Themelios

An International Journal for Pastors and Students of
Theological and Religious Studies

THE
GOSPEL
COALITION

Contents

Editorial: Gospel, Language, Nationhood

Stephen Williams

How often do we hear of something: 'This is a particularly contentious issue amongst Christians today'? So often, that we are tempted to say that it is true of almost every issue we mention or, alternatively, to say it of nothing at all, and just take it for granted. Of 'Gospel, Language and Nationhood' we shall simply say this: travel the world over and you will find Christians divided over the question and the divisions are, practically, profoundly effective.

This issue of *Themelios* is devoted to this general theme. It is extremely important to understand the background to the contributions. The ideal would have been to secure articles from a variety of backgrounds, across the continents and cultures of our world. One moment of reflection is enough to reveal why such an ideal is impractical. To try to get anything like a representative selection of articles would be fatal. For just how many positions need to be brought to our attention? So let it be clear that what follows is not representative; nor is it even balanced.

We have, rather, taken advantage of a consultation held in Wales under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance in the summer of 1994. Issues of nationhood and language divide folk deeply in Wales. The consultation aimed to address these issues, but only in the conviction that they must be addressed in a theological framework that has nothing whatsoever to do with Wales in particular. For that reason there was a representation from outside Wales, including amongst the key speakers, a presence every bit as important as the Welsh presence. The articles that appear here have their origin in that consultation.

The detailed concerns and progress of that consultation are irrelevant for our purposes. But we have retained some of the reference to Wales in particular, especially in the article by Professor R.M. Jones. This is not because Welsh is probably one of the oldest living languages in Europe and certainly constitutes one of the oldest living literatures in Europe! It is because a discussion that was not earthed in example would be the poorer.[1] The main lines of the arguments are generally theological and these have been sharpened by omitting reference, on several occasions, to a particular nation. After some hesitation, statements expressing particular, critical, judgment against the policies and attitudes of a

---

[1] Such is the grip of cynicism upon our culture, that some reader somewhere may suspect a connection between the selection of Wales as a partial case-study and the nationality of the editor. This extreme of cynicism summons form an extreme riposte. A prominent English evangelical leader has pointed out the Authorized Version rendering of Genesis 1:21 (sadly lost in other, ideologically dominated translations): 'And God created great w(h)ales.…'

particular nation have been retained in the present text. While such a phenomenon does not appear very much, it is right to mention it here. It must be made crystal clear that such particular judgments are neither in accordance nor in conflict with the views of the editor: *Themelios* is entirely non-committal here, consistently with our generally stated policy that contributors express their own views. However, if we had omitted what may be deemed to be controversial and partial political judgments, the fabric of the relevant discussions would have been spoiled.

Our first contribution comes from *William Storrar, Lecturer in Practical Theology at King's College, University of Aberdeen.* A brief comment follows from *Martyn Eden,* who is *Public Affairs Director of the UK Evangelical Alliance in London.* This is followed by a contribution from *Professor R.M. Jones, Emeritus Professor of Welsh at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.* The response to this at the consultation was a substantial one, by *Phil Hill, Chairman of Evangelical Alliance (Wales) and now pastor of Hockcliffe Road Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard in England.* However, Professor Jones modified his paper in order to take account of some of Phil Hill's original criticisms, so that we now publish only a 'comment' by the latter on Professor Jones's revised version, which appears here.

We also include a separate contribution, unrelated to the consultation on whose proceedings we are drawing, but on the same broad theme. *Neil Summerton is a civil servant in the UK Ministry of the Environment and author of A Noble Task: Eldership and Ministry in the Local Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994). This is an adapted version of a paper given at the international conference of the Council on Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament held in Friedewald, Germany, in September 1993.

There are (a) theological issues on which, I believe, we must be uncompromisingly firm. There are (b) others on which we must tolerate disagreement and suspect premature claims to certainty. There are also (c) political judgments, which may differ sharply even when we actually agree on an issue in category (a) and (b) as well. Of course, people will differ on what falls under (a) and under (b): a meeting of minds is particularly difficult when we find that the other consistently believes that what we take to be non-negotiable is an open question and what we take to be an open question is non-negotiable. It is also the case that people allow their agreement on political judgments (c) to be the basis of their unity in human relationships, friendships and solidarity. Political agreement sometimes draws atheist and Christian closer together than Christian and Christian who agree on (a) but disagree on (c). It is here that one ought to say: unity in the gospel should transcend political differences. Too often, this sounds like a claim that Christianity does not have much to do with politics. But, of course, one is saying no such thing. And in pleading for the importance of not allowing what may be termed 'political' judgments to divide our witness and for allowing some leeway for theological differences on certain issues (b), one is not restricting the scope of rigorous theological thinking. On the contrary: if we make such a plea it is in order that we might, in the grace of God, arrive as far as possible at agreement under (b) and even under (c).

Whether we think of language or nation, race or gender, we are probing the nature of our identity, what it means to be a new creation in Christ, in whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. Reconciliation, in relation to God and to each other, is central in Christianity. Any theology which disables such a reconciliation is false. That is not to dictate a line of thought on any of the matters discussed in this issue. We

are talking of reconciliation on divine, not on human terms, reconciliation in the truth, not apart from it, where affirming diversity and distinction *may* be an expression of and not a flight from reconciliation. Our talk of reconciliation does, however, remind us of both the criterion and the ethos of our theological thinking about gospel, language and nationhood. Perhaps there are no easy answers. But we must believe that as we mine the firm and abiding Word of God for the riches of its disclosure about the ways of God, humanity and world, we shall more rejoice at the divine provision for us, than lament our present theological perplexities.

'Vertigo' or 'Imago'? Nations in the Divine Economy

William Storrar

Nations in human history and Christian hope

I wish to argue, biblically, that nations are authentic, if ambiguous, human cultural creations. Nations are also part of God's creation in the sense that they have developed historically out of a common humanity made in God's image and they exist under his sovereignty. Whether they are the tribes and peoples of the ancient world or modern nation-states, nations are historical communities and not part of the original created order. They are therefore provisional and contingent communities that can lay no claim to any ultimate human loyalty. And yet they exist within the bounds of God's creation, providence and redemption and under his sovereignty. And so the apostle Paul can say: 'From one ancestor he [the God who made the world and everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth] made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times for their existence and the boundaries of the places where they should live, so that they would search for God . . .' (Acts 17:26-27). The emphasis here is on the fact that all nations are made out of one humanity and that, in their contingent existence in time and space as nations, they are utterly dependent on God and called to seek him, 'though indeed he is not far from each one of us'.

Few nations do seek God. Nations and nationalism throughout history bear the marks of human rebellion against God. But in this they are no different from all forms of human community, thought or action. All aspects of created reality and human history, from the communities of family and church to the modern ideologies of capitalism and liberal internationalism, are distorted and marred by human sin.

And yet nations are also set within the historical drama of God's redemption of that fallen creation in Jesus Christ. Humanity was not created within certain given nations or races, as religious nationalities like the Afrikaner Calvinist founders of apartheid or the German Christian movement under the Nazis have argued.[1] This sets nations apart from the identities of man and woman, and the community of the family, created and instituted by God as constitutive of our one humanity in the divine image. Nations are the contingent cultural products of human history. They rise out of the muddy course of rebel humanity's historical existence and they exist as dust in the balance of God's judgment.

The term 'nation' has been used to describe a multitude of different kinds of human community, from the ethnic tribes and peoples of ancient times to the modern member states and aspiring member nations of the United Nations. They all exist under divine judgment. And yet they also draw on significant themes in the original creation and the continuing mercy of God towards humanity created in God's image. This is their true glory. It can be argued that nations, and their cultures, have been one of the richest expressions in a fallen world of the original and continuing 'cultural mandate' given in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15-25, and reaffirmed after the fall to Noah in Genesis 9:1-17; calling on the one human race to name and develop the rich diversity of God's one creation, in cultivation and the sciences, and to celebrate the riches of human companionship, in culture and the arts, in glad and peaceful obedience to God's authority.

Therefore, nations are not without significance in the purposes and economy of God.[2] The nations of the Bible, the goyim and ethnē of the OT and NT, are constantly judged and contrasted with elect Israel and the true church for their idolatry (typically, Ps. 106, esp. v. 35). The 'holy nation' of God's people is not to be like the surrounding pagan, Gentile nations (Ex. 19:6;

1 Pet. 2:9). And yet the election of Israel and the church is for the blessing and salvation of the nations (Gn. 18:18; Gal. 3:8). In Isaiah and Acts there is a recognition that pagan nations may be both the instrument of God's purposes and the object of God's mercy (see Acts 17:26-27). The pagan King Cyrus is appointed to accomplish God's purposes (Is. 44:28-45). We also find a universal vision of the nations streaming to Israel with their wealth as an offering to worship the true and living God (Is. 60). In the Gospels, Jesus warms to those earnest Gentiles who put their faith in him and humbly accept that salvation comes from the Jews (Mt. 8:5-13; Mk. 7:24-30; Lk. 7:1-10; Jn. 4:1-41). In Matthew, the disciples are called to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19). In Acts the coming of the Spirit on the church at Pentecost affirms cultural and linguistic diversity as people of many nations understand the message in their own tongue (Acts 2:6, 11). And the Bible concludes in Revelation with a vision of the cultural riches and identities of all nations entering the new Jerusalem and the nations finding healing there (Rev. 21:22-22:3).

The one new humanity in Christ is a community of unity in diversity, a holy nation made up of people of all nations who, in embracing their new identity in Christ, retain their social and cultural identities as Gentiles and lose only the oppression and distorting effect of sin and their separation from God's covenant people (Eph. 2, 3). The Bible affirms both equality and difference. In the OT and NT, God's people are called to welcome the stranger and to show love to all neighbours, near and distant, in Barth's phrase. There is also a fundamental equality of all God's people in Christ (Gal. 3:26-29), but that does not efface our identities as Jew or Greek. As the late South African missiologist David Bosch argued, God's mission to the Gentile nations, and the need to contextualize that mission among the nations, lies at the heart of the NT and the Christian faith.[3]

And yet the nations themselves always walk the tightrope of the imago Dei over the abyss of idolatry, and frequently fall into sin. This induces a kind of vertigo, or the indiscriminate and sometimes irrational fear of nations and national identity, on the part of many Christians, especially evangelical critics of nationhood and nationalism. It should rather induce that discriminating fear of the Lord in whose image we who may belong to nations are created, sustained and redeemed. Examining nations in the light of God's image in Christ, rather than under the shadow of certain kinds of idolatrous nationalist experience, is the beginning of any wisdom we may find about nations in the divine economy. We must focus on the imago and not the vertigo if we are to keep a balanced judgment in understanding nations on the high wire of God's purposes in history. That is not to deny that any tightrope walker requires a healthy fear of the abyss below and the dangers en route.

But what are nations? What kind of human creations are they? And in what ways do they exist within the divine economy? Before answering these questions, we must set nations within their contemporary context and the related phenomenon of nationalism.

Nations and nationalism

Nationalism refers to those political ideologies and movements fostering national consciousness and advocating the right of nations to self-determination. Many different nationalist ideologies and movements are found in all parts of the world

today, some arguing for statehood as the natural right of nations while others offer utilitarian reasons for self-government. Again, some nationalist movements are more concerned with the survival and strengthening of aspects of national identity, such as the language and culture of a nation, than with political self-government as an end in itself. For example, Kenneth Morgan has contrasted two movements as close as Welsh and Scottish nationalism in this way:

> Welsh national feeling was also very different from that of Scotland, despite the spurious similarity implied in nationalist successes in by-elections in the two countries from 1966 onwards. Welsh nationalism was more concerned with cultural and linguistic aspects, rather than building on to recognised institutions new ways of asserting distinctiveness from England. Wales, indeed, seemed less aggressive in its nationalism than Scotland, more willing to be placated and to let its call for home rule be killed by kindness.[4]

Nationalism and nationhood in all their diversity remain a major political force and social reality for the foreseeable future, requiring informed analysis and discriminating assessment. Quoting a leading scholar on nationalism, the sociologist David McCrone notes: 'As Anthony Smith pointed out, national identity is probably the most powerful force in the modern age "to provide a strong 'community of history and destiny' to save people from personal oblivion and restore collective faith" (Smith, *National Identity*, 1991: p. 161)'.[5] Given the religious language which Smith uses to describe the function of national identity in the contemporary world, we must consider how the Christian understanding of history, destiny, salvation and faith must preclude any possible idolatrous nationalist alternative. But we must also consider in what ways Christians may embrace and show critical solidarity with a national identity which helps sustain and enrich the frail fabric of community.

No one definition or historical account of nations and nationalism has been agreed by scholars. A nation is any group of people that considers itself to be such, based on such shared characteristics as religion, language, history, territory, common institutions, culture, statehood or aspiration to statehood. Scholarly consensus has established, however, that nations are historical and not natural phenomena.[6] This view is contrary to some forms of nationalist ideology which argue that humanity is intrinsically, inevitably and thus 'naturally' constituted only within nations with an inherent right to statehood. Large sections of humankind now identify with and value a sense of nationhood, and virtually all human beings now live within nation-states in some form. This is a contingent historical development and not the unfolding of some eternal or natural law.

The historian Benedict Anderson has helpfully called nations 'imagined communities'.[7] This should resonate powerfully and suggestively for Christian theology. The Bible, too, sees the Gentile nations as imagined communities, shaped around created images of kingship, religion and culture. Unlike the surrounding pagan nations, the holy nation of Israel and the church are constituted by the uncreated Word, mediated through sanctioned images and supremely in the image of the incarnate Saviour.[8]

Anderson argues that nations are 'imagined communities' in the sense that they share a common style of imagining their own identity and interests. Nations are constituted by shared images of identity (*e.g.* linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, political or social) among people who may never meet or know one another face to face. There have been other ways of imagining social identity within human history, such as the tribe, empire or 'universal' community of Christendom. A nation is seen as transcending internal horizontal social divisions such as class through sharing certain vertical, variable images of a community with a common but limited membership and some measure of sovereignty over its own affairs.

It is this use of 'image', with its biblical resonances, that opens up the moral and theological ambiguity of nationhood and nationalism.[9] The Christian must ask if nations are one valid cultural expression of humanity created in God's image, and, therefore, if nationalism may be on occasion a legitimate defence of that identity. But the Christian must also ask if nations and nationalism may on occasion reflect the false worship of 'images' or idols, the idolatry of an absolute loyalty to the nation. Three factors must be considered in any Christian approach to nationhood and nationalism in the divine economy.

Nations in the divine economy

1. Biblically, the Scriptures offer theological insights into nationhood. While recognizing that there is no continuity between biblical and contemporary nations, some theorists of nationalism, like Anthony Smith, recognize that the latter are often constructed out of earlier ethnic identities reaching back in recorded history to the peoples of that same ancient world and the period of the biblical 'nations'.[10] In other words, it can legitimately be argued that 'modern' nations such as Wales are often constructed out of far older ethnic identities which stretch back into that ancient and biblical era. The biblical perspective that 'nations' are an ambivalent historical phenomenon and not the original condition of the one human race is, therefore, not without significance for the world of nations today. Genesis affirms the common humanity of all men and women, created in the image of God. It is only in the course of rebellious human history, and not in the creation, that the different tribes, peoples and nations of the earth emerge, with a dual theological meaning.

After Babel (Gn. 11:1-9), they are the bearers of divine judgment on sinful humanity in their divisions and mutual incomprehension. But the diversity of nations within history is also seen as restraining human evil or hubris on a global scale, and offering one historical context for humanity's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. Indeed, distinctive and diverse cultural, geographical and linguistic 'nations' are described as existing before Babel (Gn. 10:31-32). In Genesis the danger arises not from the diverse nations of the earth but from the hubris of sinful humanity's imperialist tendency and design to build a world empire, speaking only one language, in rebellion against God.

A Christian ethical and theological approach must hold in tension these two biblical insights, that the nations are both historical bearers of the merciful divine judgment on human sin and also one historical medium of the continuing cultural mandate given by God to the one human race. In practice today, this may mean arguing in one context that a xenophobic or imperialist nationalism, where one nation seeks to exclude or dominate other nations and reject God's ways, the sin of Babel, stands under God's judgment, while arguing in another context that a democratic nationalism may legitimately pursue its cause within a universal framework of international law and human rights, a recognition of the similar rights of other nations, and a biblical concern for culture, justice, solidarity and global stewardship. This is the fundamental moral and theological distinction between the 'ethnic cleansing' policies found in Bosnia and the non-ethnic, civic democratic aspirations of the Scottish National Party (to give an example from my own country).

2. Historically, we must distinguish between distinct eras in the development of nations and nationalism and their different attitudes to Christ. This historical character of nationhood is explicit and affirmed in the Bible, where nations are seen to rise and fall within the flow of human history and under the operation of the divine economy and judgment. While many scholars link nationalism with the rise of modernity and the sovereign nation-state in the eighteenth century,[11] pre-modern nationalism, articulating a developing sense of Christian nationhood, existed in Europe since at least as early as the ninth century.[12] Pre-modern nationalism had an inseparable relationship with Christianity and religious conflicts in medieval and post-Reformation Europe. It gave rise to the concept of the 'Christian nation' which has survived in the West into the twentieth century.[13]

It was the secular nationalism of the modern era, born out of the Enlightenment, German Romanticism and the French Revolution, that declared the nation and the nation-state to be absolute and sovereign, sometimes against the claims of God in Christ.[14] The end of this twentieth century is seeing the emergence of a 'post-modern nationalism' where autonomous regions and nations, defined by cultural pluralism, a common civil society and citizenship rather than ethnicity, seek autonomy within larger political communities like the European Union, on the principle of subsidiarity rather than sovereignty.[15] The political, cultural and economic dilemma of the late twentieth century is that the nation-state is too large to satisfy people's sense of local, regional or national identity while being too small to tackle many economic, environmental or

international issues.[16] This has led to the rise of new forms of nationalism.

As David McCrone has suggested, some forms of contemporary nationalism have shifted from emphasizing ties of ethnicity, sharing a common descent, language, culture or even religion, to defining a nation in terms of territoriality, living and working together in a common area:

> This is a plea for new forms of self-determination, of limited autonomy, and self-managing communities, based on the rights of people to govern themselves. Such plans are based on limited sovereignty in an interdependent world. The assault by nationalists on traditional nation-states is a symptom of the decay of these political formations, as well as the search for new forms as yet unimagined . . . The irony is that nationalism is probably the gravedigger of the conventional nation-state with its commitment to 'a world of sovereign, self-reliant nation-states claiming the right to assert themselves and pursue their essential national interests by taking recourse to force'. In its classical form, nationalism is pursuing precisely those political structures which are rapidly falling into disuse. As such, nationalism is probably destined to consume its own offspring. In this sense, these are post-nationalist times.[17]

Seeing it in this light, McCrone concludes that we must rethink the nature of contemporary post-nationalism:

> Those qualities of nationalism identified by Hobsbawm – instability and impermanence – point to the search for alternative principles of political restructuring in the twenty-first century. The rediscovery of 'popular sovereignty' and of democratic accountability, most noticeably in Eastern Europe, have a wider remit. If . . . we see [nationalism] as a social movement, as a fragile and heterogeneous construction, we might treat nationalist and autonomist movements as, in Melucci's words, 'nomads of the present', vehicles for collective action with an indeterminate end. The broad and diffuse, the 'non-political', appeal of nationalism seems to make it a movement of the twenty-first rather than the nineteenth century. Its commitment to the post-materialist values of autonomy, authenticity and accountability place 'post-nationalism' firmly in the future not the past.[18]

This emerging 'post-nationalism', with its concern for responsible citizenship in an interdependent world, and autonomous communities pervaded by democratic accountability, may be compatible in some measure with Christian social doctrines of solidarity, justice and stewardship at local, regional and global levels in ways that a nineteenth-century glorification of the sovereign nation-state or a late-twentieth-century re-emerging xenophobic ethnic nationalism manifestly are not. Take an example from within the United Kingdom, such as Wales. To understand Wales within the divine economy would therefore require us to ask what kind of historical nation and nationalism we are addressing. We must ask: can the central role of the Welsh language and culture in Welsh nationhood be held together with a 'post-nationalist' understanding of nationhood as an autonomous democratic civil society pursuing post-materialist values?

3. Theologically, we must set the nations within both the *imago Dei* and the *missio Dei*, God's mission to the world in Jesus Christ. I understand God's image in humanity not primarily in terms of discrete qualities, like rationality or speech, conscience or will, but in terms of personal relationships. To be human is to be in a right and dependent relationship as a creature with the Creator, the God who is a triune community of holy love, and to be in right relationships in love with one's fellow-creatures. We are fundamentally 'persons-in-community'. It is within this set of right relationships that we find our individual personhood and enjoy true humanity. Sin is the breaking and distorting of these relationships. In Jesus Christ, the one true image of the invisible God, our broken relationships are restored and our new humanity experienced as a gift of our gracious Father in heaven.[19] But in God's mercy ('common grace' in Reformed theology), our humanity is sustained even in our sin and brokenness. It is within the parameters of this set of relationships, created, sustained, judged and restored in Christ, that we use language, develop cultures, maintain patterns of government, and form those frail historical shelters of community and identity we call nations. Any nation must be judged by its faithfulness to the pattern of such relationships which constitute our humanity in God's image.

The eschatological vision of the coming reign of God (Is. 60, Rev. 21, 22) affirms both the place of the nations in final judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) and the prospect that their cultural legacy for good may enter the new Jerusalem, as the Reformed theologian Richard Mouw has argued.[20] No nationalism will survive its ambivalent historical role within this passing age, but the unity of the new humanity in Christ would not seem to efface the frail national and ethnic identities within which humanity has at times sheltered in its history. The Spirit spoke to the church and the new humanity each in his own language (Acts 2). Paul's mission was to the Gentile nations and the early church wrestled with what it meant to contextualize the gospel outside the Jewish world. The gospel is for the healing, not the elimination, of the nations (Rev. 22:2). With that eschatological hope, we must continue to wrestle with the theological meaning of contemporary nations in our time. The several models of nations within the divine economy offered below are attempts to understand nations within the framework of the *imago Dei* and *missio Dei*.

It is through a critical assessment of these three dimensions, biblical, historical and theological, within the divine economy, that nations and nationalism must be judged in each particular instance. Too often, Christian responses have offered a qualified support for patriotism while dismissing nationalism out of hand. In a world of genocidal ethnic conflicts this is understandable but indiscriminate. (It may also confuse nationalism with racism.)

In context, patriotism may cloak national aggression while nationalism may express a just defence of universal civic and democratic rights for particular communities within one world. Both are morally two-edged concepts. Imagined communities must serve and not deny the divine image in humanity. Before considering what models of nationhood may be compatible with the divine image, we must ask: in what sense are nations the objects of divine love and worthy of our Christian patriotism?

Nations and patriotism

Patriotism is the love shown in loyalty to a native or adopted country. As such, it must be scrutinized in the light of that greater, agapic, love that characterizes Christian social ethics. No country can legitimately make an absolute moral claim on the loyalty of the Christian or of any of its members. Christians and the nations are called to a greater love and an ultimate loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. Countries and nations are not part of God's original creation but have developed in the course of fallen human history as provisional and changing communities bearing all the marks of moral ambiguity in their culture and institutions. It is identity in Christ and the gospel of the kingdom which offer hope and reconciliation in a divided world, not national identity and patriotism. And yet Christians and the one human race live in the context of a range of social, cultural and political communities. That is an integral part of a God-given humanity as created social creatures. The gospel both judges and affirms the social context and cultural identity of human life within history, including the context of country and nationhood. Patriotism may be a worthy disposition for Christians in their earthly citizenship within the wider loyalty and horizon of the heavenly city. It may also be a cloak for national or party self-interest, 'the last refuge of scoundrels' in Johnson's memorable judgment. Once more, Christians are called to discriminating judgment, not irrational vertigo, the fear of the Lord rather than the fear of nations *tout court*.

The love that Christians may show for their country must be discerning and discriminating. At its core, patriotism must be an affirmation of what is best in a country's history and life, including the humane and creative achievements of its culture, its struggles for greater justice in human affairs at home and in the wider world, and the expression of certain moral values in its public life and institutions. And yet, as Simone Weil argued in relation to France, at its core a true Christian patriotism must also expose fully all that is evil and compromised in the history and identity of a nation.[21] A false patriotism, blind to a nation's faults and moral failures, dare not expose itself to such realities. But such honesty in no way diminishes a Christian agapic love grounded in the cross, which accepts the frailty and sinfulness of mortal nations within history while embracing them within

the divine love in Jesus Christ. The scale for assessing the worth of one's country does not lie in some innate national spirit or genius, as in the spurious claims of romantic nationalism, but in that human creativity and partial grasp of truth which remains open to all humanity even after its fall into sin and rebellious history.

Each culture and country may express that creativity and grasp of truth in its own distinctive ways, but no mere country is endowed with a monopoly of wisdom or possesses some unique destiny. Nor do nations escape the judgment and corruption of human sin. It is the church of Jesus Christ which is the herald of the coming kingdom of God, a community which draws its membership from every country and culture. Only from within the loyalty and perspective of the kingdom can we exercise a true patriotism for communities and cultures deserving of a penultimate loyalty and provisional commitment.

Nor must patriotism be confused with an ethnocentric or chauvinistic view of the world. The qualities and achievements that evoke a love for one's own country, however distinctive, should lead a true patriot to a respect and appreciation for other countries and cultures. No true love of country is blind to the failures, injustices and shameful episodes that mark the history and contemporary life of every country. A true patriotism will expose all that is evil or morally compromised in its own country, in the light of the gospel, and still love that country. Christian patriots like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil show the cost, honesty and courage required for true love of God and country in Christ.

Four Christian models
In conclusion, I wish to offer briefly four theological models of the nations in the divine economy which may be helpful in developing a Christian approach to the national question in a variety of contexts. They are different in their emphases but complementary. As with all models, no one model is adequate to reflect the richness of the biblical and theological tradition or the complexity of many situations. I will term these models of the nations within the divine economy the Christian identity model, the Christian liberation model, the Christian Democratic model and the kingdom ecology model. Each one draws on certain aspects of the above analysis and addresses particular issues of nationhood.

1. *The Christian identity model*
Richard Niebuhr gave us a classic account of the relationship between Christ and culture, in which he proposed five typical answers in church history to the question of the proper relationship between the two: Christ against culture; the Christ of culture; Christ above culture; Christ and culture in paradox; and Christ transforming culture.[22] Broadly, Christians have resisted, accommodated to or sought to convert culture. The evangelical scholar Robert Webber has proposed a modification of Niebuhr's fivefold model, in what he terms an 'incarnational' model of Christ and culture.[23] Christ himself in his incarnate life had a dynamic, threefold relationship to the surrounding Jewish and Gentile cultures which Christians should adopt. Depending on the context, Christ identified with his own culture, at times separated himself from it and above all transformed it, all in faithfulness to his gospel of the kingdom.

In my own work on nationhood, I have suggested that this Niebuhr/Webber model may be adapted to offer us one way of understanding the relationship between this particular historical form of Christ and culture, Christ and nation.[24] In faithfulness to Christ and his gospel, and the model of the incarnation, Christians will have a threefold, dynamic relationship with nationhood in its varied historical forms, reflecting the threefold biblical drama of creation, redemption and restoration:

> There can be a proper Christian identification with the nation to the extent that its life reflects within a particular community and identity that which constitutes our common humanity – the image and calling of God, given to us in creation and restored to us in Jesus Christ . . . In as much as the nations and nationalism express the idolatry and oppression of human sin, and reject God's image and purpose, then the Christian is called to a two-fold separation from national identity . . . from the nation's

> idolatry and for God's purpose [to find salvation in Jesus Christ, as members of a holy nation] . . . Christ calls his Church to share the Gospel of his Kingdom with the nations and the Revelation of John sees the wealth and healing of the nations as part of the life of the new humanity. As the Gospel makes its impact on the life of the nations, for time and eternity, it transforms those nations and every aspect of their nationhood and identity. It is the call to share the Gospel of the Kingdom of God with the nations and the prayer for that Kingdom to come which motivate Christians to work for the transforming of their national life according to Kingdom norms of justice and peace.[25]

This incarnational model of Christ and nation fundamentally affirms the nations as objects of God's mercy and love, and opens up the possibility of a critical, discriminating and wise engagement with nationhood. It is an appropriate model for those contexts where Christians believe it legitimate to identify with their nation within their greater loyalty to Christ.

2. *The Christian liberation model*
The American theologian Robert Schreiter has distinguished between two different types of contextual theology: theologies of identity and theologies of liberation.[26] Theologies of identity seek to affirm and sustain the identity of particular cultures. Our Christian identification model above would fall into this category. Contextual theologies of liberation, however, focus on the faultlines of conflict and injustice within a particular culture and seek to interpret them in the light of the liberating gospel. In certain contexts this may offer a more relevant Christian model of nations within the divine economy. From the biblical period, when both Israel and the nations were judged by the prophets for their idolatry and oppression of the poor and the weak, God has been understood as a liberator from injustice among and within the nations.[27]

In situations today where one nation exploits another nation, or some within the life of a nation oppress others, then the gospel is a liberating defender of oppressed nations or communities within nations. This model may be helpful in a context where some find either the cultural and political hegemony of a state, or the linguistic hegemony of a 'national' unit within the state, threatening and oppressive. There is a legitimate non-violent nationalism inspired by the gospel which asserts the rights of small nations to their own autonomy and culture. There is a legitimate inter-nationalist politics inspired by the gospel which affirms the legitimacy of cultural diversity within a common civic life that reconciles the interests of different communities within a nation.

The gospel liberates people and communities into life in all its fullness. It also recognizes the reality of conflict and structural sin within the life of all human communities, not least those we call nations. A Christian liberation model of nations in the divine economy recognizes the reality of that conflict and oppression among the nations and calls for non-violent solutions offering justice with reconciliation.[28] At the centre of a liberation model lies the cross and atonement. Out of faith in the crucified God comes a politics of solidarity with the oppressed, including the oppressed nations of the world.[29] Our third model, taken from contemporary European politics, gives us a concrete example of what this can mean in practice.

3. *The Christian Democratic model*
Christian Democracy is a continental political movement with no equivalent in the United Kingdom, reflecting the different experiences of secularization in Britain and mainland Europe. Christian Democrats seek to chart a middle way between right-wing conservatism or liberalism and left-wing socialism and collectivism, inspired by the values of the gospel and the church's social teaching. While most European Christian Democratic parties are lay Catholic in origin, in The Netherlands the Christian Democratic party is a fusion of an earlier Catholic party with two Dutch Calvinist Reformed lay political parties, in the evangelical tradition, and inspired by the great Dutch Calvinist leader Abraham Kuyper. The Dutch Christian Democratic party (the CDA) 'accepts the Biblical evidence of God's promises, acts and commandments as of decisive significance for mankind, society and government. The CDA is guided by that evidence and intends to seek constantly the meaning of the Gospel with regard to political actions'.[30] The

gospel has inspired the CDA to base its policies on the normative principles of public justice, differentiated responsibility (subsidiarity), social solidarity and stewardship.

On that basis the CDA seeks support from all Dutch people and addresses the complex problems of contemporary Europe. One such pressing problem is the national question. In a recent study document, *The National Question in Europe: A Christian Democratic Approach*, Dutch Christian Democrats have offered a model for understanding nations based on their gospel-based principles of justice, subsidiarity and solidarity. This Christian Democratic model defines a nation as 'a group of human beings with a common history, a shared value-system, usually a distinct language and a conscious awareness of this community'.[31] Nations are to be distinguished from the state, which is entrusted with ensuring for all people under its jurisdiction the equal rule of law according to the norm of public justice.

On this basis Christian Democrats reject that form of political nationalism which demands a state that rules in the interests of one nation at the expense of other nationalities and communities within its jurisdiction. On the other hand, Christian Democrats, in their commitment to human rights, recognize the group rights of particular cultures and nationalities. This includes the right to self-determination and a 'menu' of cultural, economic and political rights which would allow for a range of political solutions to the 'national question' in Europe; from language, media and education rights for minority nationalities in a multi-national state, to local, regional or national autonomy within a more federalist multi-national state, to complete political independence in certain circumstances.

The Christian Democratic model offers a practical political model for implementing the principles found in a Christian understanding of nations in the divine economy. It seems to me that it is a creative and realistic model to which Christians need to give serious consideration in some situations. It may be a model which would help Christians in a nation like Wales, for example, to understand their own range of positions on national questions of language, autonomy and identity within a common commitment to the just rule of law in the state. Finally, the Christian Democratic model raises the critical issue of the distinct but related concepts of nation and state in political analysis and the divine economy.

4. *The kingdom ecology model*

My final model draws on a concept developed by the American sociologist Robert Bellah, and taken up by Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, in his Reith Lectures, *The Persistence of Faith*.[32] In his joint study of contemporary American society, *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah suggests that society may be seen as a 'social and moral ecology', a delicate fabric of moral and social values, habits of the heart, which sustain the common life of a nation. In America, the Judaeo-Christian biblical tradition is one important value-system in sustaining the social ecology of American life, along with the civic republican tradition of public virtue and duty. Today the moral ecology of America is threatened by the competing value-system of expressive individualism which privatizes society and minimizes social responsibility. Apart from political and institutional change, the social and moral ecology of a nation is vital to its well-being.

I have argued that we may think of a biblical ecology of nationhood, which offers us a social and moral ecology for nations.[33] Within this ecology, the holy nation of God's people, the church, co-exists with the historical nations of the earth within the overall environment of the kingdom of God. The well-being of both church and nation depends on sustaining the moral and social values of the gospel of the kingdom within both types of community. Both church and nation must reflect the habits of the heart shaped by the gospel and its kingdom values. Without such values, the moral and social ecology of the nation faces an 'environmental crisis'. Even within more secular and pluralist societies, it is the calling of the Christian community to generate and sustain such values within the life of a nation. The gospel parables teach us that only a tiny seed can bear much fruit in a nation's life, culture and politics. That is the ecology of the kingdom.

Wales in the divine economy

I have mentioned the example of Wales occasionally. It is presumptuous of me to comment on where the models outlined above may place Wales within the divine economy. However, it would seem to me that there is clearly a proper and discriminating Christian affirmation of the linguistic, cultural and political dimensions of Welsh nationhood and nationalism that should not and may be lost amid a proper and discriminating judgment on any xenophobic expressions of Welsh identity. Christians, above all people, should be open to finding ways of affirming and reconciling the cultural and linguistic diversity within a land like this amid the wider loyalties of human existence in Britain, Europe and the larger world. Christians should explore ways of creating institutions and cultural patterns that will sustain and invigorate Wales, for example, as an autonomous nation enjoying multiple identities within the post-modern political realities of a world that is at once too small and too big for the constraining concept of the nation-state. The rich concept of the *imago Dei* allows for such an exciting historical development, as Christians seek to discover fresh ways of expressing nationhood in the twenty-first century. Let not the fear of vertigo prevent the praise of God from ringing out in all the languages and identities of the nations, as long as the gospel is not transgressed.

[1]See W. de Klerk, *The Puritans in Africa: A Story of Afrikanerdom* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); and J. de Gruchy, Cl. Villa-Vicencio (eds), *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1983); also Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Love of Country in Dialogue with the Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 29f., 47f., 117.

[2]For a detailed and classic study of the biblical material on nations, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 4, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961): 'Near and Distant Neighbours', pp. 285–323.

[3]David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shift in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991). See also the several essays on a biblical understanding of nationhood and nationalism in Paul L. Ballard and D. Huw Jones (eds), *This Land and People: A Symposium on Christian and Welsh National Identity* (Cardiff: Collegiate Centre of Theology, 1979), esp. R. Tudur Jones, 'Christian nationalism'.

[4]Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford: OUP/University of Wales Press, pb edn, 1982), p. 415.

[5]David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 219.

[6]See Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 2nd edn, 1983); and Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London: Methuen, 1977).

[7]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, revised 2nd edn, 1991).

[8]See William Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1990), ch. 6, pp. 110–136.

[9]For an exploration of different theological views on the meaning of the *imago Dei*, see Ray Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (Glasgow: Collins, 1973).

[10]See Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981); and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[11]For this view, see Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 3rd edn, 1966).

[12]In support of the existence of pre-modern nationalism, see James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); and William F. Storrar, *From Identity to Liberation: Towards a New Practical Theology of Scottish Nationhood* (Edinburgh University, unpublished PhD thesis, 1992).

[13]See Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: Love of Country in Dialogue with the Witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 78, 79; Storrar, *From Identity to Liberation*, ch. 1.

[14]See Kedourie, *Nationalism*.

[15]McCrone, *Understanding Scotland*, pp. 197–221.

[16]*Ibid.*, pp. 6–10.

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 219.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 221.

[19]See Ray Anderson, *On Being Human*.

[20]Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

[21]Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

[22]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

[23] Robert Webber, *The Secular Saint* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

[24] Storrar, *Scottish Identity*, ch. 8, pp. 152–179.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 166–170.

[26] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

[27] See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM Press, revised edn, 1988); N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Andrew Kirk's writings on liberation theology from an evangelical perspective.

[28] See Storrar, *From Identity to Liberation*, ch. 5.

[29] See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974); *idem*, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981); *idem*, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967).

[30] Christen Democratisch Appel, *Programme of Basic Principles* (Gravenhage: CDA, nd, *c.*1980), p. 2.

[31] CDA Institute, Gravenhage, *The National Question: A Christian Democratic Approach* (1993).

[32] See Robert Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991).

[33] See Storrar, *Scottish Identity*; *idem*, *From Identity to Liberation*.

Bibliography

In addition to the works by Anderson, Clements, Kellas, Mouw, Storrar and Weil, mentioned in the notes, see:

F. Catherwood, *A Better Way: the case for a Christian social order* (London: IVP, 1975).

B. Goudzwaard, *Idols of our Time* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984).

O.R. Johnston, *Nationhood: Towards a Christian Perspective* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1980).

B. Thorogood, *The Flag and the Cross: National Limits and the Church Universal* (London: SCM, 1988).

C. Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

Comment

Martyn Eden

1. I find myself in fundamental agreement with Dr Storrar's paper, although on a number of points I should wish to go further than he has. It is a historical and theological imperative to get our positions straight on nationhood. If Jesus is Lord, no issues on the social or political agenda are off-limits and his lordship must extend to every area of thought and action. The notion of an autonomous politics, like autonomous economics, is one of the heresies thrown up by secularization.

2. In particular, I agree with Dr Storrar that nations are human creations and not part of the created order; they are contingent cultural products of history. Karl Barth argues forcefully and correctly that the mere fact that there are nations which we inhabit does not entitle us to deduce that there must be a true command from God as Creator, or some *distinctive* form of obedience that we owe.[1] Even so, nationhood as such is never condemned in Scripture. Nations in the Bible bear the marks of the fall in the same way as do all social institutions, but nationhood is associated with God's mercy. The incident of Babel in Genesis 11 reflects both judgment and grace. When God divides and scatters by creating a confusion of languages, he keeps human creatures from uniting in the pursuit of evil in the way, for example, that is foreseen in Revelation 13. It has been well remarked somewhere that 'the same proud sin which prevents mankind from uniting for good also prevents us from uniting for evil'.

3. It follows from this that I have no difficulty in accepting Dr Storrar's view that: (a) Nations are a valid cultural expression of humanity created in God's image; (b) Nations *may* constitute a legitimate defence of identity, BUT (c) Nationalism may also be idolatrous. The challenge that lies before us, however, is to answer the question: *when is national loyalty a virtue and when does it become a vice?* In order to answer that question, we need a definition of nationalism which is less neutral than the one Dr Storrar provides when he speaks of 'those political ideologies and movements fostering national consciousness and advocating the right of nations to self-determination'. I see merit in Nicholas Wolterstorff's definition of nationalism as 'a nation's preoccupation with its own nationhood'.[2] There are two principal reasons for such a preoccupation. One is reactive and defensive, whilst the other is offensive in both senses of the word. These are generally two sides of the same coin. Both Isaiah Berlin and Martin Buber have explained the former in terms of a nation's response to a wound or disease in the body politic of a nation.

> Bodily organs do not draw attention to themselves until they are attacked by disease. Similarly, nationalism is at bottom the awareness of some lack, some disease or ailment. The people feel a more and more urgent compulsion to fill this lack, to cure this disease or ailment.[3]

So when Argentina invaded the Malvinos Islands, she wounded Britain's national pride. The response was a war, even though the British government had been signalling its willingness to discuss the sovereignty of the Falklands for a long time. Or again: many other expressions of nationalism can be explained in terms of reactions to colonial and imperialistic arrogance. We are bound to ask, therefore, to what extent a particular nationalism is a reaction to (*e.g.* cultural) oppression.

The offensive form of nationalism is so preoccupied with its national identity and interest that it becomes blind to the virtues and interests of other nations, or even to their very existence. The first president of the modern State of Israel described how 'a nation without a country found a country without a nation'. This kind of nationalism not only oppresses cultural minorities, it exploits them economically and manipulates them for reasons of its own national security. This is plain sin and its correlations with war are too numerous for me to need to document.

A discussion of 'Gospel and Nationhood' needs to take the actual or potential sinfulness of nationalism very seriously. I do not think that Dr Storrar's description of 'vertigo' is warranted here. Of course, nationhood and national identity have their positive aspects, such as the richness of the cultural heritage related to language; national identity as an antidote to tribalism and parochialism; psychological benefits of such national identity; *etc.* And, yes – national identity is also an antidote to the rootless internationalism which allows multi-national corporations to pursue their selfish goals at everyone else's expense. But when national consciousness and self-determination themselves become the causes of sin and even idolatry, as happened in the cases of German national socialism and Afrikaner nationalism, these are at odds with the gospel.

4. We should not ignore in our discussion what the Gospels implicitly say about Jewish nationalism. We know that, at the time of Jesus' ministry, Israel was occupied by Roman armies and that Jewish expectations of the Messiah were that he would be the national liberator. We also know that the Zealot nationalist movement was popular. The Gospels tell us that Jesus' disciple, Simon, was a Zealot. Oscar Cullmann plausibly argued that at least two other disciples – Judas Iscariot and Peter – were probably Zealots as well. Cullmann further argued, on the basis of Mark 8:29-33, that Jesus was under pressure to conform to Zealot expectations and consciously chose not to do so.[4]

However, it is clear that Jesus totally replaced the Jewish nationalism of his day: 'My kingdom is not of this world' (Jn. 18:36). Moreover, he acknowledged a limited role for Roman government (Mk. 12:17) and he paid the Roman tax (Mt. 17:24-27). He even included a collaborator – Matthew – in his group of disciples, along with Simon the Zealot. Jesus' priority was the kingdom of God. 'Seek first the kingdom', he taught. David Bosch summarized Jesus' attitude to nationalism thus:

> Jesus destroyed all human definitions of community solidarity. In doing so, he included at least three groups of people who

were normally excluded. First, he included the useless ones: the blind, the lame and the lepers. Secondly, he included the traitors of the nation and the exploiters, namely the universally hated tax collectors. Thirdly, he included the 'enemies', especially the Samaritans and the Romans. This cost him rejection . . . he was betrayed and crucified because he refused to fulfil sectional and ideological aspirations.[5]

Whenever nationalistic aspirations are given priority over those of the kingdom, those aspirations fall under the judgment of God and we should resist them.

5. Finally, let me make a comment on Dr Storrar's four models for a Christian understanding and response to nationhood. I must confess that I should not have presented three of them in such an elaborate theoretical garb, but they are, indeed, models for practical discipleship for us all to use.

I want, however, to single out the Christian Democratic model.[6] I see in this model a genuine basis for both political analysis and action in post-modern society. The model not only applies to Wales and to Scotland, for example, as nations within a multi-nation state, but it also applies to regional communities within Europe. More radically, it could also be applied to ethnic communities which are not geographically concentrated, but nevertheless fit the Christian Democrat definition of 'nation'. It could be of enormous significance in Northern Ireland for that reason.

Speaking as a Britisher in the British situation, for me the big challenge is how to move from the present tight unitary state in Britain to a situation which allows some measure of self-determination to various national communities in a truly democratic and *non*-violent manner. I see a reformed House of Lords as the key – replacing the hereditary peers with representatives of those communities. With that relatively modest reform in place, subsequent changes could be worked out within the democratic process and not outside it . . .

. . . But please forgive me – I have moved away from Gospel and Nationhood. The point, however, is this: if the model is to be made to work, it must be steered, indeed, by biblical theology, but also earthed in *Realpolitik*. Integration is the name of the game.

[1] See the argument of the whole section in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/IV (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), 54.3 (pp. 285–323).

[2] N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), ch. 5.

[3] M. Buber, *Israel and the World* (New York: Schockess, 1973), p. 218.

[4] O. Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1957).

[5] See D. Prior, *Jesus or Britannia* (Nottingham: Grove Booklets, 1983), where this passage is quoted.

[6] By the way, I refute the suggestion that there is no Christian Democratic movement in the United Kingdom. We may be youthful, but there are 8,000 members and we are growing both numerically and, I think, in maturity.

Language in God's Economy: A Welsh and International Perspective

R.M. Jones

Introduction

The topic we have to deal with is in some respects no longer very controversial. Most people would agree that diversity within unity is an internationally worthy and biblical ideal, and erstwhile attempts to destroy languages and cultures simply because they were minorities are not usually deliberately defended nowadays. Granted, it is a delicate balance. A singular emphasis on diversity leads to anarchy and divisiveness; too much unity leads to uniformity and monotony. Yet in Britain, for example, there has grown up a fair consensus that the old thrust against variety in our national cultures was mistaken. Even within Wales there is now a greater realization of the value of our individual civilization. Some 30 years ago there remained a fair amount of destructive animosity towards the Welsh language. Thirty years ago there still persisted opposition to the devolution of government to Wales. During these 30 years there has grown up, right across the political spectrum, support for the fostering of the Welsh language and culture, and even general agreement on the devolving of government to Wales, be that democratic or undemocratic or administrative, according to the field of activity.

So some principles now are rarely at issue except amongst a very small number of people. What Christians are required to do today is to consider how this present situation fits in with God's purposes, and in what way we should consider our responsibility for the future. There is no need for me therefore to waste your time going over old territory, and I hope we shall be able to move forward to enrich our thoughts about these topics, which have actually been of immense importance in the social development of the world in general in this century.

I am not anxious to present any agreed strategy for evangelicals. For my own part, I do not think it desirable for evangelicals to seek detailed agreement amongst themselves on matters such as this; nor is settled policy about language restoration or nationalism a matter for the local church or for an evangelical organization. What, however, is healthy and important is that as Christians we should think about these matters under God, indeed that all issues and particularly those that are relevant and influential and contemporary be faced up to honestly and openly and intelligently, and seen within the scope of God's sovereign grace. Indeed, to ignore such matters, and restrict God's sovereignty to a personal and private religion, is to insult God and to be negligent in our duties as stewards.

Let me give one warning. I shall not be using the terms 'nationalist' or 'imperialist' with any emotive connotation. 'Nationalist' in this paper will simply refer to a sense of reality regarding the nation as an entity, and a desire to defend its identity and effectiveness as a cultural instrument. 'Imperialist' refers to the phenomenon of interfering authoritatively in the affairs of another nation. The distinction is basically a technical but a key one, as journalism has found their confusion profitable and useful. From the spiritual point of view, it is essential to be more precise.

Neither shall I try to confuse nationalism with racism. There is again a frequent journalistic confusion between racism and defensive, fruitful national culturalism. Racism is inevitably a force against diversity and in favour of uniformity. Occasionally, misuse of terminology in this way may be adopted in order to destroy or bring into disrepute a particular national identity or culture. Such usage, however, is mischievous and should not trouble us here. I have heard a less than lighthearted comparison made between the imperialism of the Nazis and the defensive culturalism of Wales. This is just simply the slick topsy-turvy transfer of imperialist bad habits to the colonials themselves. Actually, Nazism was anti-nationalist for more reasons than one, and not only because it was imperialist. The great Calvinist philosopher, Dooyeweerd, has noted another most significant point:

> It was an unmistakable proof of the reactionary character of the myth of blood and soil propagated by German Nazism that it tried to undermine the national consciousness of the Germanic peoples by reviving the primitive ethnic idea of *Volkstum.* Similarly, it is an unmistakable proof of the retrograde tendency of all modern totalitarian political systems that they attempt to annihilate the process of cultural differentiation and individualization by a methodical mental equalizing of all cultural spheres.[1]

In other words, Nazism and racism confused the sphere of race, blood groups, skin colour and so on with genuine cultural pluralism. As a result, their view of human society was poisoned.

One further distinction I feel is necessary at this juncture, regarding my main concrete example of language in God's economy, namely Welsh. Of the various nations that exist in the world, there are several distinctive linguistic models. To simplify: Japan follows the one nation/one language model; Switzerland (with Romansh) and Wales the multi-lingual territorial model; Libya/Egypt or England/Falkland Islands a non-territorial monolingual model, *i.e.* a general language pattern that does not limit the language used to a particular territory; and so on. As far as I can see, the Welsh model, for which I naturally have some affection in that it links the people to a warm and original traditional culture of their own, as well as linking them to an international sensitivity to diversity, is likely to continue for at least the next 200 years if the world continues that long. And we have enough on our plate with that situation on which to base our present discussion.

Language in the divine economy

The first question I wish to raise is the very general one. What is the purpose or function of human language in the economy of God? What does it do? There are three aspects of language I would like to stress.

1. It orders and names phenomena. Naming is where it begins. In the days of man's free will, independence of naming and the potential to do this – quite apart from the language of the Deity – was bestowed on Adam. This naming is the anchor for the whole of language. Naming is an analysis, and therefore a means to understanding. It recognizes the diversity within the unity of creation:

> And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field. (Gn. 2:19-20)

This was a major step for humanity, considerably more so than the one on the moon, and a means for Adam to organize his thoughts in order to accomplish his office on earth as set down by God in Genesis 1:28; 2:15; 9:1; and Psalm 8: to be fruitful and have dominion. This language was activated within human limits, just as language remains limited – in tandem with Adam's humanity – as contrasted with the attributes of God who has no limits, is all-powerful, all-knowing, and whose language must not only include all human languages but also much more beyond this necessary scope.

This naming may indeed be related to the Logos, the Word himself. Through the Word all things were created, and thus he himself provided the objects for words. He is the one who sets order and logic on the chaos. Following the *cry* in the wilderness

comes the *Word*, a remarkable parallel, I would say, to the development of language itself in the history of the child.[2]

So, my explanation of why language names is that it is a means of realizing, recognizing, expressing and celebrating God's order. We do not for the moment know exactly the value of the variety of ways in which languages now analyse reality; why they accomplish this in God's economy in particular ways. For instance, we know that exactly the same phenomenon can be analysed in the grammar of different languages in different ways, all of which may be equally valid. Take the morphemic analysis of time within the Indo-European verb-system. In English, there are two morphemic divisions of time in the indicative, and only two, past and non-past; all other expressions or divisions are resolved or constructed by auxiliary verbs and other structural devices. In French, there are five morphemic divisions in the indicative; in Welsh, six. In other words, within language itself, God's order of time is recognized in different ways.

Perhaps we have a suggestion of this holy presence in the fact that there are always three persons in the pronoun system (although some languages combine these in different ways), there are three increasing grades in the comparison of adjectives, three predicative parts of speech, three time epochs for verbs in most languages – past, present and future.[3] There seems to be a reflection of the diversity within unity of the Creator himself. But dual systems (*e.g.* singular, plural) in language also remind us of the two natures in one Person, so central to the Christian faith. These are technical matters on which it would be improper to dwell here.

2. Secondly, and only secondly, language is a means of communication, the word uttered. Sometimes, glib people say about language, 'Oh, it's only a medium of communication.' But before it communicates, it must be a means of analysis. It must have something to communicate, it must have analysed reality. And strangely, as we noticed, that analysis possesses binary and trinary systems. Then, and only then, does it communicate. And I would claim, although this would take up a complete discussion, that the central thing it communicates, perhaps the only thing that really counts, is praise. It is a means of praising. When we say that language is a means of communication, I would prefer to suggest, rather, that for Christians obviously (and eventually for all) it is a means of praise. This is the second major characteristic of language: communication. Such communication includes everyday activities as well as the wonders of literature.

Just as we noted a difference of method of analysing order within languages, so languages have different ways within literatures of incorporating their cultural traditions. The great Welsh tradition of praise has been commented upon by civilized outside observers like A.M. Allchin. And certainly, the uniqueness of the Christian witness within Welsh literature, and its unbroken presence from the sixth century to the present day within a Christian literature that includes consecutively so-called secular work by the same writers, has a character that should prove of interest to all cultured Christians whatever their language.

I note just one simple point, to which Professor Donald MacLeod referred in the *Free Church Record*, February 1989. He referred to the relationship between Christian literature and so-called secular literature in Gaelic, or even the alienation between Highland religion and Highland literature:

> It is quite remarkable, for example, that no outstanding writer of Gaelic secular verse ever wrote hymns . . . If the secular poets had any religious beliefs at all they gave them no expression in their verse.
>
> The same was true of the hymn-writers. Men like John Morrison and Dugald Buchanan confined themselves strictly to religious themes. Not a single epic or nature-poem or love-sonnet ever sullied their pens . . .
>
> Some of the secular poets were humble, practising Christians . . . They felt 'unworthy'. Such themes should be left to the professionals, the clergy.
>
> It is not so easy to excuse the hymn-writers. They seem to have divided the world rigidly into *sacred* and *secular* and to have believed that it was wrong in principle for Christian writers to waste their time on anything but the directly religious. Secular verse, creative fiction and political journalism were out. The only valid Christian literature was the hymn and the sermon. Sadly, this attitude is still with us.

In Welsh, on the other hand, so-called secular works, nature verse and political comment, stories, social protest and love poetry have all been interwoven closely with hymns and religious verse and sermons throughout the ages, by the same writers and for the same audience. There has been a certain amount of occasional pietistic complaint about this, and sometimes an inevitable division of labour. But, generally speaking, we have been fortunate in that the main thrust of our literature has been more holistic than Gaelic and remarkably comprehensive and versatile, while maintaining the central faith.

Of course, it is understandable that a hymn-writer should specialize. One can empathize with any poet whose heart has been won by Jesus so much that his whole being must celebrate every day the wonder of knowing his Lord; and practical things may even be neglected. He has been dazzled. The beauty of salvation has taken hold of him. This is the greatest subject in his life: the Person of his Saviour, the Lordship of his Shepherd. Even the Creation of the Creator has to be secondary to the source of it all. Our great hymn-writer, William Williams Pontycelyn, can talk about little else. (Well, once or twice perhaps he wrote a comic verse or two.) But day in and day out he would sing the praise untiringly of the one and only God. This can hardly be accounted a shortcoming. Yet, somehow, it would be a shortcoming to neglect his farm, to ignore his wife and children, not to take responsibilities as a citizen, to be careless in verbal craftsmanship, to ignore the sick and needy. And, as a Christian, it would be a shortcoming not to recognize these other activities as matters to be taken notice of in praise of God, to dedicate everything – not just the hymns – to the glorification of God.

3. After language as an ordering and language as communication, we have language as a mark of the diversity of identities in the world. It is related to a society and tradition. It is possessed by people and used by them with affection. They become involved in the wholeness of life expressed in a particular place at a particular time. This is a part of their warm humanity. Language is not simply an abstract analysis, nor just a channel for communication. It is a human, local attachment, related to people in a special way. We have already drawn attention to the great and holy principle of diversity within unity, found in the Godhead and providentially for culture. Now, we may think of language as a badge of that wonderful diversity, a symbol of national identity, the word incorporated in culture. When man in his pride tries to centralize his power and raise up his might through uniformity, the will of God is expressed through the pluralization of languages and traditions: yet still within unity. Languages express this unity in diverse traditions or different tunes, with a multitude of words, in the one truth of the glory of God. And so, thirdly, language is an intellectual sign of the way the cultural mandate, to be fruitful, is expressed. It is not, perhaps, always necessary to reflect that national diversity, but it is certainly common, and delightfully interesting.

When we consider diversity, Genesis 11 is a crucial portion of text. There is no direct link with the fall, although it is well to parallel the two phenomena. The consequences of the fall on language, one would suppose, are related to the ephemeral qualities within languages. No language on earth has a divine right to survive within temporal confines. The fall would seem to be related to the 'decay', or more properly the 'development', within languages themselves. Yet one must be careful here, as 'development' within time is what we already see in Genesis 1–2. The development from the fall would, however, naturally involve falling away or decay of usages, as well as the misuse of expression. Language even before the fall adapted itself to changing circumstances; but now, its inadequacies occasionally prove more demanding.

The judgmental element at Babel can be recognized. But here, as with the central fact of the cross, the paradoxical truth of Genesis 50:2 is far-reaching. Diversity and scattering were envisaged as the desired and correct order. The judgmental element bears on mutual misunderstanding and using language as a medium for pride, rather than on diversity as such. Diversity seems to be a favourable factor, and, indeed, as an inner aspect is central to all language formation. The impediment lies in mutual 'confounding'. Babel does not prohibit mutual learning of languages. Moreover, it also allows

for the development of translation. By the moderating limitation of cultures within units, it encourages the local extension of talent, responsibility, and fruition rather than depending on mass processes. Each culture may develop its own character that enriches the mosaic of mankind.

The linguistic crux at Pentecost is that diversity is not reversed in the world of the Spirit. It is indeed, in its own way, repeated. What is reversed is mutual incomprehension. Language therefore remains quite happily a factor in the variety of peoples.

In those three functions it seems to me we have the fulness of language: language as analysis, language as communication, and language as a badge of diversity. I think it is important to keep the three in balance. As the variety of culture reflects fruitfulness, and as our human duty on God's earth is to be fruitful, the third is not a matter to be swept under the carpet. In the following remarks, I shall concentrate my reflections on this third aspect although my own primary interest, academically and practically speaking, is in the first two.

Language and the divine mandate

In thinking of the third aspect, we naturally proceed to consider the affectionate and positive attachment that people frequently develop towards their own territory and traditions. This is their particular responsibility, and as Paul himself realized, it is good and humanly healthy to feel a warmth towards one's own nation. Paul was not coy about loving his own people (Rom. 9:3), nor should the contemporary Welsh man or woman be ashamed of patriotism. In Wales, however, owing to our particular circumstances, the providence of God leads us to reflect on another strange but related characteristic in this situation, one that is of wider interest.

We are witnesses in our time of the apparent resurrection of words, the renewal of language, even its restoration or revival. The word once killed and trampled in certain areas, the word of which some felt shame and towards which others felt psychological indifference or animosity due to historical conditioning, is now reappearing in some places, and, what is more, being kindled in the hearts of people once dead to it. Formerly, the opposition to the existence of Welsh, even amongst Christians, stemmed either from pietistic malevolence to all cultural identity and fruitful diversity and from an unpreparedness to adapt Christian experience to everyday living, or from the old colonialist attempt to suppress any language differing from the tongue of Empire. Conformity, however, to the centralist cultural pattern no longer prevails to the same extent. The language itself is being reborn. It is a parable, but a parable to be taken seriously. And so I mention it as a matter to be thought about and thought through in the future. We are talking about a renewal of nationhood and of words after their imperialist downgrading. Response to this is not an easy task anywhere. Imperialism has left a labyrinth of problems everywhere in the world. These are basically psychological, though they are cultural as well. Along with psychological problems of inferiority for the former conquered people, there are just as urgent problems of superiority for the former majority conquerors. But imperialism has left good problems, too. And linguistic renewal is one of them. It is good because it defines some purpose – even at a secular level – in an age of nihilism.

In this third aspect of language, we naturally have to consider the link with nationalism,[4] a phenomenon known to us in Wales for over a thousand years and – in the sense I use it here – almost inevitably a defence mechanism against imperialist destruction. The variety of languages, although not corresponding in any mechanical way, has a relevant parallel in the variety of nations. Just as God ordained nations (Dt. 32:8; Jb. 12:23; Acts 17:26) and ordained them for eternity (Rev. 21:26), so he was responsible, subsequent to Babel (Gn. 11:1-9, esp. 4, 9) for the diversity of languages, also (on an unstrained interpretation) for eternity (Rev. 7:9-10). This is God's doing, whatever may have been the occasion; it is therefore good. Woe to the person who works against it. Power politics, the centralization and uniformity of the Big Brother attitude, seems to be anathema to him as it is to Christians. Just as the Godhead himself is diversity within unity, just as the church too has many members and a multitude of gifts within one body, so God's first good and holy act was to divide (Gn. 1:4, 7). The act

of division is sometimes emotionally and sentimentally claimed to be negative. But in God's economy and manifold grace it is necessary, and always seen as complementary to unity.

What of the eventual fate of language before the Throne? Does one need to postulate a further change of language, indeed a reversal to uniformity? I would agree, certainly, that not too much should be made of the references in Revelation 7:9; 15:4; 21:26, other than noting that plurality is emphasized. But certainly, the proposition that a new language is necessary, a sort of heavenly Esperanto, is not introduced. That diversity should be undone at that point seems to me to be not only unnecessary, but uncharacteristic, as any impediment to mutual understanding may obviously be removed. Whatever tongues were at Pentecost (and my own supposition is that they were real languages), the relevant point is that they were comprehended by all in that place. Suggestions of new revolutionary developments of what we understand as language before the Throne are matters to be wary of, if they are not revealed. Certainly there is no suggestion that diversity is to be reversed in order to guarantee mutual comprehension. *Diversity* in certain aspects, it seems to me, is eternal: *divisiveness* is temporal. Diversity as a principle is built in to the whole structure of language, as into the whole of creation itself. It is a characteristic of God himself.

Allow me to quote a fine paragraph by H. Henry Meeter, from his book *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*.

> Although all nations form a racial unity, there is also, according to Scripture, a definite place for such natural group formations as distinct nations. This important fact must not be overlooked. Had the human race remained sinless, there would have arisen in the organic life of men larger and lesser groups, each with its own cultural task and sovereignty in its own sphere commensurate with the task assigned to it. Sin, which has disrupted human life generally, has also worked havoc with the cultural demand of God to each of these groups, that they subdue the earth and accomplish the special task assigned to each of them. Instead of the unity which God had intended that organic groups should attain through diversity, each developing its own distinctive task, *there arose an attempt at uniformity without distinctiveness.* The classical biblical example of such godless uniformity is given to us in the story of the erection of the tower of Babel on the plains of Shinar. Had this project been executed, there would have arisen a godless world-empire, in which the subjugation of the earth and the development of the diversified talents of men and cultural tasks generally would have been retarded greatly, not to say defeated.[5] (emphasis mine)

The nation is a cultural unit, suitable for developing civilized traditions and establishing cultural institutions. The motive for these is found in the cultural mandate set down for humans on earth, a command that was renewed subsequently on several occasions: 'And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth' (Gn. 1:28). This is what we do to the glory of God. In so far as we fail in this, we disobey. We fail to submit to God's will. And I take it that when God refers to being fruitful, he means in all things – ever fruitful according to our gifts, agriculturally, industrially, procreatively, culturally. In all things, fructify. This includes the small things, be they small acts, by small people, in small countries, with small languages. Indeed, we have reason to suppose that God does not favour the big battalions: human immensity does not impress him (Lk. 9:46-48; 14:11; Is. 5:8-9).

It is also to be done within a framework of justice or righteousness. In recent years, we have witnessed a growing emphasis on the relationship between justice and the Welsh language. According to Proverbs 14:34, 'Righteousness exalteth a nation'. Justice or righteousness is a major biblical topic, and I have no doubt it is comprehensive and penetrating. Its primary relevance is of course to do with the relationship between the individual and God, how one can be justified. But there is no reason to think that this great principle of justice or righteousness is confined and does not relate to unemployment and living conditions, the relationship between the sexes or the position of the Welsh language. Virtue is not a private matter. In recent years some of the injustice perpetuated on the Welsh language has been repealed by law, and we shall no doubt see further moves in this direction. This brings me to some remarks on Wales in particular.

For example: Wales

The Christian religion is inclusive: it includes all culture. It is not one thread in our culture. Culture is subsumed under Christianity, just as Christianity has to do both with our eternal destiny and with every single detail of our earthly existence. Justice is related to cultural fruition. Injustice, consequently, is a handicap in the development of society and culture. And this should be of paramount importance to us. Susan E. Schreiner noted:

> Students of Calvin's theology must never lose sight of that argument against Sadoleto that the primary concern of the Christian is not the salvation of his individual soul but the glory of God. Without minimising the importance of sin, justification by faith, or the certainty of salvation in Calvin's thought, we must remember that he knew the glory of God extended beyond the individual and encompassed all aspects of creation . . . To refuse participation in this earthly realm or to neglect to contemplate nature is a failure to understand God's commitment, purpose and governance of his created order. And finally to limit Calvin's vision to the total depravity of human nature, justification by faith, and the condemning function of nature is to impose on him a mentality that he resisted throughout his writings.[6]

It is within such a perspective that I remark on Wales in particular. The structure of relationships between the English and Welsh languages was established by the so-called Act of Union in 1536. This made the language a political matter. It also set up the psychological framework for the groups who were to discuss the issue right up to the twentieth century, and afterwards. One single sentence, albeit slightly verbose, proclaims the official imperial attitude to Welsh:

> Also be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that all justices, Commissioners, sheriffs, coroners, escheators, stewards and their lieutenants, and all other officers and ministers of the law, shall proclaim and keep the sessions, courts, hundreds, leets, sheriffs' courts and all other courts in the English tongue; and all oaths of officers, juries and inquests, and all other affidavits, verdicts and wagers of law to be given and done in the English tongue; and also that from henceforth no person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have or enjoy any manner office or fees within this realm of England, Wales or other the King's Dominion upon pain of forfeiting the same offices or fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English speech or language.

Now, at long last, in 1994, this clause is finally repealed. But its wording is no longer important. What are effective and relevant are the deeply ingrained attitudes that have been firmly established in its shadow. The psychological structure is the thing that matters. The patronizing and superior stance expresses itself at a popular level in the London newspapers, even the so-called 'quality newspapers', as for instance Craig Brown's comments on the fact that the Welsh soap-opera *Pobl y Cwm* was being shown for a while throughout Britain on BBC 2 with subtitles.[7] Says Brown: 'The Welsh language sounds exactly like a tape of everyday English played backwards, but subtitles are provided for those without reversal facilities . . . The first week started promisingly with sufficient rows, deaths, swindles, tears and betrayals to keep us all happy for years to come, or, to be more accurate, emoc ot sraey rof yppah.'

This bold London attempt at hilarity seems innocent enough and has only become sinister with the wanton destruction of the language in vast areas of our country. The patronizing and superior stance from outside has been responded to by an inferiority complex regarding the language and identity from inside the country, a complex only too often reflected nowadays as a complex amongst those who consider themselves incomplete or inadequate in their knowledge of some of the main facets of Welsh culture. The one has bred the other. And this double inferiority complex is penetrating and prevalent. The extraordinary situation of having Welsh people who are anti-Welsh is unfortunately more common than one would like to admit.

Inevitably there are those of all political persuasions who work towards normalization or resuscitation. In recent years they have begun to organize themselves and work more systematically than hitherto. Perhaps their main hope of success lies in the fact that it is easier to be honest and open about one's love for the language than to disguise one's animosity. Camou-

flaging antagonism under the guise of sweet reasonableness and protestations of innocence is no longer as easy as it used to be.

Amongst evangelicals, as I have suggested, response to the situation varies. Unexpectedly, I have found the most typical response to be the put-it-off rationale: 'This is a genuine issue. We must develop an official line on this. But not yet.' The second response is the old and well-worn pietistic escape: 'The gospel is only about saving souls. All else counts for nothing.' This is basically a limitation of vision regarding sanctification and lordship: 'Everyday life is not important. All these deeds and duties we perform are not part of what the Christian God is interested in because other people besides Christians deal with those.' Lip-service may be paid to Christ's kingship in all of life; but then an awkward question such as the Welsh language crops up, and suddenly we discover that we are really not concerned with the whole of life. Retreat is immediate. We have not been thinking about every territory as something to be claimed – just simply devotions, a limited number of good deeds, and perhaps one or two protests about abortion and pornography. Often we hear people who have narrowed the gospel to the moment of salvation complaining at the same time that youth culture is aimless, adultery rampant, drugs and raves taking over, and yet little attention has been paid to the Christian concept of culture.

I am not simply talking about the responsibility of pastors in this task, nor just about sermons. I am talking about the testimony of the Church as a whole. The Church must let the unbeliever and the new Christian know that one of the first tasks he/she has is to think about how every section of life fits into this faith. How do we carry out all everyday life as Christians? How should we think, speak and act – fallibly of course but prayerfully – 24 hours a day, as servants of God? Some may say that this is not the function of the pulpit. But I am not talking about method. What I am talking about is what the Church should convey as the fulness of God's sovereignty and as the work of the Christian, what is his/her scope of praise in thought, word and deed. We need to know not just how to become a Christian, but how to be Christian in the practical aspects of life. We are dealing not simply with the duties of a certain office, such as that of the preacher, nor one means of presenting the message. We are dealing with the Church witnessing to the world and conveying that the whole of life is involved.

Running from the whole of life and concentrating on the moment of conversion is related to the unpreparedness to respect the Welsh language. We hear the warcry: 'The gospel is more important than the language', which has now led to a lack of evangelizing amongst Welsh speakers in Wales, even in Welsh-speaking areas. What is often implied is: 'If he's not prepared to worship in English, he doesn't deserve to be a Christian. He comes to us, we don't go to him. We will only evangelize if he turns to English. Language is not as important as the gospel, therefore we do not work in Welsh. All things being equal, we stick with the majority, and all things are always equal . . . Sudan is all right, not Welsh Wales.' I know an educated Welsh person within this context who, after becoming a Christian, felt an obligation to read his Bible in English. In English one has 'life': there's no life in Welsh nowadays. This secret must be kept from the Welsh. 'I'm as good a Welshman as the next, BUT . . .'

In a recent essay on this point in the periodical *Gorwelion* [*Horizons*], produced by the Welsh Evangelical Church in Llangefni, Ieuan W. Evans reminds us of the way in which Welsh speakers during the years of strength set up English causes to propagate the gospel. He suggests that it is now time for the English to reciprocate. In surveying the situation, it would be interesting to count how many Pentecostal or charismatic Welsh-language churches are in existence at the moment. Would you need one hand? Would you need one finger?

The contemporary Welsh person can sometimes become a Christian and decide: 'Now I abandon my people.' This extraordinary situation has developed amongst Apostolics, and many fervent, even Welsh-speaking, evangelicals, to excuse neglect of evangelizing or establishing churches in Welsh. The gospel is now not only more important than the language: it is exiled from the language.

On the whole, I don't think the so-called division amongst Christians regarding the Welsh language is particularly to do with the language itself: it is much broader. There may be some who are rather anti-Welsh in the old imperial mould or those who suffer in a rather old Welsh way from an inferiority complex regarding identity. I have met very few. At the other extreme, there may be patriotic Christians rather obsessive about language, on whom some of the idolatry of language and nation that some secular people possess has rubbed off. We are warned about these. I have met none of them. When language or nation or any cultural phenomenon becomes an idol, then, as Professor K. Schilder says, man has fallen in love with the tools and has lost the ideal of doing the work demanded, namely being servants and stewards glorifying God. This arises from the divorce of religion and culture, or rather from viewing culture as an end rather than as a means. *Self*-expression becomes a main delight, and the perspective of a whole life, spiritual and material, temporal and eternal, natural and supernatural, is shrivelled.

These positions are not held openly. I think the problem is more to do with breadth of vision and with sovereignty. The division I suspect is to do with a Christianity that mainly concentrates on the point of change and Christianity as a whole life: evangelizing that presents a message about one single happening (and neglects most of the rest) and evangelizing that insists on lordship in every domain.

Christ must, for a live Christian, be at the centre of all things, and it is an insult and betrayal to shunt off his claims restrictedly into devotional exercises or into the initial salvation from which henceforth the Christian is expected to find his/her own way. Christ has established the Church, a people with a local institution – a church. The Church is all-inclusive as regards territory. As a local institution the sphere of a church does not include politics as such, no more than it need formulate a detailed policy on language revival. But as the central part of the Church in general, that is the Christian people themselves as they exist in their daily tasks and duties, seven days a week, the local church can certainly proclaim the rights of God in all matters and the absolute necessity to think through and eventually to act through faithfully family responsibilities, civic, occupational or recreative living. Although I tend to see the office of the local church primarily at work in the proclamation of the Word (particularly in the call to justification and sanctification), in the ordinances, and in praise and prayer, it is good for Christians together, even in groups connected to the local church, under the Word, to think through the problems and opportunities that confront them in practical life. Such groups are a preparation for sanctification within a context of brotherhood and sisterhood, and in modern times are a way of expressing the relevance of Christ's sovereignty in everyday actions. To fluff responsibility because such and such a subject is controversial is to that extent an abandonment of our pilgrimage as Christians.

Conclusion

Imperialism has a lot to answer for. It seems to me sad that evangelical Christians, often immigrants, should be living in areas where the wonderful hymns of Pantycelyn and Robert ap Gwilym Ddu, Eben Fardd and Ann Griffiths were written, and are yet unable to understand them, that evangelical ministers should be unable to comprehend the majestic *Geiriadur* [*Dictionary*] by Thomas Charles or anything of the beautiful devotional tradition of the country they inhabit, that the sermons of John Elias and John Jones Tal-sarn lie beyond their reach. And sometimes, sadly, this is not just an inability but a deep-down resistance to the now much easier task of obtaining the key to this background. This, of course, is not at all to criticize them, so much as to regret the powerful negative force that caused such an alienation. Nor is this to denigrate the by now fine and real Anglo-Welsh culture that has developed particularly in this century. But, on the other hand, there is a new generation of Christians arising for whom the Welsh-language heritage of praise, unbroken from the sixth to the twentieth centuries, need no longer be a closed book. For them, this is not just one solo but a multitude, a chorus, a social creation which they may present as a people to God, the expression of the heart of a nation or a community. This was perhaps the most single-minded consistent though versatile praise tradition in Europe,

celebrating nature and female beauty, places and people, as a channel to perceive God's beauty itself, as well, of course, above all, as exalting the saving grace of the King. Richness of culture is like beauty itself, a shining forth of the glory of the Creator-Redeemer. Now, perhaps, this new generation, hopefully, under grace, because of a bilingual education that is now accepted by more or less all political colours in Wales, should at least have some opportunity to develop a broad and rich, healthy and vital knowledge of this fine inheritance for which no other people in the world is primarily and directly responsible.

I have talked about Wales, but not just for the sake of Wales. It is for the sake of trying to understand and to obey God's will for the nations in God's world.

[1] H. Dooyweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought* (New Jersey: Craig Press, 1972), pp. 105ff.

[2] 'Word' came to mean many things in Hebrew. Primarily, in the religious context, it meant the message of God, but also it referred to the inspiration of the prophet or, metaphorically, the creative omnipotence of God (Ps. 32:6); or it could refer to the divine law.

[3] In Welsh, we also have an equative degree in adjectival comparison that 'marks time' or notes the non-increase in grade, as it were, in one particular position.

[4] I emphasise 'in the sense I use it here'. I am not presently concerned with the broad relationships of nationalism and empirialism.

[5] See the fifth (revised) edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960), p. 183.

[6] See her study, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1991).

[7] 'Pobl y Cwm' means 'Valley People'.

Identity Crisis?: The Nation-state, Nationality, Regionalism, Language and Religion

Neil Summerton

The breakdown of Soviet hegemony in eastern Europe, and the fall of the Berlin Wall, was welcomed with enthusiasm and some naivety as opening a new era of peace and prosperity free from the tension of the Cold War. The perturbations in many parts of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union since then came as a bitter surprise to some. Those with memories and some knowledge of the history of these areas over the last two centuries may perhaps have been less surprised. At the same time, it has become evident that intense national and regional loyalties persist in many western European areas, and the project of European federalism labours somewhat. In the New World, ancient distinctions between the principal linguistic and historical communities cause Canada to tremble chronically on the edge of schism. Against this background, the purpose of this article is to explore attitudes to the nation-state and national identity in Europe, particularly in the last two centuries, with the aim of illuminating current tensions, and to make some comments from a theological perspective.

The nation-state

With the help of the Enlightenment, early nineteenth-century European Romanticism gave to the world a powerful tool for political and social organization – the nation-state in its modern form.[1] True to the Romantic ideal, the notion was that the limits and legitimacy of territorial government in any particular case should be set by collective *feelings* of popular mutual identity. Where a (substantial?) majority of inhabitants in a particular location felt a sense of common identity, there were the makings of nationhood, and therefore of a viable state. This notion chimed well with liberal democratic ideals about the proper source of the legitimacy of power, and with the related notions of self-determination (that the people should decide the limits and character of their government) and non-intervention (that external powers had no right to interfere within the boundaries of a nation-state commanding the support of its people).

From our vantage point, we can see that this subjective sense of national identity was based, from case to case, on a bundle of factors, the most significant being – for the moment, in no particular order of importance – common language; common cultural experience, frequently including shared religion;

common historical experience; common myths about that historical experience (sometimes of actual or perceived persecution); common genetic stock; and feelings of historic association with particular territory, leading on occasion to territorial claims.[2] Not all these factors were necessarily present in each case, or present to the same degree. But some were clearly of great significance in almost all cases. For example, despite the tendency of some of cosmopolitan bent to argue otherwise, shared and distinct language has usually been perceived as central to national identity – to the point that where it has been absent, as in the case of Ireland, nationalists have sometimes felt it necessary to try to revive the historic language.

Religion, on the other hand, appears to have been a less essential component in some places than in others. Clearly, it has been of vital significance on both sides of the divide in Ireland, between all three sides among the South Slavs, and possibly elsewhere in the Orthodox world. Protestantism became a significant factor in British identity between 1600 and 1850; and, for some at least, Catholicism was the *sine qua non* of being a loyal Spaniard in the nineteenth century.[3] By contrast, in, for example, The Netherlands and Germany, national identity came quite early in the nineteenth century to transcend religious divisions, while the earlier principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ensured accidentally rather than centrally that Lutheranism was a unifying factor in the Scandinavian states, though subsequently it may have become a defining characteristic for Finns, Swedes, Norwegians and Danes. By now, almost everywhere in western Europe (in effect in most of the formerly Catholic and Protestant areas of Europe), religion has become a tertiary, if not negligible, factor in forming a sense of national identity.[4] (There may here be something different in the character of modern western Catholicism compared with eastern Orthodoxy.)

Shared cultural and historical experience, including attachment to traditional governmental and other institutions, may be accidental in most cases but was and is clearly an important factor in establishing shared identity. Witness modern Scottish nationalism; the British, or rather the English, myth about a free Saxon peasantry giving birth to common law liberties and Parliament (never mind that it was a Norman nobility that extracted them from an Angevin and a Plantagenet

king respectively!); or the German interpretation of their role as defender of Europe against the barbarian Slavs and Turks. And in the Darwinian period, perceptions of common genetic stock went through a phase of being held to be important in defining national identity everywhere in Europe, not just in Germany.

Over time and from place to place, the importance of these differing factors in establishing a sense of common identity varies. The case of the United States is interesting in this respect: its Enlightenment ideals and dependence on immigration deliberately excluded religion and genetics as sources of identity, throwing it back on to a common language (I believe the oath of citizenship has still to be taken in English, *i.e.* American), and on to commitment to the Enlightenment liberties enshrined in the Constitution, to Enlightenment economics (*i.e.* capitalism), and to the governmental processes and institutions of the founding fathers.

The high hopes of nineteenth-century liberalism were only partly fulfilled. The nation-state, coupled with a much expanded role for governments capable of much enhanced rational bureaucratic efficiency, has proved itself capable of bestowing upon its subjects considerable blessings not feasible in earlier years. Moreover, the mechanism has proved eminently exportable in the twentieth century, the model being adopted across the globe so that now the United Nations comprises some 185 nation-states, each with the characteristic trappings of nationhood – flags, anthems, military forces, *etc.* The process has not been without its difficulties, if only because in many cases the territorial extent of those states has been determined by the accidents of history, such as the limits of colonial occupation, or by the decisions of outside powers (as in the case of the Versailles conference's activities in eastern Europe in 1919). The result has frequently been boundaries bearing no relation to factors such as underlying sentiments of collective identity and national coherence. Here are the seeds of internal tension and conflict. This has been brought into sharp focus in recent years in eastern Europe, but has long been present, for example, in colonial Africa where tribal identity frequently transcends loyalty to the jurisdictional state, while Belgium is an example of the questionable efforts of the Congresses of Vienna and London to fabricate states with an eye to the balance between the great powers rather than regard for emerging feelings of identity.[5] The resulting instability has often had the effect of drawing more coherent nation-states into conflict with one another.

Quite apart from this source of instability, the merits of the nation-state as a way of organizing human society were called into serious question in the first part of the twentieth century by conflicts whose savagery was palpably heightened by the intense sense of national identity felt at every level in European society. It is not too much to assert that the phenomenon of total war in the early twentieth century was made possible not only by technological change, industrialization and a new bureaucratic efficiency, but by the popular motivation resulting from nationalism. One consequence of the traumatic experience of total war was a sharp contrary reaction in public opinion in the shape of a new willingness to see the development of international institutions and international law with the aim of containing the worst excesses of the nation-state.

Those who had been far-seeing in the latter years of the nineteenth century to some extent anticipated this consequence of a Europe of democratic nation-states, and promoted both international arbitration and international conventions (such as those associated with The Hague and Geneva) as mechanisms of containment.[6] These continued to be developed after the First World War, but at the same time international security mechanisms such as the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nations, and a variety of regional organizations, came into being with a fundamental objective of peacekeeping and peacemaking between nation-states. In parallel, too, growing international trade and other forms of international communication encouraged the development of bilateral and multilateral agreements between states whose effect was to attenuate the principle of the absolute sovereignty (in respect of external power of decision) of nation-states. I say the *principle* of absolute sovereignty because, *pace* the views of some politicians, in practice the sovereignty of nation-states is rarely, if ever, absolute: at the least, nation-states usually find it convenient to enter international agreements for mutual benefit which entail

collective working and at least minimal collective institutions to give effect to the agreements, *e.g.* with respect to practical matters like navigation or air traffic control. International agreements can, of course, be renounced unilaterally, with or without consequences; to that extent, national sovereignty is indeed absolute; but while they remain in force, the sovereign state has attenuated its absolute freedom of decision.[7] Inter-war examples are the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization. Since 1945, however, the pace has increasingly quickened, so that we are now faced with a bewildering array of bilateral and multilateral agreements and international institutions dealing not only with trade, development and transport, but transboundary environmental impacts and international criminal activities. In virtually all cases, the effect is to limit the sovereign freedom of manoeuvre and decision of the individual state, typically on a voluntary basis.

Internationalism has been manifested not simply by way of the familiar mechanisms of international law, agreements and institutions. It is not too far-fetched to argue that, notwithstanding the Stalinist concept of Communism in a single country, one of the historically significant ideals of Communism was internationalism. That significance is underlined by its ability to contain and even submerge longstanding national and regional identities for a lengthy period, admittedly in part through force of arms, for example in the Soviet Union, in China and in Yugoslavia. It is too simple to dismiss Communism merely as a form of imperialism.

A further step could be to argue that the expansionary threat implicit in this Communist internationalism called into being defensive alliances, a side-effect of which was further to attenuate national sovereignty for the nation-states involved. The Gaullist withdrawal from the NATO command structure might perhaps be characterized as a nationalist reaction against this (in which linguistic and cultural, but not religious, definitions of identity were very much to the fore, in counterpoint to the dominant language and culture of the Alliance).

All three motors of internationalism may be discerned in the development of the European Community between 1950 and 1989 – containment of potentially destructive national rivalries within western Europe; the construction of a further bulwark against the rival internationalism of the Soviet bloc; the need for international economic co-operation in the interests of economic development in the face of the industrial strength of the USA, Japan and, more lately, the newly-industrializing countries. But many human beings do not find it easy to live with the attenuation of identity implicit in internationalism, particularly in an age in which the development of air and electronic communication has led to the dominance of one culture, if not to a cultural standardization.[8] Psychologically, human beings crave identity, and strive for means of differentiating themselves in order to establish a sense of identity. National identity is an obvious and durable refuge from the anomie of internationalism. Indeed, where a standardized national culture seems oppressive and boring, there appear to be strong attractions in emphasizing regional and local identity even more than national identity, especially where the national government is perceived as failing to deliver the same level of benefits as is enjoyed by the remainder of the country concerned.

This is all the more so where the external threat is removed. It smacks of Greek tragedy that, at the very moment that the leaders of the European Community chose to make a decisive move towards European federalism and ultimately Union, the Soviet threat should have been removed, leaving the various peoples of Europe free to risk differentiating themselves by way of their historical identities and myths about themselves. At any rate, in the first part of the 1990s, in many parts of the European Community the thrust towards unitary institutions manifestly threatened to outstrip the development of a popular sense of European identity as a substitute for national identity. A result is the current emphasis on the concept of subsidiarity,[9] which is, for some, often code for national and even regional self-determination. Similar sentiments were much more powerfully expressed in eastern Europe and on the fringes of the former Soviet Union with the removal of the internationalizing or imperial power. For the moment, in Europe, it appears that national and regional sentiment is often much more enduring and appealing to demos than is internationalism.[10]

Some theological reflections

Why should commitments to national identity be so enduring when rationality points to the illogicalities and risks to which it gives rise, and to the benefits of international intercourse and agreement? What commentary does biblical revelation offer on these conflicting issues? Literature in English setting out a biblical theology of temporal collective identity is comparatively modest, especially from within the evangelical tradition. William Storrar's work is notable here.[11] I am less certain than Storrar, following Karl Barth, that Genesis 10 is to be interpreted as a positive affirmation of nationhood as a temporal providential provision. It seems to me that the chapter should be read as parallel to the first part of chapter 11 (I agree of course that when human organizations and associations have a governmental character, they should be considered in the light of the providential status given by Scripture to human government). More seriously, I am less certain than Storrar that the nations, *qua* nations, have a place in the *redeemed* creation, as distinct from being represented through those who have been 'purchased . . . for God from every tribe and language and people and nation' (Rev. 5:10; see also 7:9). The nations will finally recognize Christ's lordship, but it does not follow that all will be redeemed. Care needs to be taken, it seems to me, not to build too firm a doctrine on this point on the evidently symbolic language of Revelation 21 and 22.[12] A close examination, however, shows that, arguably, issues of language, land, 'state' religion, and collective and individual identity lie close to the heart of the biblical description of the human predicament – not surprisingly, since the Judaeo-Christian word seeks to draw universally applicable truth from concrete historical experience. It may be argued that, according to the Scriptures, a fundamental human problem in a fallen world is humanity's sense of loss of identity, security and land.[13] Humanity is turned out of (rather, has in effect turned itself out of) a God-given land in which there is pleasure and plenty (Gn. 2:8-16; 3:22-24). It has become 'a fugitive and a wanderer' cursed to unfruitful territory and insecurity (Gn. 4:12, 14),[14] cut off from the true source of its identity – relationship with its Creator (Gn. 4:14: 'Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden'). The result is existential suicidal *Angst* – 'My punishment is greater than I can bear' (Gn. 4:13).

Fallen humanity's characteristic response to this predicament is to build for itself a substitute identity and security, focused in its own autonomous culture and polity: 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth' (Gn. 11:4). In the biblical account the consequence of that counterfeit venture is division by language, so that now identity and security will be sought in competing linguistically orientated collectivities. Typically, in the OT, this involves a sectarian (*i.e.* exclusive) religious commitment which is idolatrous in character – and which is contrasted with the commitment to Yahweh which is required of Israel (and in fact of all humanity), interestingly within the framework of a sovereignty treaty (covenant). As that covenant itself implies, this is not to argue that the biblical revelation does not see government based on national or communal units as a legitimate temporal function in human society. It is rather that in a fallen world human beings, in their search for lost identity and security, have a constant tendency to accord to their autonomous governmental/national/communal collectivity an idolatrous commitment, and human governors/leaders have a constant tendency to demand it (*cf.* the different portraits of government, people and power in the book of Daniel).

With this portrait of humanity excluded from the divine presence may be compared the condition of the restored humanity as gradually revealed in the Scriptures, culminating in the second Eden-Jerusalem of Isaiah 60, 65 and 66, Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 21 and 22. 'Internationalist' is scarcely an adequate description of this vision. The restored people is envisaged as a theistic community transcending, even abolishing, national or other collective distinctions: '. . . There cannot be Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all' (Col. 3:11). 'The dividing wall of hostility' between human collectivities has been broken down; 'one new man' has been created through the cross, 'bringing the hostility to an end' (Eph. 2:14-16). A single new land, indeed universe, is created (Rev. 21:1) into which the kings and nations of the earth bring their glory[15] (Is. 60:10-13; Rev. 21:24, 26) and in which the trees are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). It is to this new land that the Christian is irrevocably and transcendently committed (Heb. 13:14 – 'here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come'). Here is the Christian's true and transcending collective identity, even in this world.

That does not imply that human society and government do not have a legitimate temporary function and value in the NT understanding, nor that the new race created in Christ may not respect and take pleasure in the ties of family, community, city and country. The apostle Paul, for example, was proud (or at least made use) of his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-29), of his home town ('no mean city' – Acts 21:39), and of his education in the Jewish law schools (Acts 22:3). He also accepted the tribal and territorial divisions of humanity as God-given, if temporary and changing in character, while at the same time asserting humanity's essential unity in creation (Acts 17:24-26: 'The God who made the world and everything in it . . . [is] the Lord of heaven and earth . . . he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation . . .'). At the same time, however, these ties are subordinate to the higher commitment in the new community of faith. So he decisively condemns his former religious and social commitment which he regards (notwithstanding its sincerity of conviction) as having set itself up in exclusive and autonomous opposition to the living God (Rom. 9–11, Gal. *passim* and Phil. 3:3-11). For him, it had become in effect the same kind of fallen human mechanism for conferring the spurious identity and security as that offered by the idolatrous societies condemned in the OT. Similarly, for the writer to the Hebrews, the member of the new community of faith cannot draw ultimate and transcending identity and security from, or give exclusive commitment to, human society in that way: for the moment, the Christian is a pilgrim, a nomad, 'a stranger in a foreign land . . . looking forward to the city . . . whose architect and builder is God'. Christians are 'aliens and strangers on earth . . . looking for a country of their own . . . looking for a better country – a heavenly one' (Heb. 11:8-10, 13, 16, NIV). The goal is the (redeemed) 'internationalism' or, better, 'intercommunalism' of the prophetic visions. The future ideal (now but not yet) must condition current loyalties.

Some implications and applications

Perhaps the most significant lesson of this biblical portrait should be to warn Christians to evaluate carefully the true nature and consequences of their religious commitments. At many times and places in human history, the religious commitment is the dominant sentiment – strange as that may seem in the secularized western Europe of today. Indeed, Scripture sees such a Christian commitment as mandatory. Thus, the early Christians sometimes described themselves as the 'third race', to distinguish themselves from Jews and Gentiles, or perhaps Romans and barbarians, or Romans and Greeks. This sense of dominant Christian commitment lived on in some form or other in both western and eastern Christianity at least until the Renaissance and Reformation, and for many groups was the central source of self-identity.

It may be argued that this was particularly so in the eastern forms of Christianity. So, for example, an historian can write of Christianity in the Sasanid Persian empire in the fifth and sixth centuries:

> Nothing has been said about national identity, and the reason for this is a simple one: such a concept (at least as we now understand it) never existed in Sasanid Iran, any more than it did in the Ottoman empire before the rise of nationalism. Across the border in the Roman empire, it is true, one can occasionally find a non-Chalcedonian writer like Jacob of Serugh (†521) speaking of 'us Rhomaioi', but this is only possible because the state is a Christian one. For Christians in Persia, on the other hand, their 'nation' was that of their religious community. As Wigram put it, 'religion was the determinant of nationality'.[16]

Western European commentators are therefore likely to make a grave error if they underestimate the centrality of religio-cultural identity in national identity throughout the Slav world, in Maronite and Uniate areas, and in areas where Armenian forms of Christianity are the norm. They had better not under-

estimate, either, the similar dominance of the religious element throughout the Islamic world in establishing sentiments of collective identity. (Incidentally, this may well turn out to be a politically significant factor in those western European communities which have recently acquired large Muslim minorities, as assimilation may be less rapid than for many other immigrant minorities.) Where the religious element is central to perceptions of identity and psychological security and the approach is shared by different communities in close proximity, as in Ireland, former Yugoslavia, the Lebanon and Nagorno-Karabakh, we should positively expect the mixture to be explosive.[17] Less obvious but nevertheless real are current tensions in Slovakia, Rumania and Russia, where the growth of Protestant groups is perceived as presenting a threat to fundamental collective identity.

In the light of biblical theology, it is legitimate to pose the question whether the religious commitment has not in the circumstances described become precisely that counterfeit source of human identity and security so sharply criticized by the apostle Paul in the letters to the Galatians and Philippians, against which he had to contend in the incidents recounted in the closing chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and which was of course a central factor leading to the crucifixion of Jesus. In the absence of true faith and relationship with God, it is possible for the idea of the final triumph of Christianity itself to become the idolatrous ideology of a master race.

On the other hand there are serious risks that the secularized West will place too great hopes in the self-evident 'truths' of internationalism and syncretism as the basis for resolving problems of nationalist-religious conflict. The result will be to underestimate the force of national and regional identity in certain areas of the world and to be mystified when groups fail to behave 'sensibly', or to assume that the common people are simply being misled by evil leaders, when in fact those leaders are doing no more than to focus deeply-held popular sentiments. The Christian should at least be a realist in not expecting his or her biblical 'internationalist' or 'inter-communalist' ideal to be widely shared by society at large. In the absence of the deep inner resources which the Christian would argue can alone come from restored relationship with God in Christ (the 'reconciliation of all things' of Col. 1:20 (NIV)), human beings can be expected, at least from time to time and place to place, to take refuge in an idolatrous 'nationalist' commitment; or to become disorientated by anomie in the absence of a strong focus of collective identity; or to erect internationalism and syncretism into new sources of counterfeit identity.

Nor does it follow from the inter-communal vision of Scripture, and the undoubted evils that flow from an idolatrous sense of autonomous national identity, that the Christian is bound in this life to pursue an inflexible policy of internationalism against the claims of the nation-state or lower communities. That is so as a matter of both principle and practice. As just indicated, an autonomous internationalism is as capable of being idolatrous as nationalism, and is therefore capable of doing as much, if not more, evil. After all, Genesis 11 depicts man as *unitedly* seeking autonomously to build the perfect society: Scripture depicts the event as being precisely a *global* project. In a prophetic capacity, the Christian will oppose every effort at human organization and government (of whatever character – whether sub-nationalist, nationalist, federalist or internationalist) which seeks to take institutions beyond their God-given limits as temporal mechanisms. Practically, the Christian is entitled to support organizational projects at whatever level if they appear not to transgress those God-given limits, if they answer to the legitimate needs of the case, and if they meet the criteria of justice which Scripture so strongly requires with respect to civil government. The ultimate 'internationalist' vision of Scripture does not require an inflexible presumption in favour of internationalist solutions in this present age. It does, however, prescribe a bias towards promoting harmony, concert and *shalom* between communities and nations, based on the canons of divine justice, and a bias against so sharp an assertion of national and states' rights as to risk exciting hostility and an idolatrous xenophobia. Nor does the 'internationalist' vision call for the obliteration of local, regional and national distinctives; rather it allows warmth for kindred, tribe and community to flourish, so long as they do not become the locus of an idolatrous and exclusive assertion of separate identity.

But realism in a fallen world will also counsel that, insofar as we seek to formulate workable policies for 'the present evil age' (Gal. 1:4), internationalist projects (to the extent that they are desirable as a temporal measure in any particular set of circumstances) will need to work for widespread popular support. The pace of internationalist development will need to be moderate enough not to outstrip existing popular sentiments of collective commitment. Here there is wisdom in one aspect of the Catholic natural law tradition of subsidiarity: government which is perceived as being remote and unresponsive is also likely to be perceived as illegitimate. In a modern democracy, expressed through the electronic media, it is essential for stability and effective government to have at least a basic modicum of popular commitment to institutions. If the arguments in this paper are convincing, a reliable criterion to guide the application of a principle of subsidiarity would be whether competences are allocated for the time being to levels (whatever they may be) which command sufficient popular support. If they do not, the allocation is unlikely to endure for long. Among fallen human beings, feelings have more power than rationality – no wonder Romanticism has been such a powerful philosophy!

[1] It is true that in a limited number of places on the north-western seaboard of Europe (England, Scotland, the United Provinces, parts of France and perhaps Castile) something approximating to a co-terminousness of national feeling and the boundaries of unitary government did emerge at a somewhat earlier stage (*cf.* 'this sceptred isle', *etc.* (Shakespeare, *Richard II*)). But the product was a pale shadow of the nation-state which emerged in the nineteenth century with the fusion of Enlightenment rationalism, liberal democracy and Romanticism. Louis XIV was clear that '*L'État, c'est moi'*; the denizens of the nation-state are clear that 'the nation-state is us'. (See 'The shape of the world' in *The Economist*, 23 Dec. 1995 – 5 Jan. 1996, pp. 17–20.) To my mind, W. Storrar (*Scottish Identity: a Christian vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1990), pp. 9–24), probably over-stresses the popular nationalistic element in assertions of the independence of late-medieval Scotland. It is true that in many places in Europe at that time the secular power was anxious to establish its independence from the pan-European power of the papacy and that a related phenomenon was the assertion of the vernacular against papal Latin. But the relationship of national feeling to these phenomena and to governmental institutions was problematic: for example, the anti-clerical Germanism of the humanists had no implications for political organization, beyond the exclusion of papal power and influence; indeed it had to be tailored to political realities: 'Within the nationalism of the humanists there often existed regional elements, tending to a more detailed treatment and more fulsome praise of the author's regional *Stamm* and his background in historical topography. Commonly the patronage of some prince or city can be shown to have influenced such emphases'; '. . . we should in present terminology speak of Germanic rather than German nationalism . . . Many of these humanists . . . displayed what might be somewhat paradoxically called a pan-German cosmopolitanism . . .' (A.G. Dickens, *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (London: Fontana, 1976), pp. 39, 41).

[2] For a parallel description of the sources of modern nationhood and its relation to the state, see Nicholas Townsend, 'A race apart?', *Third Way*, March 1995, pp. 18–21.

[3] Frances Lannon, 'Modern Spain: the project of a national Catholicism', in Stuart Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity: Papers read at the nineteenth summer meeting and the twentieth winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1982), pp. 567–590.

[4] Clearly, it remains very significant in Ireland, Slovenia and Croatia (if the latter two countries may be regarded as western European) and has a residual importance in Scandinavia (fear for traditional religious culture was a factor in the 'no' vote in the Maastricht referenda in Denmark, for example). I doubt its significance now in Iberia and Italy. Greece must be grouped in eastern Europe in this respect – witness the severe legal constraints on public expressions of anything but Orthodox religion there (open-air preaching by Protestants can lead to arrest and prosecution in the courts).

[5] Religion was a factor in the creation of Belgium – notwithstanding common language with the northern Netherlands, the Flemings were unwilling in the 1930s to continue within a Netherlands in which Protestantism was politically dominant. They preferred instead to identify with their co-religionist Walloon neighbours, an approach which is being reversed now that culture and language are seen by the Flemings as being more significant sources of collective identity than is religion.

[6] See A.C.F. Beales, *The History of Peace: a Short Account of the Organized Movement for International Peace* (London, 1931); F.S.L. Lyon, *Internationalism in Europe 1815–1914* (Leyden, 1963); and N.W. Summerton, 'Dissenting attitudes to foreign relations, peace and war, 1840–1890', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 28, no. 2 (April 1977), pp. 151–178.

[7] *Pace* Maritain, I use 'sovereignty' in its common usage, *viz.* the power of autonomous political and, therefore, legal decision on behalf of a distinct body politic. Thus now in the United Kingdom, Parliament is sovereign in its

ability to make law which conditions the actions of institutions and individuals in the United Kingdom, but that sovereignty is attenuated in that it is, for example, bound to give specific effect to legislation made by the European Community under the provisions of the Treaty of Rome; *i.e.* it is not free either to fail to implement European legislation or to do something different. (See J. Maritain, *Man and the State* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1954), pp. 25–48, 178–179.)

⁶Internationalism can be seen as the politico-structural expression of ideals ranging from cosmopolitanism on the one hand (which emphasizes both the global identity of human beings as one race and universal citizenship, and sometimes vigorously rejects lesser identities based on national and cultural communities), to a more inter-communal approach giving greater weight to cultural and other differences between groups of human beings on the other. The *Zeitgeist* of early twentieth-century internationalism, with its roots in Enlightenment (and, in Britain, Nonconformist) liberalism, was very much of the former variety, even if the internationalist institutions to which it led could not for practical reasons be other than inter-'national' and inter-governmental in character (*e.g.* the League of Nations). In practice, there is much evidence that (fallen) human beings often find even the inter-communal version of internationalism too attenuating of their sense of emotional security and identity so that they seek refuge in their national or communal identities.

⁹'Subsidiarity' is a technical term having its origins in the Thomist concepts employed in the papal encyclical of 1931, *Quadragesimo anno*. There, the use of the term was in the context of Fascist and Communist totalitarianism, on the one hand, and individualistic economic liberalism on the other – with perhaps a degree of *arrière pensée* towards an idealized peasant and guild culture. The 'subsidiary principle' referred to the importance of allowing institutions and associations (*e.g.* trade unions) both to moderate individualism and to subsist outside the control of the state. In the latter respect, it was undesirable that all institutions should be absorbed into the infrastructure of the state – indeed, there should be a preference against governmental action in favour of voluntary associative action, as a check on the growth of totalitarian government (*Quadragesimo anno*, ¶¶ 76–80: '. . . On account of the evil of "individualism" . . . things have come to such a pass that the highly developed social life which once flourished in a variety of associations organically linked with each other, has been damaged and all but ruined, leaving thus virtually only individuals and the State . . . owing to changed circumstances much that was formerly done by small groups can nowadays only be done by large associations. None the less, just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to a group what private enterprise and industry can accomplish, so too it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, for a larger and higher association to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower societies. This is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, unshaken and unchangeable . . . The State therefore should leave to smaller groups the settlement of business of minor importance . . . it will thus carry out with greater freedom, power and success the task belonging to it alone, because it alone can effectively accomplish these . . . Let those in power,

therefore, be convinced that the more faithfully this principle of subsidiary function be followed, and a graded hierarchical order exist between various associations, the greater will be both social authority and social efficiency, and the happier and more prosperous the condition of the commonwealth.') In recent debate within the European Union, however, the term arises in the context of discussion of whether uniform governmental requirements should be determined at Union level, at national level, or at regional or municipal level. 'Subsidiarity' is a requirement of the Treaty of Rome, as amended by the Treaty of Maastricht. There is scope for disagreement as to the meaning of the relevant reference (Article *3b*) – whether the criterion for determining the level at which action will be taken should be that of effectiveness or necessity. Centralists in the Union tend to favour the first interpretation, on the argument that uniform central requirements will be more effective across the Union as a whole, and those who prefer maximum devolution of freedom of decision, the second. The concept also tends to be seen through the lens of differing national experiences: in Germany, for example, it tends to be seen in the context of the chronic tension between the *Länder* and the Federal Government as to the ambit of the power of each.

¹⁰Lest it be thought that this is to look at recent events through expressly British eyes, it should be noted that a Norwegian referendum rejected the terms of the Maastricht Treaty, as also did the first Danish referendum, and that the French referendum succeeded only by a hair's breadth. Swedish popular opinion is sceptical about membership, as shown by the results of the elections to the European Parliament in September 1995. The concept of subsidiarity is a matter of lively political debate in Germany, partly as means of asserting the rights of the *Länder* against the German Federal Government. The more favourable attitudes towards the Community in the southern states may reflect the extent of economic assistance given to them under the Maastricht provisions.

¹¹Storrar, *Scottish Identity*, pp. 110–136, 160–179, gives a more extended account than I can offer here.

¹²I recognize, however, that here my pre-millennial biblical socialization may be speaking, in contrast to Storrar's Calvinist a- or post-millennial socialization! For another extended evangelical consideration of nationhood, see O.R. Johnston, *Nationhood: towards a Christian perspective* (Oxford: Latimer House, 1980).

¹³The fundamental cause is, of course, separation from God by human sin – the loss of identity, security and land are the inevitable judgments that result from the rejection of God, as Genesis 3 and 4 make clear.

¹⁴Scriptural quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁵The meaning of this obviously symbolic language seems to be 'submit' (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:25-28).

¹⁶S.P. Brock, 'Christians in the Sasanian Empire: a case of divided loyalties', in Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity*, p. 12.

¹⁷For a regrettably prophetic analysis of the Yugoslav situation at the end of the 1970s, see 'Religion and national identity in Yugoslavia', in Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity*, pp. 591–607.

Comment
Phil Hill

Introduction
In many respects I wish to identify with Professor Jones's framework of thought. Like him, I am Reformed in theological outlook and from the Free Church tradition which has come to be the primary expression of Welsh Christianity. Like him, I view English rule of Wales as a catalogue of injustice and oppression (despite my being of English origins myself). In fact, I share with him a (lesser, I think) degree of sympathy for devolution and even Welsh independence. I gladly submit to his erudite learning regarding the function of language. However, I think he is dangerously wrong in two respects. One is theological, the other is political.

A theology of language
Professor Jones believes that diversity is both an original aspect of language and culture and one which will exist in heaven. My understanding is the opposite. Linguistic and cultural diversity is presented in Scripture as a whole, and in Genesis especially, as a result of the fall, an act of judgment on humanity. As judgment, it is the deprivation of original harmony and understanding. As restraint on evil, it is a preventive measure against evil taking absolute hold on human society. What Professor Jones does is to minimalize the stated purpose of Genesis 1–11 in a manner which strikes me as exegetical existentialism. Judgment is not denied by him but rather denuded of its obvious meaning in favour of the exact opposite – a blessing God always intended to give. That argument strikes me as reminiscent of C.H. Dodd's attempt to redefine 'the wrath of God' in Paul.

As Professor Jones begins with the premise that diversity is original, he must face further biblical difficulties. The first is Pentecost. The miracle of tongues is no longer the sensational gift of common understanding by different nationalities (the reversal indeed of Babel) but the sensational approval of differentiation (the ennobling of Babel!). Second, the miracle of the Christian Church is not that people are raised above their cultural and sexual differentiation, but rather that Christ enters into them all in defiance of Galatians 3. Third, the prophetic visions of the Last Days are rendered meaningless when they show the nations going up to worship God in the Temple with one language and with one law. Fourth, the heavenly vision of Revelation has one people redeemed 'out of every nation' and not remaining within them. It is difficult to know where in apocalyptic literature the line should be drawn between what is symbol and what is symbolized. But it is not difficult to see the message of eternal harmony, unity and concord for the redeemed which transcends and obliterates forever the divisions of earthly society. Perhaps only those brought up without a clear cultural identity can appreciate this vision. An eternity where no-one is an outsider is heaven indeed to them. That is surely the message. Heaven is essentially something new: transcendence of what is good in this world, and reversal of what is bad. Bobi Jones's vision falls short just here. If you belong already on earth you are in and in for ever. If (like me) you do not belong exclusively to a single culture, you are dispossessed forever. That seems to me a rather un-heavenly vision.

Political issues
Professor Jones uses his theological understanding to absolutize the existence of separate cultural, racial and linguistic groups. This, I believe, is flatly contradicted by Acts 17 and Paul's clear conviction that nations rise *and fall* in the sovereign purposes of God. Not only the beginning, but the end, of a nation's allotted time lies in the hidden will of God. No explanation is offered in Scripture of where or why these boundaries in time are fixed, except the partial one that the nations surrounding Israel were judged by their treatment of God's people. Whatever the case, it is enough to say that nations do fall as well as rise and do so because God has determined as much. The losing of languages and cultures are as much Providence as the creating of them originally.

The believer must accept the providence of God. When that is a *fait accompli* the matter is theologically simple (not by any means simple morally or emotionally, of course). But what about turbulent times, when the process of change is not yet inevitable? Surely, then, everything consistent with good may be used to promote security and well-being. This includes the use of weaponry as far as I am concerned, but only by a legitimate government (whether *in situ* or exiled) for a legitimate purpose against a declared enemy (not against internal and otherwise law-abiding dissent). In modern society it also includes using to the full the democratic process of persuasion, debate and lawful political action. This may lead to apparently outrageous behaviour, of course. Both nationally and internationally, an oppressed cultural or racial group may seek to make controversy over practices which are assumed by the uninformed or casual observer to be just and moral.

Evangelicals and controversy
Evangelicals have historically disliked such robust political activism. We are stronger on eternal concerns than temporal rights. We have tended to favour passivity and conservatism in domestic politics. And sadly we have been over-enthusiastic to maintain solidarity by the threat of rejection from our ranks. In this respect, I agree with Professor Jones that Wales and the Welsh peoples remain shabbily treated at the bar of both law and popular prejudice, and that no significant voice of protest has been raised from within English evangelicalism (until recently by the Evangelical Alliance).

I believe his call for justice is biblically and theologically

defensible, but not for his reasons. That the biblical and moral basis lies in eternal significance for every language and culture seems to me to be confused, if not polemical. It reminds me of a certain tendency in evangelical life. Anti-slavery campaigners wooed evangelical support on the grounds that slaves had eternal souls to save rather than temporal rights to enjoy. Victorian reformers stressed the spiritual dangers of young girls living without privacy rather than the political injustice of whole families living in squalor.

If our disagreements are only at the level of theory rather than practice, do they matter? I believe so for two reasons. The first is that truth is truth. The day when Christians cease to debate and to speak according to truth for its own sake will be a sad day for Christianity. The second is that wrong arguments have a bad habit of coming back to haunt us, especially in politics. Rhetoric becomes prejudice all too easily. And prejudice with a gun in its hand may become a callous murderer. I think that is my greatest fear with regard to Wales. Ireland is, after all, only next door.