

welcome

Welcome to the February 2009 issue of *Faith and Community*, the bulletin of EA's public theology work. In this issue, in accord with the favourable response we received from the last edition, we have solicited some Australian responses to events and documents over the past year.

Motivated by the strange, publicised 'prophecies' of Danny Nalliah at the last federal election, we asked four Australians to muse on the theme 'prophecy and politics'. I have to admit, I had second thoughts about whether to raise this issue, but with another round of spurious comments in the public domain leading up to the U.S. Presidential elections, and then the recent outrageous comments regarding God's apparent removal of "conditional protection" from Victoria, it seemed appropriate to present these critical and constructive thoughts.

Last year, many Evangelicals in America tired of being automatically associated with the 'religious right' in media and popular consciousness and, under the guiding hand of Os Guinness, produced the *Evangelical Manifesto*. The manifesto spoke to both Evangelical identity and political engagement and was commented on briefly in the U.S. media and for a somewhat longer time in the Christian 'blogosphere'. Most of that commentary and critique was North American; so we have asked a few Evangelicals closer to home to give their views.

Our next issue will include reflections on 'providence in public' (thinking about God's activity or ostensible absence during tragedy) and 'one year under Rudd'. If you would like to contribute, please contact me at ian@ea.org.au to discuss further.

Lastly, I hope that even in the midst of economic crisis (and the desperate needs of catastrophes close to home), you won't forget to renew your EA 'membership' as an individual EA partner or as an affiliated organisation or church. Please contact me or our office on (03) 9890 0633.



Grace and peace

Ian Packer
Director of Public Theology
Australian Evangelical Alliance

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Zadok Institute

Annual Dinner and Address
7pm Friday 27 February

"Learning to Speak: the Church's Voice in Public Affairs"
Rev Dr Keith Clements

Keith Clements is a Baptist minister and public theologian, who was General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches.

Paragon Cafe, 651 Rathdowne St, Carlton North (Melway 2B J2)

A three course meal is included in the charge of \$50. Drinks available for purchase. A short Zadok AGM will also be held.

Bookings by 20 February: Chris White, tel: 9882 2604 or email: cjwhite46@yahoo.com.au

ZADOK
P E R S P E C T I V E S

At the heart of orthodox Christianity, seen in terms of communion, is the coming of God through Christ into a personal relation with disciples, and beyond them others, eventually ramifying through the church to humanity as a whole. God establishes the new relationship with us by loving us, in a way we cannot unaided love each other. (John 15: God loved us first). The life-blood of this new relation is *agape*, which can't ever be understood simply in terms of a set of rules, but rather as the extension of a certain kind of relation, spreading outward in a network. The church is in this sense a quintessentially network society, even though of an utterly un-paralleled kind, in that the relations are not mediated by any of the historical forms of relatedness: kinship, fealty to a chief, or whatever. It transcends all of these, but not into a categorical society based on similarity of members, but rather into a network of ever different relations of *agape*.

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 282.

On Prophecy and Politics

"Thus saith the Lord"?

Graham Buxton

It is evident that many Christians have been confused – some even outraged – by the pre-election declaration by Danny Nalliah, a pastor in the Catch the Fire Ministries, that God had summoned him to 'prophetically prepare' Peter Costello as the next Prime Minister of Australia. Of course, with the election now behind us and taking into account the words of Deuteronomy 18:21-22, we are entitled to say that Danny Nalliah has spoken pre-sumptuously, and his status as a 'prophet' of the Lord should rightly be under review.

Notwithstanding the cynicism of those who have no truck with religious, let alone Christian, pronouncements, the episode raises a number of very important issues about a Christian understanding of prophecy today. With regard to specific – and especially *predictive* – prophecy, the biblical requirement to weigh a prophetic utterance becomes urgent. However, before looking at that more fully, I'd like to say a few words about the nature of the prophetic in our contemporary world.

Prophecy is essentially God's self-communication: God reveals something about himself, his mind, his will, his response to what is happening in the world (*his* world) around him. Typically, the Bible discloses two main categories of prophecy – foretelling and forthtelling. Foretelling is predictive in nature, a disclosure of future events known only to God, but channelled to others through a chosen human instrument. For example, in Acts 28 we read that the prophet Agabus accurately predicted a severe famine throughout the Roman world. Later in Acts he predicted that Paul would be handed over to the Gentiles.

Forthtelling is a 'speaking out' of God's mind concerning what is happening amongst his people or in his world, again channelled through his people. This dimension of prophecy is far more common in the Bible, and typical examples include the pronouncements of the great prophets of the Old Testament like Jeremiah and Isaiah, and the so-called 'minor prophets' like Amos and Hosea (hardly minor, given their condemnation of what I call the three Is of idolatry, immorality and injustice). So, in diverse ways, God gets his truth over to his people, often speaking directly into the social conditions of the day ... which, of course, is why prophecy and politics must not be divorced from each other.

The prophets of the Old Testament revealed God's heart for truth and justice, but it is often overlooked that the ultimate expression of that was meant to be found, not in perpetual prophetic pronouncements, but in the way his chosen people Israel were called to live out their lives amongst the surrounding nations.

They were called to live prophetic lives, *God communicating himself through his people*. Nothing has changed. Indeed, the Christmas message of the incarnation – the Word made flesh – is the ultimate expression of God's self-communication. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In Jesus Christ, we see Old Testament prophecy fulfilled ... but more than that, we see in his life an expression of the life of God. His life was a prophecy: he revealed God by the way he lived – and died – probably more than by the words he spoke. As those who have been baptised into Christ, and who now partake in the life of the triune God, Christians are similarly called to be a prophetic voice in today's culture. In my recent book, *Celebrating Life*, I argue that the Church has been called by God to be prophetic in its redemptive presence in the world. We are called to be salt and light in society, seeking to make a real difference amongst those around us. The recent film about William Wilberforce and his energies devoted to the abolition of slavery is a stark reminder to us that the true prophets of our age may be marked more by what they do than by what they say.

So, following a framework that I first came across in a book by the English pastor and theologian Mark Stibbe, I would like to suggest three tests of prophetic presence that, as we shall see later, also apply to prophetic pronouncements (such as the one that I referred to at the beginning of this brief article). After all, as John reminds us (1 John 4:1), we are not to believe every spirit, but to "test the spirits to see if they are from God". In assessing whether or not something is a work of the Holy Spirit, Stibbe refers to the test of Christology, the test of character, and the test of consequences.

The first test has to do with whether or not Jesus is exalted. As we live out our lives in the world, is Jesus glorified? The second test – that of character – asks the question: Is our conduct a witness to the reality of God amongst us? Is the Church known by its love ... or by its divisions and prejudice? Paul had a lot to say to the early church about that, and through the Spirit still does. The test of consequences emphasises the long-term impact of an event of the Spirit – as some have remarked, it's what happens to you when you get up off the carpet that is important!

Let's apply these tests to predictive prophecy, and in particular to Danny Nalliah's 'word from the Lord'. Firstly, a word of caution – because we are weak and imperfect people, we do well to submit so-called 'words' to others, mindful that there is safety in an abundance of counsellors (frequent advice in the Book of Proverbs) and that, until we see God face to face, our knowledge is partial (1 Corinthians 13:12). In this

regard, extra-biblical prophecies need to be handled extremely carefully, especially where they apply to individual – the widespread broadcast by Nalliah of his ‘message from God’ projected him (unwittingly or not) into the public arena, not Jesus. It was not a word to be shared publicly, and its influence on the voting intentions of Christians marks his behaviour, in my view, as unethical. On those counts, therefore, it failed Stibbe’s first two tests.

The third test, of course, failed spectacularly, as the Labour Party was swept into office on 24th November. I’m not sure how Danny Nalliah has responded to this, but I hope that he is humble enough to admit that he got it wrong, and does not rely upon his ‘get-out’ clause (“if the Body of Christ unites in prayer and action”). In the minefield of “thus saith the Lord”, we are

all imperfect, and do well to acknowledge that. Humility goes a long way in healing divisions not only between Christians, but also between Christian and non-Christian. It is one of the reasons why Jesus came.



Rev Dr Graham Buxton
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Reading the Bible Politically

Ben Thurley

The Bible, of course, is full of the stuff of politics. In its pages you will find princes and procurators, advisers and advocates, laws and litigation, plots and princes, coups and counter-coups, battles, enthronements, empires, tribal confederations, trials, and executions... Yet, despite this abundance of resources, many begin and end their quest for a distinctively Christian political understanding and response with a very restricted range of readings. Touchstone passages such as Romans 13:1, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God,” or John 18:36, “My kingdom is not from this world,” are used as argument-enders rather than spring-boards for enquiry about our task as Christian citizens.

And despite (or perhaps because of?) this abundance of Biblical resources, few questions are as vexed as the question of how Christians are to engage politically, if they are at all.

Are we to be “Christian socialists” or “Theo-conservatives”?

If we are to be prophetic, then what kind of prophets? Pastor Danny Nalliah of Catch the Fire Ministries clearly understood himself in the role of Samuel

anointing David for kingship when he asserted that the Lord told him to “prophetically prepare Peter Costello as the future Prime Minister of Australia” and “boldly declare that John Howard would be re-elected” at the November 2007 election. I have no doubt that God continues to raise up prophets to guide His people and perplex the powers, but – at least on this occasion – Pastor Nalliah is not to be counted in their company.

Or in a very different form of engagement from this uncritical embrace of (seemingly) responsive power, are we to be the kind of prophets who raised then Foreign Minister Alexander Downer’s ire in his 2003 Sir Thomas Playford Annual Lecture? In response to criticism of the Government’s involvement in the invasion of Iraq, Downer launched a trenchant attack on “tendency of some church leaders to ignore their primary pastoral obligations in favour of hogging the limelight on complex political issues”.

And if we do shut up about politics and get on with shepherding and being shepherded, are we to withdraw from the political fray entirely? Complete withdrawal is harder than it looks – the Exclusive Brethren in Australia have received much publicity for their rather contradictory stance of – on the one hand – forbidding their members to vote, while – on the other hand – engaging in direct lobbying of politicians and spending large sums of money on deeply partisan, and disturbingly anonymous, political advertising in recent Australian and New Zealand elections.

There seems to be no reason for Christians to withdraw from engagement in politics. If politics is the work of ordering our common life so as to prioritise and seek agreed goods, and to name, restrict and punish wrongs, then Christians have a vital interest in and, under God, some insight into these things. And, like some other exiles in our own broader heritage, we are called to “seek the good of the city”. However, engaging politically requires us to take a discerning and self-critical view of the Bible’s entire witness to the big questions of policy and politics.

It seems to me that there are three overarching principles that emerge from the Bible’s witness on politics. First and most fundamental is that there is only one supreme authority, God’s, and that all other authorities are subordinate to His. But governments and rulers have a place in God’s good ordering of the world. Hence Christians are called to pray for our rulers, and acknowledge the legitimacy of governing authorities.

Second, governments, rulers and authorities are fallible and prone to self-idolisation at best, and at worst are potentially demonic. God’s authority over other authorities is, in the current age, contested and not transparent and obvious to all, and so the assertion of God’s supreme authority often has a clear political edge against idolatrous claims. As N.T Wright has noted, when the first Christians declared that “Jesus is Lord”, they were sharply implying that Caesar was not. This understanding of the fallenness, and even

the self-idolatry of human authorities, empowered Daniel's resistance in the Babylonian court, John the Baptist's and Jesus' criticisms of Herod's rule, Paul's refusal to go quietly after being falsely imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:16–40) and John's apocalyptic depiction of the Roman Empire as a demonic beast bringing chaos and violence from the sea (Revelation 13).

Third, whatever else government is for, all governments – whether those of Israel, or those of the nations – are expected by God to be attentive and responsive to the needs of the poor and marginalised. Of Shallum, King of Judah, God asks,

Are you a king because you compete in cedar?
Did not your father eat and drink and do justice
and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well.
Is not this to know me?
says the Lord.
Jeremiah 22:15–16

and in a poetic vision of a heavenly council meeting, God demands of the gods of the nations that they,

Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
maintain the right of the lowly and the desti-
tute.
Psalm 82:3

Holding these assertions together puts Christians in a very disturbing place, both for us and for those who govern us. Our governments should take the deepest comfort that we pray for them, and ask the Almighty to grant them wisdom and courage. They should be aware that in following the example of our Lord, we seek to put the interests of others – particularly the vulnerable and marginalised – ahead of our own and seek governments that attend to this in the public sphere. They should also be deeply disturbed that in praying to the God of the entire universe, we acknowledge only His authority as supreme. The principalities and power should never be comfortable having Christians around because we won't bow down to the idols of wealth, or power, or military might; since we find the true source of power and authority in the peaceable kingdom of the Lamb that was slain.



Ben Thurley was at the time of writing *National Advocacy Coordinator, TEAR Australia*

Like [Gen Xers], I am keen to meaning, more excited by relationships than possessions, and often happy to be cynical (not least because it seems that cynicism is the only faithful response to hypercommercialised Christianity).

Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, p. 13.

Prophecy, Politics, and Paul

Siu Fung Wu

What do politics, prophecy and the apostle Paul's letters have in common?

Did Paul believe in prophetic utterances? That is, did he believe that God would – by his Spirit – reveal his plans and purposes through human beings? Judging by his Jewish heritage and his letters (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:1), the answer is a resounding yes.

Was Paul aware of the political situation around him? The answer is again yes, because practically everyone in the Roman empire experienced its control and power, and they knew that they were subjected to the lordship of Caesar.

Would Paul be surprised, if he lived in Australia today, to hear a prophecy about Australian politics? No simple answer. But what we do know is that Paul, through the history of Israel, knew that the prophets of old often prophesied to the kings and other political leaders.

Indeed it is impossible to read the OT prophets without noticing the political implications (unless we have been badly blinded by our 21st-century individualistic mindset). More than often the prophets' message was about justice and was directed to the political leaders of their days – to urge them to show mercy to the poor and stop oppressing them (e.g. Isa 1:17; 10:1-2; Jer 5:5, 28; 9:23-24; 22:15-17; Ezek 16:49; 22:29; Zech 7:5, 9-10; and most of Amos and Micah).

With this in mind, one would expect modern-day prophecies to speak against injustice. Indeed in the following we shall find that justice is a common thread that runs through Paul's letters, politics and prophecy.

Paul and the empire

Did Paul engage in politics? To answer this question we first need to understand the historical context of Paul's letters.

The Imperial cult was a fast growing religion in Paul's days. According to N. T. Wright, the Roman Julio-Claudian emperors received divine honours after their deaths. Being hailed as the son of the deified Julius Caesar helped to raise the emperor Augustus' profile – and that of his successors. In other words, the emperor was portrayed as a "son of god", something that the people in the empire would not ignore. Emperor worship was thus a political affair, for it served as a means to elevate Caesar's status.

Further interesting facts can be found in the history the Roman empire. According to Wright the goddess *Iustitia* (justice) was an innovation of Augustus. Dieter Georgi notes that the inscription *Acts of Augustus* speaks of "*dikaioynē*" (i.e. "justice" or "righteousness") as one of the four attributes of Augustus. Moreover, the emperor's birthday was hailed as *euan-*

gelion, which is the Greek word for “good news”, or “gospel” in biblical writings.

These vocabularies (justice, righteousness, good news, son of god) are commonly found in Paul’s writings, and one wonders what might bring to the minds of Paul’s audience when his letters were read in their churches.

Most importantly, the emperor was understood as the *kyrios* (i.e. “lord”) of the world. In fact, it is precisely because he was the lord of the empire that his birthday was hailed as good news and that the Imperial cult was spreading fast.

In this context Paul’s proclamation that “Jesus is Lord” was most subversive. Jesus was Lord meant that Caesar wasn’t.

We must be careful that we do not turn the gospel into a political message. Paul did not base his theology on Roman politics. But when we read Paul we must always remember that the declaration “Jesus is Lord” placed Paul and his audience in danger from political persecution.

Paul’s gospel and ancient prophecy
Therefore, Paul’s gospel has a politically subversive tendency. But does his gospel have anything to do with prophecies?

Most definitely – because Paul is adamant that his gospel is based on prophetic words. Indeed Romans starts and ends with this affirmation (1:1-2; 16:25-27).

Most noteworthy is that in Romans 10:12-13 Paul says that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, and then he cites the words of the prophet Joel, which says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Scholars such as Gordon Fee note that here the title “Yahweh” is applied to Christ, because the Greek word *kyrios* (i.e. Lord) is used in the Septuagint to refer to Yahweh, the Creator God.

Thus Paul’s gospel declares that the Creator God has acted – through his Son Jesus – to save everyone, Jew or Gentile, who believes in Christ. This is of course rooted in the age-old prophetic tradition that God is always the God of all the earth, and he would one day come and reign over all nations.

The gospel and politics today
It should now be clear that the gospel has profound implication to the whole world – not least the Roman empire, the most powerful political kingdom in Paul’s days. For Paul, Caesar was not the lord of the world. Jesus is. Caesar was not really a “son of god”. Jesus is *the* Son of God. The birthday of Caesar was no good news. “Jesus is Lord” is *the* good news. What does this mean to us when it comes to Australian politics? Here Paul’s citation of Isaiah’s prophecy in Romans 15:12 is helpful.

The apostle quotes Isaiah 11:10 and says, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations...” The context of Isaiah 11 perhaps tells us more about what Paul has in mind. The Root of Jesse will judge the poor and needy with justice (11:4). Righteousness will be his belt (11:5). In his kingdom the wolf will live with the lamb, and the cow will feed with the bear (11:6, 7).

Paul understands Christ as the Root of Jesse and hence the Lord of the cosmos, according to Israel’s prophetic tradition. The gospel is about the establishment of Christ’s kingdom where he rules with justice and his people live in peace and security.

The fact that Jesus is already the Lord of the world means that all political leaders – including both the Roman emperor in the ancient world and the Australian Prime Minister today – are ultimately under his lordship. He has the right to require them to act justly, love mercy and lead their people with humility (cf. Micah 6:8).

Paul did not have the luxury of democracy, yet he boldly proclaimed Christ’s lordship and God’s righteousness. If there is a prophecy about politics in a democratic society today, may it serve as an exhortation to our leaders to administer justice and love mercy, according to Christ’s kingdom values.

We have to be thankful that Australia is taking some steps to tackle climate change, for it is the poor who will suffer most from global warming. Likewise we should be grateful that positive steps are being made towards saying sorry to the Indigenous people for the past policies of child removal. But we still have a long way to go. And our Overseas Aid level remains to be one of the lowest among developed nations. Maybe the Spirit is already urging to the church to speak prophetically about this and other justice issues?



Siu Fung Wu
World Vision Australia

Core components of Christian lobbying Beth Micklethwaite

Australia entered a new political era on 24th November with the election of Kevin Rudd and the Australian Labor Party. The high profile of the Christian constituency during this election has led to renewed examination of Christian engagement in politics.

Regardless of who holds power, Christians are to pray for those who govern us and submit ourselves to their authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2, Romans 13: 1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-14, and Titus 3:1). For some Christians, political

involvement ends there, because God has given them a different calling. Those who are called to serve Christ in the political arena need to understand their role in that environment, to ensure that they can truly be in that world but not of it.

What does Christian lobbying involve?

Lobbying is the process of seeking to influence political decisions. It involves earning influence, using that influence to achieve a good outcome, and choosing the right tactics to exert that influence.

How is influence earned?

Lasting political influence is earned by:

- Demonstrating the existence of, and providing access to, a constituency that politics needs to win;
- Being non-party partisan;
- Building good relationships of mutual respect with the constituency, politicians and journalists.

Both sides of politics certainly recognised the value of the Christian constituency at the recent election, probably based on their experiences of the 2004 campaign. John Howard and Kevin Rudd agreed to address 100,000 Christian voters via the Make it Count webcast on 9th August, with both men keen to demonstrate how Christian teaching influenced their own lives and their respective party's policies. This bipartisan interest did not happen by accident but was carefully cultivated through persistent and effective political engagement over the preceding years.

Christian lobbying is at its best when it is lobbying for a particular *policy*, not for a particular *party*. This is a key distinction, reflecting both biblical principles and wise tactics. All political parties are human constructs and prone to human failings. No party can claim to represent God or automatically to deserve Christians' votes. Governments of many different political persuasions can offer wise and godly leadership to their citizens, though they will each have their own strengths and weaknesses. As former Labor leader Hon Kim Beazley said in a speech at an ACL event in Sydney, there is nothing in the Bible that compels a vote for the Liberal Party, or the Labor Party or the National Party (or indeed any other party).¹

This is one of the reasons that ACL has always maintained a non-party partisan stance. We have built good relationships with the ALP over the last few years and look forward to working with them during their period of office. Contrast this with the 'wilderness years' that we would now be facing had we tied all our hopes and influence to a party that had lost power.

Lobbying is first and foremost about building relationships with politicians and the media. This means honouring politicians, keeping confidences, commending those who deserve thanks, refusing to engage in spin, and resisting the temptation to vilify our opponents, even as we call them to account. Some of the most

effective lobbying occurs out of the public eye but politicians only give this kind of private access to organisations or individuals who have earned their trust.

What policy change are we trying to achieve?

Christian lobbying should have a biblical base. This is a prophetic role in a sense: we are calling the government to a high standard of righteousness and justice in its policies, based on what God has already spoken about how society should function.

Not all Christian morality can or should be turned into legislation. Furthermore, the Bible will not provide a clear answer to every public policy issue. As former Federal Treasurer Peter Costello said, it is hard to find much support for a direct tax system over an indirect tax system in the Bible.² However, we can usually find clear biblical principles by which we can evaluate a particular proposal. Such principles would lead us to advocate policies that provided for impartial justice, fair business practices, respect for human life, strong families, care of those in need, personal responsibility, and good environmental stewardship (amongst many others). Exactly how these principles should be translated into policy often leads to rigorous and healthy debate!

By its nature, politics involves negotiation. Whilst not compromising on our principles, we should be willing to negotiate about what can be done now. Very rarely will we ever get all that we want right away. An absolute 'all or nothing' approach can be counter-productive as there are often opportunities to improve bad policies, even whilst making clear our preference for a totally different approach to the issue. Many big changes are achieved in a succession of smaller steps - and a step in the right direction is usually better than no step at all.

What tactics are used to exert influence?

It is of key importance that we remember the way of Christ as we seek to serve him in politics. It is not enough simply to lobby for a good policy: our methods as well as our goals must honour Christ. Contrast the violent tactics of some radical anti-abortion campaigners with Dr Martin Luther King's rejection of violence as a means to secure civil rights for America's black population; a decision strongly influenced by his reading of the Sermon on the Mount.

Conclusion

There is a role to be played by Christian lobbying organisations, but such responsibility needs to be handled wisely. Thankfully there is a great cloud of witnesses for us to learn from.³

It is clear from this recent election that the Australian Christian constituency is not like the US Religious Right. Given the sizeable swing to Labor it would seem that many Christians who voted for the Coalition in 2004 voted for the ALP this time. In this election, many Christians perceived the ALP to have found a new voice on moral issues, and to offer more on social justice

issues. Clearly, Australian Christians want a government that will deliver not only strong policies on traditional moral issues such as marriage, but will also actively promote the social good, particularly in respect of the most vulnerable people in society.⁴ These issues are inter-related, but governments need to perform well across the spectrum of moral and social justice concerns in order to appeal to Australian Christians.

Our society is still broken, with many areas of injustice, unrighteousness and hard-heartedness, which cause pain and suffering for many people. Those Christian organisations with a political mandate play an important role in fostering accountable government and social cohesion if both our behaviour and our advocacy reflects Christ.



Beth Micklethwaite was at the time of writing *Senior Research Officer, Australian Christian Lobby*

- 1 Hon Kim Beazley MP, Address to the Draw the Line Dinner hosted by the Australian Christian Lobby, Sydney, 5th March 2007.
- 2 Hon Peter Costello MP, Address to the Australian Christian Lobby National Conference, Canberra 23rd September 2006
- 3 These include: William Wilberforce's campaign for the abolition of slavery and the 'reformation of manners'; Lord Shaftesbury's reform of working conditions in the factories that powered Britain's Industrial Revolution; Elizabeth Fry's work to improve the lot of female prisoners and to care for the homeless; and the campaign for equal rights for black people led by such heroes of the 20th Century as Dr Martin Luther King Jr and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
- 4 Results of recent research commissioned by ACL through the National Church Life Survey showed that the five most important political issues to Australian Christians were: marriage & family; poverty in Australia; abortion; drugs; and overseas aid.

Fear, Faith and Leadership

A CMA Business Breakfast featuring Dale Stephenson, Senior Pastor, Crossway Baptist

Thursday 5 March, 2009, Athenaeum Club, 87 Collins St Melbourne. 7.00am for a 7.15 start



Fear is a normal part of life, but when it gets the better of us, particularly as leaders, it can be debilitating both personally and for our organisation. Learning how to control fear is essential especially when stress levels are high and uncertainties abound. Evidence is rapidly emerging that the current economic situation is producing high stress levels, and leaders - whether from the church sector, the business sector, or the nonprofit ministry sector - need to understand the symptoms and appropriate responses to fear in themselves, and in their people. In this session Dale Stephenson will bring a holistic approach that helps us to grasp the concept that fear can be controlled and harnessed, and demonstrates how faith faces fear.

Dale Stephenson was appointed Senior Pastor of one of Australia's largest churches, Crossway Baptist, in January 2008. Prior to this he held the role of Senior Pastor at New Peninsular for twelve years, leading the church to be engaged with the entire Peninsular community.

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MELSTEB RE 03/2009

An Evangelical Manifesto

"An Evangelical Manifesto is an open declaration of who Evangelicals are and what they stand for. It has been drafted and published by a representative group of Evangelical leaders who do not claim to speak for all Evangelicals, but who invite all other Evangelicals to stand with them and help clarify what Evangelical means in light of "confusions within and the consternation without" the movement. As the Manifesto states, the signers are not out to attack or exclude anyone, but to rally and to call for reform." See <http://www.anevangelicalmanifesto.com>

An Evangelical Manifesto... for Australia?

Brian Edgar

Evangelicals now have their own manifesto. Along with a few other groups. Check out, for instance, the Manifesto for Well-being, or the National Dementia Manifesto, the Ecosocialist Manifesto or even the Manifesto of Graphic Designers.

There is a trend towards manifestoes being seen as *cool*. As long as they are short, sharp and snappy. In which case the Evangelical Manifesto is not cool as it runs to about 8,000 words. Consequently, some have criticised it for being outdated in style (too 'modern!') and too long and detailed, especially for a post-modern, web-based era.

Not that I mind the length myself, nor will you if you prefer substance over style. And 17,000 words did not seem to unduly limit the influence of Marx and Engel's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, so I suppose that there's still hope for it.

When something like this appears there are the inevitable concerns about exactly who it is that is claiming to speak on the behalf of evangelicals. And that, of course, is always a tricky issue. Evangelicalism is a diverse and complex movement and definitely not a monolithic organisation. Evangelicals are found with numerous denominations and in countless para-church organisations. And while there is no doubt that this has strengths as it can also create problems when it comes to trying to speak with a single evangelical voice. As a former Director of Public Theology for the Evangelical Alliance I'm very well aware of the constant reminders one gets about the difficulty of speaking for evangelicalism - and of the criticism that can arise if one even thinks about it!

So who are they? The steering committee for the evangelical manifesto comprises Timothy George, Os Guinness, John Huffman, Rich Mouw, Jesse Miranda, David Neff, Richard Ohman, Larry Ross and Dallas Willard. Unless you are exceptionally well read on North American evangelicalism it is unlikely that you will recognise more than one or two names at most. Probably Os Guinness and perhaps one other. Fortunately, they recognise the problem and do not claim to speak as more than "a representative group of Evangelical leaders" and they do so in order to invite other Evangelicals to stand with them and help clarify what it means to be an Evangelical. (And that is,

as they say, Evangelical with a capital 'E' – parallel to Catholic, Protestant, Jew and Muslim). So you can choose to sign up to this manifesto and make it your own if you wish.

But it is distinctly North American in both purpose and content. This is not to say that there are not important aspects of the document that are relevant in Australia (and I will consider those in a moment or two) but the document is clearly heading towards defining what they see as the past and current problems associated with Evangelical involvement in public, and especially, political life. They want a re-think on civic engagement to avoid the opposite errors of a secularism which excludes religion from the public square and Constantinianism which aims to have religion dominate. Rightly understood Evangelicalism defends the rights of all religions and does not assume that any one view (left or right, Republican or Democrat) is automatically right. And while politics is important it is *not* the main thing. The take-home message is that "The Evangelical soul is not for sale" in the marketplace of political ideals because "it has already been bought at an infinite price."

Now the issues that they are aiming at here – with regard to evangelical behaviour and political opinion in the public life – certainly have some relevance in the Australian context. But we must avoid the mistake of over-exaggerating the similarity. Australia really knows little of the one-sided politicisation of public faith that has dominated the North American scene. It would be wrong and unhelpful to assume that when it comes to political and public action that the history of evangelicalism in Australia is the same as in North America.

(There is probably not even the same concern to be known as 'Evangelicals' – with all that entails – as much as simply 'evangelicals'. That is, not as a party but (as the Manifesto itself says) simply as "followers of Jesus Christ, plain ordinary Christians in the classic and historic sense.")

Yes, of course there are some similarities with regard to public life but one ought to import ideas about the evangelical past with caution. No one would think that it was appropriate to interpret the life of the Liberal Party of Australia only using evidence gathered from the Republican Party in the USA, or the Labor Party in Australia using only the life of the North American Democrats.

Indeed, the whole point of the Manifesto is to demonstrate that such a view is not even the full story in North America and that Evangelicals actually engage

politically from a number of points of view. Nonetheless, although our histories are different the Manifesto's positive statements about the public life of evangelicals are very helpful and should be noted by those engaging in the public sphere.

There are two other areas where Australian evangelicals might well affirm the Manifesto. The first is the detailed definition of what it means to be an Evangelical/evangelical. There is a significant list of important aspects of evangelicalism which fills out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and thus to make a contribution to not only the church, but also to the wider world; and especially to the plight of many who are poor, vulnerable, or without a voice. These dimensions of evangelical faith deal with Christ, the cross, new life, scripture, service, hope and love. They are worth reading.

But perhaps the most powerful part of the Manifesto lies in the recognition of evangelical failures. "All too often we have abandoned our Lord's concern for those in the shadows... we have succumbed to the passing fashions of the moment... we ourselves are often atheists unawares, secularists in practice who live in a world without windows to the supernatural, and often carry on our Christian lives in a manner that has little operational need for God... we have attacked the evils and injustices of others, such as the killing of the unborn, as well as the heresies and apostasies of theological liberals whose views have developed into "another gospel," while we have condoned our own sins, turned a blind eye to our own vices, and lived captive to forces such as materialism and consumerism in ways that contradict our faith...." And so forth. Sobering. Real. Important.



The transformation of the world begins with repentance. It is a healthy, authentically Christian spiritual exercise.

Brian Edgar
Professor of Theological Studies
Asbury Theological Seminary

I read *An Evangelical Manifesto* after sharing the evening meal with a group of twenty-something Australians. My dining companions told me how they 'gave up on church' in their late teens. Years later, one of them visited a different type of congregation and, soon, the whole group were participating in congregational life, rediscovering the God of their childhood. What was it about that church that made the Gospel so attractive? "They don't shove it down your throat. What they say is worth listening to, and they give you time to think. People are pleased to see you, but not in an in-your-face demanding kind of way. They listen if you want to talk and aren't disappointed if you

don't."

The minister and congregation of this church do not describe themselves as Evangelical, and are sometimes derided by those who do, yet affirm the full "set of beliefs" the Evangelical Manifesto Steering Committee consider distinctly Evangelical. Conscious that we have no God-given monopoly on the Gospel, the Steering Committee affirm other traditions and urge us to appreciate and cooperate with each other. I hope those who endorse their *Manifesto* will be equally careful.

We need to be particularly careful that claiming the "right to say who we understand ourselves to be" does not shield us from the voices we most need to hear. We would be foolish not to listen when other people tell us that they do not experience us as loving, generous and just. How we see ourselves is not how we are seen; our understanding of ourselves is not at all how we are understood. Maybe media caricatures of Evangelicals (strident, judgmental, self-righteous, coercive, intolerant of difference, reluctant to listen) and third-world perceptions of Western Christians (arrogant, promiscuous, profligate, violent) hurt so much because they strike so close to home. How often we wannabe-disciples act like Pharisees...

An Evangelical Manifesto is a public declaration of shame, a corporate confession, and international apology: "We have betrayed our beliefs by our behaviour... We profess faith but operate as atheists." It initiates a process of corporate repentance even as it calls us to repent. Grace frees us of any need to deny our failures or defend our inadequacies. Only through repentance can we embrace our God-given ministry of reconciliation.

Two particular confessions resonate with me.

We ascribe to high, clear statements of biblical authority yet interpret the Bible in ways that betray the Gospel. The authority we ascribe to the Bible is not demonstrated by what we say about it but by our practice: How are we changed by the Bible? How do we respond to it? Does the Bible inspire us to participate with God in transforming the world? Unfortunately, against our best intentions, our hermeneutic habits often insulate us from the Living Word. We skip over passages we find irrelevant, difficult, or offensive, and perform complex interpretive gymnastics to evade passages that threaten to disrupt our way of seeing things. We break narratives into fragments and turn things with real meaning (slaves, money, land, violence) into metaphors for something else. Despite the Gospel writers' reticence, we don't hesitate to find fault with noncompliant slaves in Jesus' parables, nor to praise their masters. We mine the Bible for answers to our dilemmas (reducing the Living Word to a self-improvement manual or rule book) rather than inviting Scripture to question us. We read the Gospel as if we

had no money and accumulate and spend money as if there were no Gospel.

We attack the evils and injustices of others yet turn blind eyes to the evil and injustice we do ourselves. Unable to see that we benefit from and are enmeshed in the steep asymmetries of power that feed exploitation, we are oblivious to our complicity in the injustices we condemn. We are, for instance, outraged by slavery yet enjoy slave-grown chocolate and coffee. We are appalled by gambling yet reap its plunder. We rail against human rights abuses yet buy, sell and invest in ways that promote/perpetuate those abuses. We are passionate about climate change yet fly and drive record distances and feel entitled to air-conditioned/central-heated comfort. We condemn violence perpetrated *against* Christians yet explain away violence perpetuated *by* Christians, and refuse any responsibility when our words and behaviour fan fires of violence elsewhere.

Questions of social location and perspective: What is our role in public life? My reservations about *An Evangelical Manifesto* relate largely to the composition of the Steering Committee. Its nine-members are all male, nearly all post-tertiary educated, and nearly all white. Is it a coincidence that that the names that remind them of the political and social movements led by Evangelicals are the names of upper-class white males, of people like them? (Where is Martin Luther King Jr. in this list compiled by *American* Evangelical leaders?) Their silence about the evangelical roots of the public education, public health and trade union movements, and their own socio-economic locations is striking. Even more concerning is their failure to locate contemporary Evangelicals in hierarchies of power and privilege, explore how this relates to our public responsibilities, or discuss the possibilities and limitations our privilege presents.

From its very inception, the Gospel of Christ has always been completely political *and* completely religious. New Testament communities of faith inhabited occupied territory in which Caesar Augustus was 'a divine son of God' and a 'gospel' of 'peace,' 'liberation' and 'salvation for the world' was proclaimed in his name. Jesus, his disciples and the first apostles lived in dangerous power-laden situations within which unguarded words or actions could have lethal consequences for Jewish peasants, fisherfolk, carpenters or tent-makers. The situation of most non-indigenous Americans and Australians is dramatically different. As non-poor citizens of democracies, we inhabit power. Rather than pleading 'no influence' or adopting resistance strategies appropriate to oppressed or marginalised groups, our task is to transform power *from within*. What influence might we exert, where and how? How do our lives affect those who are less privileged and more vulnerable? As soon as we ask these questions, we realize how many of our problems are of our own making. How can we complain

that no-one listens to us if we forfeited our voice by voluntarily deserting the public square (public schools, transport, health, sporting clubs...)? How can we live as the people of God (salt, yeast, light) if we retreat to holy ghettos, or are "useful idiots" eager to serve any power that pays lip service to our creeds.

An Evangelical Manifesto is a document I will use and celebrate. What makes it so attractive? It doesn't shove things down your throat. What it says is worth listening to, and prompts us to think. Would our proclamation be more persuasive were it less strident? What would we hear were we to lecture less and listen more? ...Listen! What *is* the Spirit is saying to the Churches? Having heard, how would we respond? Might theologians and ethicists focus less on quandary ethics and abstract doctrines and more on our rarely questioned habits, systems and practices that, collectively, shape the world? Might Christian economists devise ways to maintain society without relying on ever-increasing levels of consumption? Might Christian executives think less about shareholder profits and more about how their corporations affect the world? Might Christian parents ask, 'How does our family life shape the future?' rather than 'What is in the best interests of my child?' Might we stop preaching personal guilt and repentance long enough to share the vision and hope that enchant us? Our testimony would certainly be more credible if we lived as if we believed the Gospel we proclaim.



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Modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion. The greatest of the revolutionary upheavals that have shaped so much of the history of the past two centuries were episodes in the history of faith—moments in the long dissolution of Christianity and the rise of modern political religion. The world in which we find ourselves at the start of the new millennium is littered with the debris of utopian projects, which though they were framed in secular terms that denied the truth of religion were in fact vehicles for religious myths.

John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, p. 1.

I read *An Evangelical Manifesto: A Declaration of Evangelical Identity and Public Commitment* with that mixture of cringeing curiosity that you have when someone sets out to describe you. The document turned out to be well worth reading, and I recognised much of what matters most to me as a follower of Jesus in these words by American brothers and sisters. My comments following should be understood as personal and preliminary only.

The *Manifesto* is intended as an important public document with a face to the world, and although it does not presume to speak for all Evangelicals, it has many authors and dozens of signatories. The difficulty in putting together such a document should not be underestimated. Agreed wording in such a thing is no small feat.

It does have the stylistic hallmarks of a committee document. Some tangential passages disrupt the flow of the document (e.g. the overlong sixth and seventh 'defining features'). Some polemical moments miss their mark. (The attack on liberalism, p. 9, may be too general to be useful; and the attempt to distinguish evangelicalism from fundamentalism is too vague to enable anyone to diagnose the difference. And who, exactly, believes in 'today's nihilistic "change for change's sake"' [p. 10]!?) Some words have crept in that I would use differently or not at all ('consequential', 'voluntarist', Jesus' 'entrepreneurial dynamism').

Yet on first impressions, I would point to it as a useful summary of what is meant by the much-maligned term 'Evangelical'. I have not yet participated in any discussion of the document within my own Christian community, and I often miss important elements in the absence of such discussion. But I appreciate its positioning of Evangelical identity as a *theological* way of thinking, believing and living that is all in orbit around the Lord Jesus Christ. I appreciate its candour about Evangelical failings. I value its attempt to articulate an Evangelical approach to public life. The following observations about shortcomings in its three main sections are all offered from within these appreciations.

1. 'We Must Reaffirm Our Identity.' This very helpful section outlines the theological nature of Evangelical self-understanding as thoroughly as can be expected in a document of this type. However, I think it may underplay the role of the Bible in Evangelical life. To be sure, the Bible is named as the totally true and supremely final rule for faith and practice, on the authority of Jesus himself. I can't imagine the sweat that was spent hammering out that much. But the fact remains that to an outsider, the Bible obviously figures highly in what Evangelicals do, and I think they need to know more about how and why this is so. The document's emphasis upon our following the way of Jesus helpfully shows that the Bible is finally *about* something beyond itself: a relationship with God through Christ, which also changes our relationship with others

and our response to the creation. Yet at the same time, the document may inadvertently obscure the way our only induction into that relationship is via the Scriptures (and that these Scriptures are abused when made to talk about something else).

Perhaps my complaint highlights the way the section would need to be read alongside other historic confessions of faith. No one document can say everything, and no human statement of Christian truth can ever say it perfectly. (For example, I also pondered whether the document spoke of our 'following' the incarnate Jesus at the expense of our being 'in' the risen Christ. I also wondered whether it said enough about humanity's lost, dark plight when we try to sidestep Christ.) But it well serves the purpose of re-introducing Evangelicals to the world as followers of Jesus, forgiven by God, in a community open to all. It also wonderfully highlights the way that in the good news, God puts humanity back upon the proper way toward our deepest yearnings.

2. 'We Must Reform Our Own Behavior.' I applaud the effort to articulate where Evangelicalism has fallen from its high calling. These failures are due both to human creaturely limitation, and to self-serving carelessness. Several 'all too oftens' seek to admit to various Evangelical errors in practice, and do make hard reading. This controversial section will need ongoing thought and discussion if we are to heed its call to repentance.

But such thought and discussion may suffer because of the way any 'manifesto' needs to be written, where both too much and too little can be said. This section labours under that difficulty. Too much is said, because the many listed failures make it hard to know where and how reform should begin. Indeed the section threatens to overwhelm the freedom and joy of the evangelical good news. Yet paradoxically, too little is said, because the targets addressed are very broad and highlight how hard it is to think and act ethically as Christians in a complex and fallen world. A much closer analysis of each of these 'all too oftens' is needed.

Perhaps then each Evangelical individual and community may need to take this section, and first attend just to those moments where there is a spark of self-recognition.

3. 'We Must Rethink Our Place in Public Life.' At this point the authors seem to give up on talking about worldwide Evangelicalism, and write as Americans to Americans. Some judicious rewording could have helped the document remain relevant to a wider audience. However, there is a lot of helpful wisdom in the 'Chalcedonian' method employed in this section, where their political understanding is 'not too much of this, but not too much of that either'. Despite this method though, the fact remains that every local polity will have hard decisions to make over actual public policies, and it remains to be seen what this 'Chalcedonian' method will look like in actual political and social life where there will be secular and religious

winners and losers on various issues. Again, further analysis will be needed (and the failed attempt to do so under the heading of 'Jesus, not Constantine' is not really it).

The document ends with a call to onlookers to deal with Evangelicals as we really are. This too deserves to be said, and in this respect the piece is like the apologetics of the second century, which sought to press for proper culture space, to correct misunderstandings and to commend the gospel to outsiders.



Perhaps the document should best be understood as a work in progress, subject to the same reforming instinct it espouses. I hope that ongoing discussion of it brings glory to Christ, as its authors have attempted, rather degenerating into a round of knocking them and its shortcomings.

Dr Andrew Cameron
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I appreciate the balance and humility of the Manifesto while it affirms a commitment to the Evangelical tradition. As I was reading it, I found myself constantly agreeing with its statements, such as: "To be Evangelical, and to define our faith and our lives by the Good News of Jesus as taught in Scripture, is to submit our lives entirely to the lordship of Jesus and to the truths and the way of life that he requires of his followers, in order that they might become like him, live the way he taught, and believe as he believed" (p 5); "first and foremost we Evangelicals are *for* Someone and *for* something rather than against anyone or anything" (p 8); and "We call for a more complete understanding of discipleship that applies faith with integrity to every calling and sphere of life, the secular as well as the spiritual, and the physical as well as the religious" (p 13).

Its seven supreme foundational beliefs are extremely well crafted and a model for an evangelical statement of faith (pp 5-6), though some might look for a clearer (rather than implied) reference among the foundational beliefs to the universality and depth of human sin. The statement has to be read of course in the context of orthodoxy (p 7) which affirms the Trinity, God as Creator, etc. The catalogue of evangelical failings with its call for reform is penetrating and deeply challenging (pp 11-14).

I especially appreciate the Manifesto's affirmation of the authority of Scripture based on the acceptance of its authority by Jesus. Evangelicals have a tendency to believe in Jesus because they believe the Bible (hardly an option for the early church when the New Testament did not as yet exist!) While I acknowledge

it is a somewhat circular argument (because our only access to what Jesus believed about the Scriptures is in those Scriptures), it seems healthier to me to have the horse before the cart and to accept the Bible because we are committed to Jesus – his beliefs, lifestyle and mission – and this includes his acceptance of the authority of the Scriptures. This in turn may make the inerrancy of the Bible less of a central issue than it has been for some Evangelicals, in that acceptance of the Bible as God's Word is not based on its inerrancy but on its authority derived from Jesus' teaching about it.

Some may feel that the Manifesto's approach to the Christian voice being but one amongst many in modern society is giving too much ground away. It is one thing to argue for tolerance and acceptance of everyone's right to believe, worship and contribute to society as they want (within appropriate limits of course) but it is another to allow secular and pluralistic threats to the very foundation of that tolerance in the Judeo-Christian tradition to go unchallenged and unchecked. What happens when those who "engage the public square on the basis of their faith" (p 17) do so in such a way as to silence the voice of Christians? For my part, to argue and act to retain the Judeo-Christian tradition as the foundation of western society is not to arrogantly seek a place of privilege for Christianity but rather to preserve the very context in which true tolerance is possible.

Not all Evangelicals will want to dot the Manifesto's every "i" or cross its every "t" and it is important to observe that there is no claim to speak presumptuously for all Evangelicals. It is a statement made by some (including prominent) Evangelicals with which many will resonate and which might provide a framework for engagement as Evangelicals with the contemporary context.



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Tragically, Christian political activity today is a disaster. Christians embrace contradictory positions on almost every political issue. When they join the political fray, they often succumb to dishonesty and corruption. Even when they endorse good goals, they too often promote their political agenda in foolish ways that frighten non-Christians, thus making it more difficult or nearly impossible to achieve important political goals... At the heart of the problem is the fact that many Christians, especially evangelical Christians, have not thought carefully about how to do politics in a wise, biblically grounded way.

Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of Evangelical Politics*