosophical stance, as present us with situations where we are called on to enter not only imaginatively but in reality into the absurdity, pointlessness and lack of meaning which is the human lot. Man is what he experiences and particularly what he wills. The sum of man is his choices.<sup>1</sup>

The existentialist position also reduces to phenomenology, where the facts of inner experience are examined and re-experienced, but rather than this leading to objectivity it leads to the opposite, subjectivity, whether we take the observer viewpoint or the participating position. Both extremes seem to be at fault, for there is a much more complex, yet dynamic interaction between subjectivity and objectivity which modern science is leading us towards and which we need to grasp in every area of study, not least in theology.

The Christian then comes to a society and culture which in fact have contradictory views of the nature of man. Man is simply matter. Man is purely biological. Man is purely the product of his conditioning. Man is what his society makes him. Man is the sum of his behaviour. Man is what he feels and wills. Man is . . . The Christian view of man seems to be

1. For a fuller account see *Blind Alley Beliefs* (Glasgow, 1979), by the present writer.

no more than and accordingly no less than an alternative to these views. Ideally we should proceed as follows.

Given a number of competing theories as to the nature of man there must be a procedure for deciding between them. This entails looking at each view in turn. The examination would take the following form. First, we would be seeking to discern the inner logic of each view. We would be trying to test each view for internal coherence and self-consistency. Given that it was consistent and not self-contradictory we would then move to the next level of analysis. Secondly, we would wish to test each view as to its correspondence with reality and the facts. This is more difficult for most views actually offer some definition of what constitutes the facts, but the point and test must still stand in the sense that each view must be seen to match up with reality and not to contradict what we experience, discover and are confronted by in the world and society. Given this correspondence test, we are then, and only then, in a position truly to compare and contrast alternative views.

The basis of judgement between competing views must rest on which offers the best sort of explanation in either completeness or economy and neatness — which is a version of Occam's Razor. There is a third kind of test between alternatives, that of fertility in creating new ideas and bringing about creativity.<sup>2</sup> This stems from the application of relativity theory to research and epistemology.

As Christians it is essential that in both apologetics and ethics we take alternative views very seriously, especially those which have a large following in our culture. To take them seriously means to seek to understand and then criticize them along the lines suggested. Such examinations are out-with the scope of my present paper, but the analysis of the Marxist challenge<sup>3</sup> is the kind of thing I have in mind. I rather wish to turn our attention to the other horn of the dilemma I raised, the nature of biblical anthropology. Before we are able to develop a proper relation between biblical anthropology and the many differing cultural expressions of the nature of man we must be clear about the nature of man as outlined in Scripture.

My aim will be to give an overview of the doctrine of man, bearing in mind the bases and contents of alternative views and accordingly seeking to highlight the points of contact.

2. See T. F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (Oxford, 1969).

3. See chapter five.

These points may be used in positive and negative ways. They may be seen as a common basis for discussion and joint projects as has been the case with some Christian-Marxist dialogue and its expression in liberation theology in the South American setting. Alternatively, the points of contact may rather become sticking points at which fundamental decisions must be taken to discern the truth of one view and falsity of another.

Given the backdrop of a biblical anthropology, I wish then to turn our attention to three key social issues which, I believe, have far-reaching implications in ethical, political, and social policy terms. These are individualism and collectivism, sex, and race. My aim in this section will be simply to draw attention to the nature of the issues and to suggest some dangers to be avoided and avenues to be pursued. In the final section I wish to develop briefly four areas where the strengths of traditional Evangelicalism need to be applied to our culture along with a parallel awareness of Evangelicalism's own inadequacies and weaknesses.

### *The Biblical Doctrine of Man*

Traditionally there are two great starting points for the development of a biblical anthropology. Oliver O'Donovan described these as creation and kingdom.<sup>4</sup> The first starts at the beginning and develops the doctrine of man along the lines of progression from creation and all that it entails. We shall see where this leads us. The alternative is to begin with the revelation of man at his best and this must mean beginning with the person of Christ, the perfect man. Having seen the ideal we can then understand how far short mankind falls of God's perfect standard. For the sake of completeness we shall utilize both approaches.

### *Image and Dust*

The creation-centred approach may be summed up in the word *image*. The idea of the image of God has formed the basis for many theological positions from Irenaeus through Schleiermacher to Brunner. Man is made in the image of

4. See chapter one.



God. In this way man is both a representation and a representative. He cannot be understood only by reference to himself. This is the rock on which the modern subjectivist tendencies within and without theology must shatter. Man is not truly self-referent. To understand his nature fully we must be able to refer to the original, to that which is represented in man.

What is more tendentious however is the actual content which we may attach to the notion of 'image'. Are we simply dealing with certain *formal* characteristics of man, or are there specific *qualities* which may be discerned? Brunner, for example, draws the distinction between man having the form of God but not having the content.<sup>5</sup> The formal image of God in man is responsibility and answerability. The content, which man lacks, is being in love. Thus man is confronted with the demand to take responsibility in loving his fellow man, himself and God, but lacks the ability to be a 'lover'. It is not my intention to seek to explicate the meaning of the term image, for there is exceedingly little in Scripture to go on. Rather I want to take the bald statement of man being in the image of God and see what implications we may legitimately derive from the Bible.

The first main theme is that man is made in God's image not because man chooses to be but because God makes man thus. We are created beings. We are not free to be whatever we wish to be or would like to be. We are God's creatures and that must imply certain limits as to what man is able to do and to be. Perhaps one of the key limits is that of freedom, or in more traditional philosophical language, that of autonomy. Is man free to make his own laws and to live his life in anyway he pleases? The Christian answer must be negative. Man may try to live without reference to God and even try to assume responsibility for himself, but he cannot escape from his maker and his created being. He does not have infinite possibilities for change bound up in himself. Man is limited.

Given man's created nature, it is crucial for man to understand his limits both in physical and psychological terms, but also in social and spiritual areas too. Some human experiments are bound to fail, given the nature of man. If we examine some of the areas of breakdown in terms of individual and social collapse we may see some of the limits of man and thus be able to define what he is, by seeing what he cannot be and do.

5. E. Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, (London, 1942).

### *Rationality and Personality*

Theologians have tried to express the content of man's image of God along the lines of rationality and personality. To illustrate the first we turn to science. The scientist begins the business of scientific research making two assumptions. The first is that there is something there to be understood and the second that he will be able to understand it. He assumes a basic rationality in the nature of things and in himself. If God is the creator it is reasonable to suppose that things have a purpose and order. Hence for centuries science and theology went hand in hand. To study God was to study the nature of things in their ultimate rationality. If we are made in the image of God we share in his rationality. I do not myself think that this means that we are all highly intelligent, but rather that it is the level of rationality which marks off sanity from insanity, the child from the adult, humanity from animality. This is crucial for our understanding of man in society. If we are fundamentally rational beings, there is the possibility of argument, discussion, reasoning, justification, evidence and science. Without such rationality, there seems no genuine basis for communication, understanding, joint-functioning, informed choice, evangelism, or apologetic. How we treat people and how we educate our children and how we expand the frontiers of knowledge all rest on rationality. The alternative is irrationalism and chaos, offering no hope of understanding God, ourselves or our world.

The other theme is that of personality. What is the real person? Is it the physical body we all see and identify as Tom Jones? Or is the real Tom lurking somewhere inside? Peter Sarstedt expressed it thus: 'Where do you go to my lovely, when you're alone in your bed? Tell me the thoughts that surround you. I want to look inside your head.' Some suggest that the real I and the real you is our inner being, our spirit, our soul. For some this is described by God breathing his life within us. What seems crucial for biblical anthropology is that man is more than his body and more than his mind. We must not start with a divided self or person, for we can never then put the pieces together. Rather we must see man as a psycho-somatic unity. Our society must then deal with the whole person — physical, mental and spiritual. Any ordering of society which ignores aspects of man's being is destined to cause harm and to be not only destructive but self-destructive. In terms of our social policies, or our church pro-

grammes, are we truly dealing with the whole person?

Where the breakdown most obviously occurs is in the realm of work. It is no surprise that *Which?* discovered that clergy are the poorest paid but most satisfied of all workers, particularly at the professional level. God gave man work to do. If man does that work properly then he pleases God. That is he worships God by responding properly to God. We may illustrate this by considering man's unity with nature and yet his difference from it.<sup>6</sup>

### *Man and Nature*

Links between man and nature are obvious in the common biological and chemical make-up which man shares with the animal world. He is dust and to dust he must return. But man's unity with nature does not imply identity. Some ecologists adopt a Buddhist-type approach which sees man and nature as basically one. This view tends to glorify, romanticize and even to deify nature. Unacceptable conclusions follow: if nature is beyond detraction it must be accepted warts and all. But it is not always benevolent and a view which encourages its uncritical acceptance must quickly degenerate into a fatalism which accepts whatever happens as good and right. Furthermore it reduces man to the level of grass, though there does appear to be a difference between man thinking he is the same as grass, and grass thinking that man is the same as grass.

Man differs from nature. Though man is part of his environment, he is distinguishable from it. In thought he can disengage from his surroundings, can ask and answer questions and act accordingly. Between man and his environment there is a basic, qualitative distinction. To say this is not to be arrogant, but rather to state the obvious.

In the creation story man is distinguished from nature in several ways. He is the climax of God's work: only when he is included in the now completed creative process is creation pronounced to be very good. Man is made in the image of God. Therefore his function in nature is unique. God gives him an injunction: he is told to multiply, to subdue the earth and to have dominion over the animal realm.

In fulfilling this commission man has been guilty of abuse.

6. See E. D. Cook, 'Some Theological Implications for Ecology', *Faith and Thought* 102 (1975), pp. 184-196.

He has too often become parasitical on nature and deified himself. But in exercising dominion, is it necessary for man to be aggressive? Part of the problem is that the words 'dominion' and 'subdue' can be suggestive of aggressiveness. Yet they have other connotations too, e.g. of the rule of a king over a people or a master over a servant. Dominion need not imply domination; certainly it does not imply extermination. A balance is possible between creatureliness and dominion. The biblical picture is of the shepherd-king who cares for and protects his flock. This is the model for man. One expression of this role is seen in the naming of the animals. Control over the name implies control over the named object, but man's giving of the names, although it implies power, is a loving, gentle act almost paralleled by our use of private nicknames for those we love.

The pre-fall situation ought not to be the main focus of attention in understanding man's difference from the rest of creation. It is rather to the flood narrative that attention must be drawn. It is in the renewal of a covenant with man that God describes the situation of our fallen world. In Genesis 9 we find the beginnings of fear and dread on the part of animals towards man. Animal flesh is now, for the first time, at man's disposal as a food supply. After the flood, there is a clear and violent separation of man from the animal world.

The Bible now pictures man as a rebel. He is selfish, self-centred and sinful. Through the fall he becomes a tyrant over nature. The ecological crisis is one fruit of that sin. It is to be doubted whether man can ever totally overcome the results of his sin and disobedience in relation to the natural realm, until he is totally redeemed. If so, it is only proximate cures we can hope for rather than absolute ones. For the Christian in society this may result in questions as to how best to use his energy and time. Should he first seek to change men recognizing that it is the changed man who has the potential for God-like relationships with creation? Or should he seek to alleviate the situation by other means which would involve a realistic assessment of man's condition and hence the recognition that man's attitude to his environment will be changed only by appeal to selfish motives?

It is important to note that the final difference between man and nature is not so much in status as in function. Man is called to be a manager, trustee, steward or vice-regent. On God's mandate, he is entitled to live from the estate, but that

7. See chapters three and seven.

does not mean he owns it. It is held in trust for his Lord, to whom he is answerable; he will be called to give an account of his stewardship. Yet this is no mere business relationship, but one of love in which man is seen as a co-worker with God. This work is not to be characterized by a 'laissez-faire' attitude. A good manager is involved in research and development for his master, remembering that the shepherding is his model and that the sheep matter. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, it is the developer who is rewarded and not the conservationist. This is no charter for exploitation, for the gain was in no way selfish, but all part of fulfilment of stewardship. The conservationist made no attempt to put his resources to their proper use and so reaped the unpleasant consequences.

Man is one with nature — yet different from it — in the work he has been given to do. At the same time it was not good for man to be alone. Man on his own lacked something so God created man in society. If the well-being of man is to be any kind of criterion, man is necessarily a social being. Some have seen in this a reflection of the Trinitarian nature of the Godhead. The Father, Son and Spirit live in community in which there is unity yet difference. Man is to reflect even that aspect of the Godhead — unity in difference and difference in unity. The history of salvation has reinforced this point. It is the people of Israel who are in communion or out of it with God. The sin of one, for example Achan, affects the whole. This same community is part and parcel of the New Testament with the emergence of the church, the new people of God. This raises questions as to which social setting is basic and crucial for our view of anthropology, but before we come to that we must sum up this section.

Man is made from the dust of the earth in the image of God. As dust and image he is created. He has the likeness of God but is not God himself. He has a purpose and a task to fulfil set in the context of a community no matter how basic. What we have not stressed is the fallenness of man. It is part of the weakness of the image approach that it necessarily plays down the fall, yet cannot deny it all together. The least it can say is that man is not what he ought to be. In one sense that is enough for us. Man is not only created, he is also not now as he ought to be. He falls short of the glory of God. He does not fulfil the image of God. The marks of fallenness are everywhere. Even the Marxist makes them clear. He stresses man's inhumanity to man, man's inhumanity to the created

order, to nature itself, and man's inability to live with himself in any kind of harmony and peace. Sin has marred the image, but to what extent? Is it a fatal shattering, or is there enough of that image left to build a new society? Man is dust — but he is also destined for glory.

### *Incarnation and Glory*

The second key approach to a biblical anthropology must be more briefly treated. It centres on the incarnation, the revelation of Christ. One effect of the publication of *The Myth of God Incarnate*<sup>8</sup> has been to make the whole church ask what difference if any the incarnation makes. Is the incarnation fundamental to Christianity or not? What kind of faith is left if we remove the divinity of Christ? A truly biblical anthropology reveals man not only as he is, but also as he may be. This is where the incarnation becomes the starting point for anthropology. We can understand man properly only if we see him as he should be. 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity, Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Immanuel' — God with us. In one crucial sense this reduces God to a size and shape that humanity can grasp. God is in Christ tangible, comprehensible, knowable. And yet the tantalizing thing about Christ is that the more we seem to get to know him, the less we really appear to understand. We *apprehend* something of God, but we do not *comprehend* him in the sense of fully grasping and knowing him.

If there is any doubt about the goodness of matter, then the incarnation shows again that matter is not in itself evil. This enables the possibility which becomes actuality in Christ, that humanity need not be defeated by sin. The biblical picture is one of man struggling; Paul expresses it as the flesh striving against the spirit. In Christ we see the victory over the flesh, the world and the devil. The human is still human, but it is what true humanness was created to be. The 'very God and very man' of the reformed catechisms draws our attention again and again to the true divinity and true humanity of Christ. If he is less than divine we are no better off, for he cannot help our predicament. If he is more than human he has an unfair advantage and offers real man no hope in this world of coping with the flesh and the devil. This is the key way in which the transcendent becomes immanent. Either

8. *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. J. Hick (London, 1977).

alone is useless. The totally transcendent God is too distant from man to make any difference, the totally immanent God is too near man to be able to change his basic condition. Thus a point of intersection between the transcendent and the immanent is required and that is Christ who is fully both and exclusively neither.

In the model of Christ we have the revelation of the glory of God and at the same time the revelation of the glory of man. In Christ, man is truly man. Thus the anthropology of the Christian is rooted in the *indwelling Christ* — Christ indwelling and indwelling in Christ. Man finds his fullness in Christ. That is where we are the new creation and old things are passed away.

The process of redemption and renewal is that of glorification. We are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. Christ in us is the hope of glory and in the Spirit we are already partakers of his glory. Christ then is the perfect standard for man. By his life and by his death he enables man to attain that standard, that glory, that perfect humanity. But when? Here and now? Or in the eschaton? Or partly now and partly later?

Here we are brought back to the fall and to the real force of redemption. Is the fall still effective? Has the prince of the air still his power? Are we still sinners? Or is Christ's victory real, total and absolute? The usual response is that we are in the middle. D-day happened at the cross where the decisive action was fought once for all and the real victory won. V-day has yet to come when the whole business will be finally tidied up. We are at present engaged in the mopping-up operations. The enemy has no real power but there are still pockets of resistance which need to be wiped out. V-day arrives when Christ returns again in glory, with glory. Then we shall be totally redeemed, our bodies shall be transformed and the whole of creation fundamentally restored, and we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

Now these pictures of dust and glory as the basic and true nature of man are very fine and surely biblical — but how does this help us? If we have passed the evangelical litmus test, we are still left with two different men in society.

### *Two Societies, One Humanity*

The first society is all of humanity, equally created, equally

human, equally fallen. Here is man in society, man in a mess and man trying by a wide variety of means to make this world a better place for himself, his fellow man, and his children. But can he ever succeed? Are the improvements in human society real improvements at all? Or are they all tainted with sin and fallenness and accordingly hopeless and ultimately useless?

The second society is that of the redeemed, the fellowship of those who are in Christ, those who are partakers of divine life, those who are new creations. Is this society then heaven on earth? Does the church reveal the true nature of humanity by its life, practices, and very existence? Theoretically, all that is good must be found here. All that is honourable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, of excellence, and worthy of praise should be the basis of man in the redeemed society.

So there are two main questions. What *is* the difference between man in these societies? What *should* the difference be? All men are equally created, equally dust, equally fallen, equally died for, equally created for glory. Or are they? Perhaps in the end we have to come back to *predestination*. Why are some men members of only *one* society but not of both? Why are some elect and not others? Should the elect any longer remain part of that first basic society or should they separate themselves from man in his unredeemed society?

The answers to these questions are vital for our attitude towards the possibility of social, legal, political and economic change and the basis for such change. Can we recognize any good thing outside the redeemed society? Will it last? Can we work with agencies and philosophies which have a fundamentally different view of man and the world? Is there any genuine hope for changing people in society? Is there any means of changing society itself? Is the only means bringing people into the community of the redeemed for that is where true change happens?

These are questions to make us rethink our attitudes — towards the world, in the sense of the non-Christian societies in which we live and work, towards joint participation with organizations and structures which are at base fundamentally opposed to Christianity, and towards the nature of the church and the redeemed community.

As a Baptist, I am intrigued by the middle ground which churches like the Church of Scotland and the Church of England try to adopt. Here is a redeemed community which is yet in theory fully integrated into a non-redeemed community.



The church is *established*. If the church can be truly and rightly totally integrated into a society and culture which have nothing much to say for or against Christianity (or are even opposed to it) and at the same time be the society of God's redeemed people, then that would solve the problem of the two societies. There would be no conflict. I confess to scepticism, and feel driven to hold some basic form of separation between the two societies and to uphold some fundamental differences between the members of one society and that of the other. To do anything else seems to entail the abandonment of the incarnational understanding of man through Christ.

I want now to turn attention to three problem areas in society and to say a word about the Christian approach to these problems. I shall deal with the theme of sex at greater length, but deal more briefly with race and individualism.

### *Individualism and Community*

The classic evangelical position in the Protestant mould is personalistic. Jesus died for me. I receive Christ into my heart. Christ lives in me. I am on my way to heaven. Of course, I am delighted to find others who have Christ in their hearts too, but that simply reinforces my mission in life, to help each individual to a personal saving knowledge of Christ. The emphasis is on the person, on the individual, on each one deciding for himself or herself.

The so-called 'Social Gospel' was a stark reaction to all this. The gospel was about society, about changing society, about transforming communities, by changing conditions, structures, laws, setting, by creating new orders of life, new opportunities in life. If we created the right environment, then we would have shown the love of Christ, the gospel in action. Housing, education, leisure, culture — these were the key.

Neither of these extremes is as popular today, but we have a new approach to community. The Renewal Movement has brought many significant changes in its wake — the most relevant here is the charismatic community. The body picture of Corinthians is taken to a logical conclusion in the setting up of a charismatic household. Each member is part of the whole, the body; no part can exist or function properly without the rest. At the extreme this means that I do not

decide what I am going to do today, or this week, or with my life or my future, or my career. The community decides. The group of Spirit-filled Christians together will be led to God's will for the community and thus each part of the community.

Personally I want to affirm the individual, to stress the personal responsibility, to uphold a strong notion of individuality but I see the crass extremes to which it leads. Ultimately it is not simply individualistic, but existentialist, subjective and ultimately solipsistic. I inhabit my own little world and there is no room for anything or anyone else.

So I must equally affirm that God makes individuals only in the context of community. The extreme stress on community alone destroys individuality, and substitutes totalitarian control for personal responsibility. Yet we are by creation and nature social animals. For the Christian that social basis is derived from God. It is not so much our common humanity, our shared culture, our similar race, or even our nationhood (a Scot can say that); it is our creation in God.

So how then are we to be fully individuals in a right sense but also fully social in a proper way? How may we bear our own burden and also bear each other's burdens, without destroying each other's individuality yet fulfilling our social natures? How can we learn from the charismatic stress on community, without losing the truth of the Protestant stress on the individual?

## Sex

Mankind comes in two packages, male and female. You cannot have one without the other, though all male clubs try and some feminists would be equally glad to see one-sex rule. None of us will deny that there is a real and crucial sense in which women have needed to be liberated, though I imagine that there might be a fairly hot debate as to whether the process has gone too far. If we are to say anything relevant about man in society we cannot avoid talking about maleness and femaleness. If we are hoping to present a true biblical anthropology we cannot pretend that Scripture has nothing to say on the subject. Indeed the opposite is true. For many the Bible has said too much and thus condemns itself. To understand man (in the generic sense) and to understand society we must look at masculinity and femininity.

If we look closely at modern society we shall find that

stressing the role and the blatant oppression of women has led not to liberation for all, but to more subtle oppression, and to a corresponding demand for freedom from oppression for men, and, generally, more conflict between the sexes. Feminism, like chauvinism, polarizes the sexes from the start. Once the two have been torn asunder, no one can join them together. If there is to be any hope of men and women understanding who they are and the ways in which they can help each other grow, rather than thwart and stunt each other's development, it does not seem that the answer of feminism or reaction to feminism is without basic flaws.

There is an alternative.<sup>9</sup> The concept of maleness would have no meaning without the concept of femaleness and vice versa. If there were no women, not only would men soon cease to exist but there would be no significance at all to being a man. The only sense which would matter would be to differentiate man from animals and things. The first significant thing about humanity is not that it has two forms of sexuality, male and female. It is that people are different from animals and things. It is personhood, not sexuality, that is primary to people. Of course, persons happen to come in two particular packages, the female and the male person. But if there were a neuter person without specific sexual characteristics, we should still be faced with a person to be treated as human with all the rights and dignities of humanity. On the other hand, a male or female which was not a person, would be more like a vegetable or an animal. It would not be a member of the human race. Personhood is more basic than sexuality.

This will look like a side-stepping of the question 'What is a man?' and 'What is a woman?'. It is just that. It is not a refusal to examine male and female characteristics but a genuine attempt to shift the debate from a quicksand of sexual aggression and impasse, to an area where the initial unity of humanity and persons is realized. Sexual discrimination is not a problem about men or women, but about mankind both male and female. Two immediate questions face us. 'What is a person?' and 'What significance if any, does being a man or a woman have for a person?'

### *What is a Person?*

A person is made in the image of God. God makes a person

9. E. D. Cook, *Are Women People Too?* (Bramcote, Notts., 1978).

the person he or she is. Each person is created as a complex unity. Each has a body which enables him or her to feel. Each has a mind which seems to encapsulate the two aspects of thinking and willing. The person has a personality which can flower or be crushed, cope with situations or collapse in the light of them. To be a person is not the same as to be an animal or a thing. This seems to be bound up with consciousness, self-consciousness, and the ability to communicate. A person can be aware of himself or herself, has a sense of value and worth (or even of no value and worth), can choose to be self-centred or can try to develop in different directions.

To be a person is not just to have life. Quality of life matters. This is why cases of badly deformed children and accident victims who are like vegetables are hard. The loss of quality of life makes us uncertain as to their personal qualities. Are they persons at all? Treating people as persons is to assume their worth and their responsibility. We are not to walk all over people, because they are worth something — or were, or will be. They also have responsibility. That means that to be a person is to be answerable for what we do and say.

These aspects of humanity are primary to mankind. They form the basis for our relations with each other. Legal cases, cultural patterns, and social behaviour take root from these aspects of humanity. When it comes to regulating roles and to analysing at the most basic levels, it is the qualities which we call personal that matter most. Personhood ranks in importance before sexual identity. In our impersonal world the biggest threat to us all is of being reduced from a person to a thing or object. It is people who matter first and foremost rather than simply male people and female people.

### *What is Male and Female?*

The male is physically stronger but less resilient, he is more independent, adventurous and aggressive, he is more ambitious and competitive, he has greater spatial, numerical and mechanical ability, he is more likely to construe the world in terms of objects, ideas and theories. The female at the outset possesses those sensory capacities which facilitate interpersonal communion; physically and psychologically she matures more rapidly, her verbal skills are precocious and proficient, she is more nurturant, affiliative, more consistent, and is likely to construe the world in personal, moral and aesthetic terms.<sup>10</sup>

10. C. Hutt, *Males and Females* (Harmondsworth, 1972), cited by Cook, *Are Women People Too?*, p. 9.

Even if this picture has only a grain of truth, it is one we are all familiar with. So where do the differences between men and women come from?

The first answer is biology. In terms of genetic structure, hormonal activity and basic physiology, women are different from men and always will be. Sexual differences are the products of nature. Ivor Mills, A. Storr and S. Goldberg have all argued that women cannot be more like men. To try to be so is to change nature which leads to unnatural consequences. On the other hand, feminists have argued equally cogently that women are women because of nurture, not nature. Social and cultural conditioning produces sex roles. The social, physical and psychological environment of western society makes little boys grow into men and girls into women. Patriarchy has produced what we call male and female characteristics. But if there were a matriarchal society things would be different. Feminists distinguish sexual (biological) identity from gender (cultural) identity. What matters most and what can be changed is gender identity. Different psychological and cultural approaches would produce different kinds of females and males. Men and women can exchange roles and functions. They need not conform to stereotype pictures. Women can be more like men and vice-versa. What is unique to one sex or the other is minimal and largely irrelevant. Different nurturing will produce different people.

Overcoming a natural tendency to say 'Vive la différence!', I must confess that it does not seem possible for the Christian, or anyone else, to give a categorical answer to the nature versus nurture question. One would need to be an expert geneticist, physiologist, biochemist, psychologist, sociologist and anthropologist all rolled into one and, more crucially, to be able to accept the presuppositions on which all these 'sciences' were based.

This does not mean the Christian has nothing to say about sexual/gender differences. God made the male and female. He made them as male and female. He created sexual differences. At this point it is clear that there is no superiority and no inferiority. There is basic difference. Difference to be explored, understood and accepted. Male and female have equal standing in the eyes of God. They are equally sinful. In Christ, they are equally redeemed. If that equality is worth anything, then both sexes have it. Both sexes need to explore their sexuality.

This is not the same as genitality. Masculine and feminine

seem to fall broadly into Hutt's classification, but that is not to say that all sexual differences are fixed and that there are no exceptions. People seem to cross any line drawn too rigidly between the two sexes.

Society and culture have traditionally assigned certain roles to women and others to men. We must ask, given sexual difference, what roles are appropriate for the sexes? Are some totally inappropriate? To answer these questions we must examine the nature of the persons in the situations. What personal qualities are present? This is the primary way to assign roles or question them. But this must happen not on paper, but in real life, always remembering the reality of sexual difference.

Perhaps sexual differences are best understood not as a blueprint to be forced on every specimen by rigid classification. Rather as a whole, they provide a map with some stable points of reference, but also with uncharted areas in which we may explore. Any explorer has to use what he/she knows in order to explore what is not known. For the Christian such exploration will happen in the context of the church using the Bible as a guide-book.

### *Biblical Principles: Old Testament*

The most important passage for understanding male and female is Genesis 1-3. Not only is this the basis of the Old Testament views but Jesus stresses it and Paul uses it as the foundation of his theological argument. The basic qualities of personhood stem from God and his creation of persons. Then we read that God made two kinds of people in his image. Men and women are made to complement each other. Woman is to be a helper to man. The man is to take responsibility for woman, as he does in naming her. That was the creation ideal, but both fall from God's standard and that means broken relationships with God and with each other. All too easily we fall from partnership before God into positions of domineering and cowering. That is true for all women and men, not just married folk. The only solution is to replace misleading talk of equality by complementarity, that is, each other fulfilling the best for the other before God.

One link between the Old and New Testaments is the idea of headship. In 1 Cor. 12-14 we must note that all are under headship. This is not something anti-women. It affects men

as much as women. God is the head of all. Christ is the head of man and man of woman. This headship is not some male plot to keep pushy women in their place, for it comes from God. Men have a place as much as women and both are to keep to their proper roles. This is why the behaviour of both men and women is at stake in Paul's mind, not just that of women. If a woman wishes to reject the idea of headship, she is not so much rebelling against man, as against God. Headship implies that man is responsible for woman; it is interesting that God comes to Adam first though it is Eve who has sinned first. The idea of man as head is cold comfort for the male chauvinist. Inasmuch as that sets demands for women, it equally sets demands for men to behave and act towards women in proper ways. All too often men's behaviour towards women is not so much headship, but self-centred domineering. This is why Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself for her (Eph. 5:25). The headship of man in relation to women is never an end in itself, but is always under Christ's headship of man, and God's of Christ. Barth sums up the point in a helpful way: 'The essential point is that woman must always and in all circumstances be woman; that she must feel and conduct herself as such and not as a man; that the command of the Lord, which is for all eternity, directs both man and woman to their own proper sacred place and forbids all attempts to violate this order.'<sup>11</sup> No idea of subordination — being of a different order — can be demanded without leading to fatal legalism. Christ offered obedience to God in love. Man cannot demand obedience, but woman, in love, can offer a right response to man. The law kills, but the Spirit gives life. There is an aim in subordination. It is to fulfil both sexes properly in being what God intended. Woman was made for man not by man himself, but by the Lord. This is why both are totally mutually dependent. Their very life depends on each other and likewise does the fulfilment of God's purpose for mankind.

Paul is clearly teaching that a different place in the order of creation does not contradict mutual dependence. Rather it enhances it. The point in any subordination is not for one sex to glory over another, but that the partnership might be more fruitful and more lovely for both and so for God. In the end, man and woman together are answerable for what they make of the world God gives them. Such accountability naturally

11. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III: 4 (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 156.

may mean different kinds of responsibilities, but these are not independent from each other nor inferior or superior to each other.

For many, talk of subordination or subjection is too much to stomach. It would be if this was one sex foisting its views on the other. But all of creation is in subjection to something or someone. To pretend otherwise is to reject all authority over us and to imagine that each individual can do exactly as he or she likes and be his or her own boss. A more accurate description of the basic nature of sin would be hard to find.

### *New Testament*

Galatians 3:28 seems to proclaim the full effect of Christ's victory over the fall. In Christ the basic distinctions which can separate people are overcome. Our problem is to make that reality come to pass initially in the church and eventually in the world. Theologically, redemption by Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit are the heart of the New Testament. Men and women are equally redeemed and indwelt. Christ and the Spirit do not obliterate a person, but allow the full growth and development of manhood and womanhood. Our task is to help each other, all too conscious that the effects of the fall are being overcome, but that the final overcoming will only be seen at the end. So we live in the tension between Christ's complete victory and its future complete realization. The example of women and men's relationships with them from Christ to Paul reflects that tension. Even in the presence of Christ, women, like men, do the wrong thing. Martha gets it wrong, while Mary gets it right.

We are not to belittle each other, but to build each other up. What is true for the church as a whole is true for individual men and women, whether married or not. In the perfect re-creation in Christ, this is now truly possible by the Spirit who dwells in us.

### *Concluding Postscript on Sex*

The feminist debate has drawn attention to the breakdown of right relationships between men and women. How are Christians to respond? First, we need to be careful about accepting suggested prescriptions, for the very diagnosis of the disease may rest on anti-Christian views. We need to take the prob-



lem seriously but to refocus the debate towards the question how all people should relate properly as persons, and then apply this to male-female relationships.

Perhaps modern society talks too much about male and female, but does little to explore the depths of man-woman relationships. As with the seed of the gospel, the work of change is slow. Society will only begin to change, to question its own views and practices, when it recognizes the failure of its present attempts and the possibility of different ones. The debasement of both sexes is obvious in the way they treat each other. There is hope for change if a new pattern of man-and-woman relationships can be discovered.

The redeemed community of the church is the best place to reveal God's pattern of man-and-woman relationships. This means that church practices and male-female relationships need to be closely examined. In what ways are we following cultural patterns? In so doing, are we allowing the world to mould us? In what ways are biblical principles in fact being worked out? All traditions must be brought to the bar of the Bible.

It is clear in Scripture that men and women are meant to be different to complement each other and so complete God's perfect plan for the world. How can we order the church so that this mutual support is fostered? Without a proper balancing of the sexes, the result will be less than the best. Headship and subordination are relevant not only to women but to men also. Both are under authority and bear responsibility before God. This inevitably means that women were not made to do all that man does, or vice versa, but if the one fails to do his or her job properly, then the other may take his or her place. There are limits to the exchanging of roles. Men cannot be women and sexual differences must remain.

So let us explore masculinity and femininity within the loving context of the church, where we can afford to make mistakes recognizing that God's grace is always sufficient. Let us use the Bible as the test for practices and attitudes to each other. Let us learn to complement each other properly. As always the real solution lies in the example of Jesus, the servant. It means an all-round change of heart with both sexes renouncing bossing and bossiness but each reckoning the other better than oneself, taking responsibility for each other and facilitating the growth and development of each other and the exercising of gifts and graces by both. In all this we are co-workers with God, for the man-woman relationship relies not

on men and women, but on God.

### *Race*

A recent *Observer* article bemoaned the genuine difficulty a brilliant black teacher had in trying to get to the top in an education system which was white and racist. The cry was clear: how many black teachers are there in schools which are predominantly West Indian, or Asian teachers where the kids are Asian?

Here is the racist vicious circle. You have a racist white system. In seeing the wrong in it, you create — not an integrated system — but a racist black system. The whites teach the whites and the blacks the blacks. Muhammed Ali summed it up, 'Like mates with like — you don't find butterflies mating with birds; so keep to your own and we'll keep to ours'.

We could spend hours examining the racial problem, in terms of conditions and attitudes, and the cures suggested, but at the very heart of it all for me lies the attraction of like and the fear of unlike.

I have time for two comments. The first is that we shall never understand the race problem, far less go any way to solving it, until we all admit that we are racists. We are all prejudiced. If our social and civil legislation began at that point, then the laws and our understanding of racial problems might be very different.

This leads directly to the second comment. The ideal at present is integration. Yet by making special categories and special procedures, we are in danger of reinforcing and institutionalizing the very differences and prejudices that the special efforts are designed to obliterate. Do we really want integration? Does anybody want it? What will it really mean? If society is to be a cohesive unit, how much difference can we take, and how much similarity does there need to be? Baldwin's question to the American Negro is highly relevant to the Black Rhodesian, South African and indeed British West Indian or Asian, 'Do I want to be *integrated* into a burning house?' What price integration?

At the outset I stressed the need to be clear about our biblical anthropology before we embarked on the application to society. But inevitably it is meeting with and coming to terms with the plurality of cultures in our society which will sharpen our understanding of man, and enable us to apply biblical in-

sights to our social, legal, economic, political, and theological functioning. The areas where the need for clarification is most urgent are: individualism and collectivism; sex; race. But I think there are clues which will help us in these areas and in understanding man in society in general.

The first is the reaching of a proper balance between me, us and them. What am I, and what is proper for me, as an individual to do and be? Who are we? What makes us a community? How do we, how should we function as a community? If our community includes, it also excludes. Who are left out? How are we to think of them? What separates us from them and should it?

For me the second clue lies in the understanding that to be human is to be responsible and answerable. If we are concerned to be fully human, we must learn to take and shoulder proper responsibility. If we are concerned to help others to become more human, we must help them take responsibility, yet without shelving our own responsibility for and to them. We are to bear each other's burdens, as well as bear our own burdens.

The third clue lies in the nature of *koinonia* — fellowship. What kind of social cohesion is fellowship? Is it unique, or is the pub as much a fellowship as the church meeting? How much pluralism can the fellowship of the church stand? Do we need to bring a test of orthodoxy and heresy?

The fourth clue I do not pretend to understand, but I am sure it is vital for man and society. It is creativity. Behind this lies the creativity of God, which man made in his image must learn to express properly. I use the term 'art', but 'science' or a great many other things would do equally well. I take this to mean various things, for example, art for art's sake. It is an expression or extension of me and my personality or me and my group's ideas. For the purist it means art for its own sake. It is just there, it does not carry a message, it does not state. It is simply there because it has its own value regardless of what I, the artist, think it is, or how you, the observers, react to it. Then there is the kind of creativity which we tend to belittle by calling it applied or technological art for society's sake. We feel there is something less than pure and artistic about pragmatic art. Yet why should creativity be useless rather than useful?

In the church and in society at large, we need to encourage and express creativity in all these sense. This will be part of our fulfilment as men and women in society.

### Reading List

- G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: the Image of God* (London, 1972).  
E. Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (London, 1939).  
G. Carey, *I Believe in Man* (London, 1978).  
J. Moltmann, *Man: Christian Anthropology in the Conflicts of the Present* (London, 1974).  
R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols. (London, 1941-43).  
D. Williams, *About People* (Leicester, 1978).

### Questions for Discussion

- 1 Is there really any difference between man in the society of the church and man in society at large? What are the differences? What should they be?
- 2 Must we choose between 'me' and 'us'? What is the right relation between the two?
- 3 What is the relevance to measures designed to counter racism of (a) the fall, and (b) redemption in Christ?
- 4 Is what really matters in the end being human or being Christian? If we say 'Christian' have we denied our humanity, and humanity's humanity?
- 5 How far do the elements of a Christian social anthropology presented in this chapter provide guidance in tackling social issues such as education, punishment of offenders, unemployment?