

BIBLICAL ETHICS-SOCIAL CHANGE

Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982),

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CHAPTER 1: BIBLICAL FAITH AND THE REALITY OF SOCIAL EVIL

In time of Jesus, violence and oppression led people to see underlying the lawless deeds of humanity a structure of evil, personified by fallen angels. Some Israelite's visionaries believed that events of the days of Noah explained their own (Mott P. 3).

We can say the same thing because the world today isn't much different from those days.

A basic way of describing evil in the New Testament uses the term *cosmos*, "the world." This word refers to the order of society and indicates that evil has a social and political character beyond the isolated action of individuals.

The Greek term, *cosmos*, however essentially means *order, that which is assembled together well*. It referred to the structures of civilized life and specifically the civic order represented by the city-state. Reference to Shek's mission.

The biblical concept of *cosmos* and the supernatural powers comprise an objective social reality which can function for good or for evil. Careful observation of institutional life suggests ways in which the powers and the *cosmos* protect or threaten human life. The powers are able to rule because individuals follow their influence and conform themselves to the world-order in actions which are system serving rather than system critical. The objective social situation and individual choice exert influence on each other. Social entities came into being through individuals over the years. But they also are powerful influence upon our choice. Jesus recognized the interrelatedness of the social source of evil and individual responsibility (Mott P. 14).

Our social systems are not eternal or absolute but reflect the ambiguous nature of humankind and the angelic guardians of culture. Our institutions are not just a constraint on sin; they themselves are full of sin. The structure of social life contain both good and bad. Because of the hold of self-interest we will tend to see only the good in those social forms which favor our interests unless we have a strong theology of sin.

CHAPTER 2: GOD'S GRACE AND OUR ACTION

CHRISTIAN ETHICS GROUNDED IN GOD'S ACTS OF GRACE

Christian Ethics Grounded in God's Acts of Grace

Grace preceding Christian ethics. God is the basis of Christian ethics. God is God who is gracious to us in Jesus Christ. Our obedience to God is inextricably bound up with our reception of divine grace in and following conversion (Mott p. 23).

Paul demands that the behavior of the believer conform to his or her identity as a Christian (1 Cor. 5:7). "Without fermentation" is the character of the Christian through conversion and baptism, based on Christ's sacrificial act for us. "Clean out the old yeast" describes the ethical duty of the Christian to conform to this reality. The "old yeast," as the context shows, is vice, particularly sexual immorality, but also such things as rapine and greed. Our ethical behavior is to correspond to what God has enabled us to be by adoption and grace based on God's historical, once-for-all act in Christ's death and resurrection (Mott p. 23-24).

Romans 6: is a classic passage illustrating this [relationship of grace and ethics](#). A section on grace, demonstrating our union in baptism with Christ's death and resurrection ([Romans 6:2-10](#)), is followed by a section of instructions on the obedient behavior that this union impels ([6:12-23](#)) (Mott p. 24).

Another example in [Philippians 2: 2-10](#); Confronting rancor and self-centeredness in this church, Paul argues that this conduct denies the grounding of their new life. A spirit of love and putting others before oneself (Phil. 2: 2-10) is what corresponds to the "incentive of love" at the heart of their faith. Ernst Kasemann argued that Paul is not urging a self-conscious imitation of Christ, but participation in the ethos of his drama of salvation – the source of their being as Christians (Mott p. 24-25).

[John 3:21](#), for a final New Testament example, states that "those who do what is true come to the light that their deeds may be clearly seen as being done in God." What are "deeds done in God"? They are deeds rising out of and in harmony with a relationship with God (Mott p. 25).

Grace appears as the foundation of ethics in the Old Testament also.

"For ancient Israel, the basic motive for ethical action of a particular kind is the obligation to respond to the activity of God on her behalf" (Mott p.25)

Grace empowering and invoking Christian action

God's redeeming grace has two aspects. 1. [Grace is God's power for us](#), the work of pardon and justification through atonement by the Son. 2. Grace is also God's power *in us*, the work of sanctification by the Spirit of God, as well as the Spirit's work in

drawing us to repentance and transforming us (Mott p. 27). As God's power *in us*, grace gives us strength to be what we cannot be in ourselves. The Spirit empowers us to act ethically, including social action, as grace "reigns through righteousness for eternal life" (Rom. 5:21) (Mott p. 27). Karl Holl notes that grace "creates an inner affection, a feeling of gratitude which must find expression and for which the highest is not too much to do. This affection is the source of the naturalness, the spontaneity of action rising out of a relationship with God (Mott p. 27).

CHRISTIAN ETHICS CORRESPONDS TO GOD'S GRACIOUS ACTION p. 28

Christian ethics is a response to the grace of God that we have received in Jesus Christ. What is the nature and content of our ethical response? "We love, because God loved us." states [1 John 4:19](#). Once more we see the pattern of grace preceding our ethical action. Our action is grounded in God's action: our ability to love is preceded by our reception of God's love. "We love *because* God loved us." [John 4:10](#) clarifies the form of God's love: God loved us and sent the Son as the expiation for our sins." Our action corresponds in kind to God's action. *We love because God loved us*. The content, the nature of God's grace determines the content and nature of our acts. Our response is love because God's grace is manifest as love. Karl Barth writes that we are to do what responds to God's grace (Mott p.28). [우리들은 하나님께서 우리에게 주신 은혜에 부합하는 응답을 해야한다.](#)

[Ephesians](#) provides a similar teaching: "Become imitators of God as much loved children and conduct yourselves in love, just as Christ loved you and gave himself on behalf of us" (5:1-2). We are loving in our conduct because its foundation is the love expressed in Christ's sacrifice for us. As children copy their parents in appearance and conduct, we are to be like God in love (Mott p.28).

Because God has been gracious to us, graciousness is to characterize our relationships with others. We are to carry out to others the pattern of God's action for us (Mott p.29). Grace we received from God is not something we keep it to ourselves or in our safety box but must act it out exactly what God has done for us.

SOCIAL ACTION OF GRACE

Karl Barth states that [grace demands](#) that we do in our own circle that which God does by Christ. We should attest to God's creating, reconciling, and redeeming acts by deeds and attitudes which correspond to them. [Our circle](#) includes intimate relationships and persons needing to hear of Christ's redeeming love. Yet we cannot exclude our extended social and political relationships and responsibilities, including those social forces which so frequently oppress. We are to act out what God has done, in the context of our own lives (Mott p.29).

Because we have received grace at an enormous cost through Christ's death, grace must characterize all our human relationships. The reception of grace puts one under a heavy responsibility: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for your iniquities (Amos 3:2) (Mott p. 30).

In the Law of Moses, God's act of grace in the deliverance from Egypt is frequently invoked as the basis for commands to do justice to socially and emotionally weak:

"You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. Because they had received justice from the Lord, they were to extend justice to others(Deut. 24:17-18)) (Mott p. 30).

Certainly, evangelism is in this sense a basic response to grace; it would seem impossible to be grounded in the grace which brought us to life and not want to share it with others. But to limit our obligation to evangelism is not only to underestimate the scope of God's work of reconciliation, but also to miss the fact that Scripture calls for a broader response to grace 2 Cor. 8 : 9 delineate the social implications of grace and illustrate the characteristics.

"For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." (Mott p. 31).

Grace is not like gummy syrup
Bon Hoeffler's cheap grace

In 2 Cor. 8:1 Paul said that

"We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia;

That grace enabled the Macedonian Christians to give despite their own affliction and poverty (v2). They gave beyond their ability. They begged Paul that they might have a part in his collection (v.4). They "asked for the act of grace and the sharing which is the contribution for the saints." God gave *charis*, and they responded with *charis* in giving to meet the material needs of the poor (Mott p. 32).

Paul uses the contrast between poor and rich to illustrate Christ's great acts of grace and to give weight to this exhortation (8:9). ..Care for the poor will demonstrate their love if it is genuine. They only have to be reminded of Christ's love. If truly grounded in the event of Christ's total self-giving on behalf of the helpless, our response to those who are weaker than we are can hardly be begrudging or niggardly.

[SOCIAL ETHIC OR COMMUNITY ETHIC \(P. 34\).](#)