

LST

# InSight

SPRING 2010

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Book reviews



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# SPRING 2010 INSIGHT HOW WOULD GOD VOTE?

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## Dear Friend

As I write this, we have just signed a momentous agreement with a local Christian training School to become integrated into LST. Watford School of Leadership will now bear the name of LST's Centre for Missional Leadership (CML). From this second campus in the heart of Watford, the centre will continue to run a Certificate course focused on Discipleship, Leadership, Evangelism and Theology with the aim of resourcing Christians for effective engagement in business, media and a variety of other professional contexts. We are excited by this historic development in our mission to equip people to have a strategic influence for Christ. We will be telling you more about CML in due course. For the time being, you can find out more by visiting [www.lst.ac.uk/cml](http://www.lst.ac.uk/cml).

With the forthcoming General Election in the UK we have chosen politics and faith as a special focus for this edition of InSight under the heading "How would God vote?" It is a challenge to all of us, as each of our guest writers identifies, to play our part as Christians in the democratic process, to encourage integrity and service in public life, and to do all we can to "make the cross count" at this election.

In our book reviews, we identify *Votewise Now!* as a very useful tool helping Christians to vote with confidence. Nola Leach, Chief Executive of CARE, also recommends their dedicated election website in her article "What issues should I consider when deciding how to vote?" Do consider making use of these and other resources produced by Christian organisations to help make informed and effective decisions as we approach Election Day.

We were thrilled to welcome Professor Alister McGrath as our 2010 Laing Lecturer to speak on a world-engaging theme. You can read more about the event on page 18 from Dan, one of our PhD students, or you can listen online to Prof McGrath's lecture "The Lord is my light: In defence of a discipleship of the mind" by visiting [www.lst.ac.uk/smartweb/news-and-events/](http://www.lst.ac.uk/smartweb/news-and-events/).



We are also delighted that renowned evangelical theologian Professor Don Carson will be the 2011 Laing Lecturer. It promises to be another inspiring event.

Can I point you to a section of our website called "Theological Themes". International evangelist J John has written helpful articles on the Haiti earthquake, and faith and politics which you can read by visiting [www.lst.ac.uk/smartweb/news-and-events/theological-themes](http://www.lst.ac.uk/smartweb/news-and-events/theological-themes). J John has become LST's first Mission Associate. The role of our Mission Associates is as ambassadors of LST, those who have a regular link with us through teaching, writing, student placement connections and mutual support. As a group, Mission Associates symbolise our passion for mission and for excellence in Christian service.

Looking ahead to the autumn, the third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation will be held in Cape Town in October with over 4,000 leaders from more than 200 countries addressing the critical issues of our time as they relate to the future of the Church and world evangelisation. Thousands of people will participate through the Lausanne Global Conversation and at remote sites through the Cape Town GlobalLink. We are delighted to be an official GlobalLink site, providing video links to the congress. Nearer the time we will let you know how you can participate in this great event here at LST. Both John Azumah, Director of our Centre for Islamic Studies, and I will be attending in Cape Town.

Thank you for your prayerful interest in, and support of, the ministry of LST. May you be encouraged and challenged by what you read and in your ministry and faith.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Simon Steer".

**Simon Steer - Principal, LST**

# WHAT ISSUES SHOULD I CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING HOW TO VOTE?

A recent discussion on the forthcoming General Election left me somewhat concerned about the views being expressed. They ran along the lines of *'I'm fed up with this election campaign already'* to *'well my vote won't make any real difference any way, it will only be more of the same'*.

Wonder how many of us would own up to feeling this way? Many voters including Christians have become apathetic and cynical about engagement with the political process. Yet we have an amazing opportunity to make a Christian difference at this moment in our nation's history. With an estimated possibility of 200 or more completely new MPs we have a unique chance to influence the vote and bring in a different parliament.

A former Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper wrote, 'In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which Christ who alone is sovereign does not declare, "this is mine!"' We believe that Jesus is Lord. It is He who sets the agenda and we have our part to play.

We long for Amos's words to be true in our society today that 'justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never failing stream' God requires His people 'to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with (our) God'. We believe that now more than ever the local church is the hope of

the world. We are called to be salt and light, but what does this have to do with politics and how we vote or not?

It is true that in one sense the Bible says very little about politics. There's no prescription for a good transport policy, no advice as to whether health care should be provided by the State or the market, no suggestion as to what the best way to set interest rates might be. But politics has been defined as the 'art of living together in community' and the Bible is precise about what it means to be part of God's people living in God's world. It sets out His vision for His creation – and for the beings that inhabit it.

What a privilege that from the beginning of creation we have been given a mandate to care for God's world. This responsibility also involves choosing good stewards to order it and working and praying for the good of our land.

Politics and the exercise of political authority in our world is an extension of God's stewardship mandate – but with authority comes accountability.

Ideally, politicians should understand that human beings are created in the image of God and have a responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. It also means that as Christians living in a democracy, we need to think carefully about the representatives that we elect to carry out practical policies on our behalf, and to represent our local and individual interests. We have a responsibility to choose good stewards for God's earth. We should not simply cast our vote at random. So how do we do this?

Firstly we need to find out who the candidates are and build a relationship with them. We should ask questions of them and of ourselves. What kind of country do we want our children and grandchildren to grow up in? Which candidate would work towards this sort of society? What motivates them? What are their beliefs on a whole range of issues? What do the different political parties stand for? We need to weigh up how we think the Government should be conducting its policies in areas such as



education, the running of the economy, employment and benefits, health, old people and unborn children, or prisons for example and balance the different points of views of the candidates. If the candidate has been a local MP has he/she represented the constituency well?

One way to find out what the candidates think is to host or attend a local hustings meeting where the candidates can be questioned. Another is to use resources produced by Christian organisations. CARE for example, the organisation I work for, has a dedicated election website [www.makethecrosscount2010.net](http://www.makethecrosscount2010.net).

We may need to recognise that there may be compromises to be made. When we live as part of a community, we must make choices that benefit the common good. Indeed, it is impossible to live as part of a community and not make concessions on a daily basis – think even of your home or church life. We must ask the important question of where and when compromises can be made, whilst maintaining integrity.


As Christians we want a spiritually healthy country. The Christian voice needs to be heard and the best way we can do that is by getting to know the politicians on many levels, not least caring for them by

finding out their needs too and praying for them. Many churches already invite their MP to meet with them, perhaps sharing a meal; this too can help inform us, while bringing a positive message to those in government.

In twenty first century Britain many people take democracy for granted. Yet it is fragile. We must take inspiration from those who have fought for democracy, be informed and then involved. It is our sacred duty to vote. Let us do all we can to 'make the cross count' at this election.

**Nola Leach - Chief Executive, CARE**

# A YEAR IN POLITICS – REFLECTIONS OF A FORMER THEOLOGY STUDENT



Christians need to speak truth in the world of politics. Truth is powerful; the Gospel is potent because it is truth. Spin, lies and deceit are part and parcel of the political world.

I left LST in June 2009 ready to take on the world. Three years of study had led me into the world of politics, something I would never have expected at the start. I focused my dissertation on trying to discover a relationship between Christianity and politics. I am now continuing that journey by working in the deep end of politics in the office of an MP! These are my reflections...

I notice the catchphrase that LST have adopted on their website is "Preparing for Real Life in the Real World." What a fantastic description of the process students embark on at LST! I learnt lots of lessons in my three years at LST that have been invaluable in the "Real World." As well as developing analytical, literary and reflective skills, I learnt crucial lessons in how to conduct myself. The most important lesson being that the priority for my life must be to love my neighbour and treat everyone I meet as I would want to be treated. Politics can be a stressful environment. Problems arise, issues need resolving and tempers can fray. To love in this atmosphere is not easy. No matter what political background, whatever position and situation I find myself in, I am aiming to love my neighbour.

Christians need to speak truth in the world of politics. Truth is powerful; the Gospel is potent because it is truth. Spin, lies and deceit are part and parcel of the political world. So too is reputation, career and compromise. Christians need to step away from all of these trappings of political

life and live a life that is characterised by the truth of the Gospel. When I started working in politics I believed that compromise was essential to progressing up the political ladder. As I have worked in Westminster, however, I have seen that Christians are being pushed to the outskirts and faith in Britain is being threatened by an increasingly secular agenda. This concerns me greatly and the only way to tackle this is for Christians to speak the truth. Truth is costly; it may cost someone a promotion, a position in cabinet or their reputation, but it is what is required of us. Compromise cannot be an option for the Christian. The future of the Church depends on it!

I have found the relationship between Christianity and politics an uneasy one that sits uncomfortably. I do think however, that this is how it should feel. When I become complacent with the world as I find it, I know that I have lost my passion. The political world can be hostile, ferociously unchristian and unforgiving; if I become complacent with how I find it I know that I have lost the battle. There are, however, pockets of light in the dark. Christians are making a difference within all of the political parties, speaking truth into darkness, loving their neighbours even when it is difficult, and never compromising. These rays of light encourage me and fill me with hope. Christians *can* gain ground for the Church through the political sphere. Christ's love compels us to engage and a broken society needs the love and grace that only

Christians can bring. As an election looms I am excited as to what Christians engaging in politics can achieve.

Whilst many would like to push faith out of politics, everywhere I go I carry my faith with me in boldness and confidence. Westminster can be a very hard place to work, the trappings of money, power and position are always on show. It is comforting to know that Christ walks with me in the corridors of power but also that he owns the corridors themselves!



Laurie O'Brien – graduate on CARE's Leadership Programme (LST 2006–2009)



Some Christians maintain the Church should be concerned solely with the spiritual and other-worldly Kingdom of God. But indifference to the things pertaining to this life involves flawed biblical exegesis. God's Kingdom is actually amongst us. God is consistently portrayed in the Bible as being a political God who acts in the affairs of history. God is intimately concerned with laws and authority, and with human issues of justice, peace, and freedom – all enduring socio-political symbols. Jesus himself identified with human needs, both spiritual and material, and called on his Church, as a social institution, to live in proper relation to their neighbours – perhaps the most enduring motivation for social change.

There is undoubtedly a contemporary secularising attempt to privatise and individualise religion, especially in the context of a pluralistic society. But Christian hope is a public rather than private hope and the Gospel is a public Gospel. Historically, Christians have been intimately involved in social politics and the Christian message emphasises both vertical relationship with God and horizontal expression of faith through community involvement. Salvation itself is a cosmic mission – not merely an individual affair. Christians are supposed to impact and permeate society like salt and light or shine like stars (Matt. 5.13-16; Phil. 2.15). If Christianity is confined to the private sphere its radical message of redemptive love may become inoffensive, but also largely irrelevant and meaningless. And what becomes of the Church's task to confront the causes, let alone the symptoms, of endemic evil in the structures of our society? Detachment or withdrawal,

which can so easily become avoidance of social commitment and responsibility, is not the answer.

Politics is an essential aspect of human social activity. Because they are human beings participating in everyday relationships, Christians are, by definition, 'political'. The imperative for Christian involvement stems from Christian belief in a Creator God who gave humanity responsibility for creative management of the world, and to challenge the structural forces of evil endemic as a result of the Fall. God himself became incarnate, thereby identifying with fallen human nature and demonstrating concern for the human material condition and its wellbeing. Through the incarnation God effected his plan for redemption of the world. His coming promised salvation instead of judgement, restoration to wholeness, and transforming new creation life in the 'here and now' of present existence. In other words, it involves his disciples changing the world in which they live, as much as preparing for another one.

It has never been so important for Christians to be involved in the political process and as an integral part of their missional call to demonstrate love in action, to fight for civil liberties and social justice. Christians often need to grasp a broader vision of what 'full-time service' actually means. Being salt and light is not about grasping political power but rather engaging with the challenge to bring the distinctive flavour and light of Christ through public service and leadership in the most public and visible parts of society, such as local and national government, education, health, law, arts, media, voluntary work etc.

During 2009, the reputation of politics was severely damaged, and some of those who sit in Parliament to represent the public were exposed as not always having the most honourable of motives. Most MPs remain committed to serving their constituents and their country, and some have been tainted by a scandal that they were not a part of. At the ballot box in the coming months some MPs will be judged on their conduct, and those seeking to become MPs will face the challenging task of convincing a sceptical public of their motives.

Christian engagement in the political system can help bring integrity and service back to the heart of democracy. The chance to vote is just the tip of the iceberg, and a tiny but important part of a much more holistic approach to our contemporary world. If you support a particular party perhaps you could help campaign for your local candidate. They are usually grateful for all the help they can get. Churches are often the only groups to hold local hustings, public meetings where political candidates can be held to account. Find out if churches in your area are already planning something. If they are join in, or gather together with other churches to help open politics up to your community where everyone can have a say. And above all, be aware of what is going on in your local community, your country and your world. Every Christian can make a difference somewhere.

**Don Horrocks – Head of Public Affairs, Evangelical Alliance and Associate Research Fellow, LST (LST 1995-1998 and 2001)**

# TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF POLITICS

‘We don’t do politics. I’m sorry, we don’t do politics.’ It’s the opposite of Alistair Campbell’s widely reported retort, ‘We don’t do God’ position, but it’s a classic Christian one – and it’s deeply flawed.

**M**ark 12:17 seems the obvious place to start when thinking about developing a theology of politics. In response to some Pharisees and Herodians who were trying to trap him with a question about the legitimacy of paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus said, ‘Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s’. Mark notes that ‘they were utterly amazed at him’. Why were they amazed?

The trick question posed to Jesus was of the classic ‘When did you stop beating your wife?’ variety. Whichever way he answers, Jesus will be in trouble, either with the religious leaders or the Roman authorities. Commenting on the text, Tom Wright argues that, ‘The closest echoes to this double command are found in 1 Maccabees 2.68. Mattathias is telling

his sons, especially Judas, to get ready for revolution. “Pay back to the Gentiles what is due to them,” he says, “and keep the law’s commands”. It is doubtful that ‘paying back the Gentiles’ referred to money. The revolutionary hint can’t be ignored. Standing there, looking at a coin, Jesus’ surface meaning was that the tax had to be paid; but underneath there was the strong hint that Caesar’s regime was a blasphemous nonsense that one day God would overthrow. Is that what amazed Jesus’ hearers?

The ‘God and Caesar’ text is frequently used to justify the separation of ‘religion’ and ‘politics’. However, the ‘religious-secular’ divide is an enlightenment construct, not a New Testament one. Jesus is clear that Caesar has some legitimate authority, but under God’s authority. In the words of Richard Bauckham, ‘Jesus’ point is not that God has no rights over Caesar,

but that God’s rights do not exclude Caesar’s. Of course, Caesar’s exercise of his right to taxation might on occasions conflict with God’s law – he might exceed his right – but the right itself was allowed by God’s law.’

In developing a theology of politics, it is important to put three building blocks in place. It’s crucial, firstly, to reject the idea that theology and politics are unconnected or even incompatible. Jürgen Moltmann comments ‘Its subject alone makes Christian theology a *theologia publica*, a public theology. It gets involved in the public affairs of society. It thinks about what is of general concern in the light of the hope of Christ for the kingdom of God.’<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, we should recognise that there is a legitimate role for political authority. Government is part and parcel of the



created order. It's a thoroughly good thing. Politics is about organising our economic, social and cultural life. It's about restraining evil and promoting the common good, not just the interests of those in power. The positive view of government in the New Testament is seen in texts like Romans 13 and 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

Thirdly, politics should be kept in its proper place. The negative view of government is evident in texts like Revelation 13. The role of the political authorities is an important one, but it's not all-important. Karl Barth makes clear that the 'civil community' can 'only have external, relative, and provisional tasks and aims'.<sup>2</sup> The fifth article of the Barmen Declaration rejected the idea that the state should usurp the functions of the Church by becoming the 'single and total order of human life'.<sup>3</sup>

'Salvation', according to Stanley Hauerwas, 'is a concrete alternative that the world cannot know apart from the existence of a concrete people called church.'<sup>4</sup>

The question is how should the Church and government relate? Secular neutrality doesn't exist. It's a myth. In its actions, governments, of whatever party, preference some notions of the good over others, and they are right to do so. The role of the Christian community is to shape those notions of the good and speak truth to power, especially when government oversteps the mark.

In practice this means that political engagement – voting, joining political parties and standing for office – is a critical part of Christian discipleship. Christianity and politics aren't incompatible; they're inseparable.



**Paul Woolley – Director of Theos, public theology think tank (LST 1996-1999)**

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Storrar, 'Introduction', 1.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, *Community*, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas, *Dictionary*, 76.

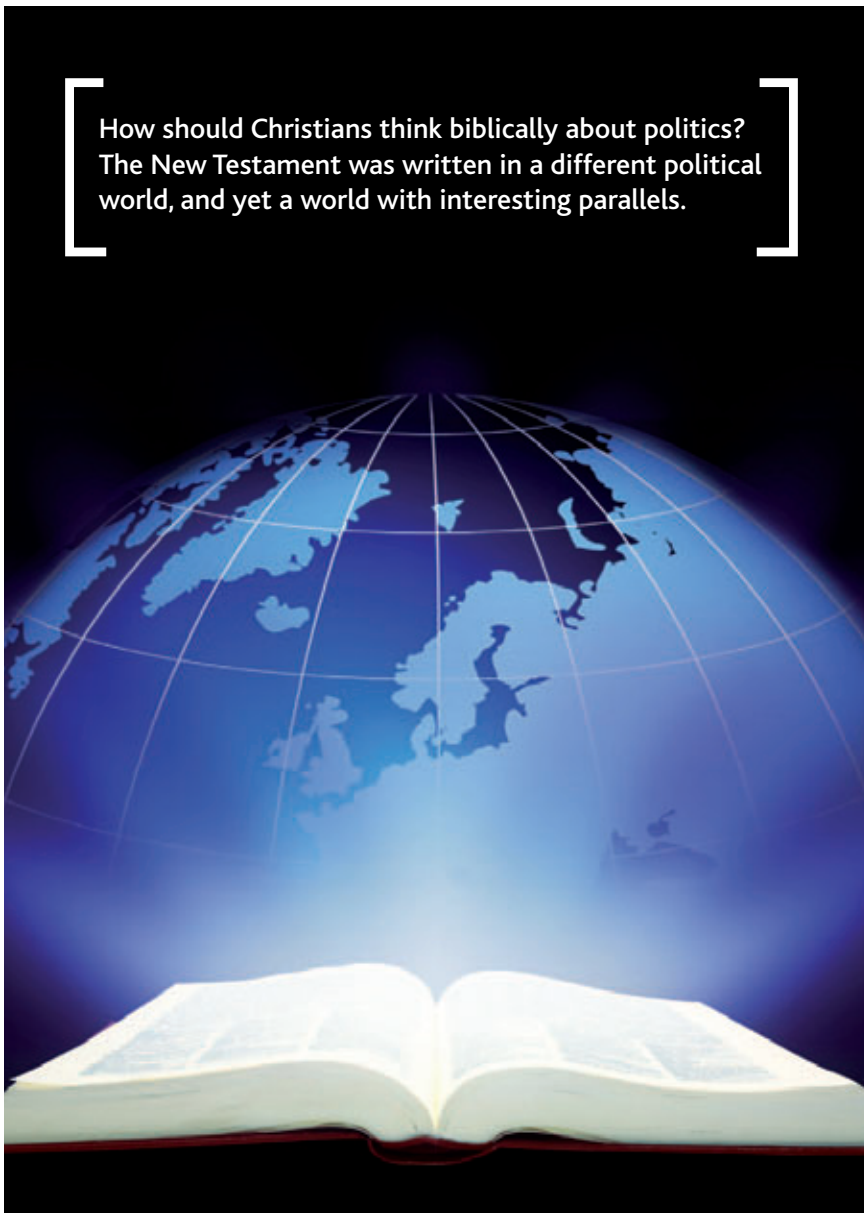
<sup>4</sup> Hauerwas, *Christendom*, 35.

# LUKE, THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND POLITICS

How should Christians think biblically about politics? The New Testament was written in a different political world, and yet a world with interesting parallels.

Paul wrote positively of the role of the Roman authorities as those responsible for administering justice and to be respected by all (Romans 13:1-7) – and yet the Book of Revelation portrays the Roman empire as the beast rising from the sea and attacking God’s people (Revelation 13:1-8). These two pictures seem in tension: how can both be true? Luke’s portrait of Jesus and his followers in the Roman empire offers us clues which help us think about a Christian approach to today’s rulers.

Like the tension between Paul and Revelation, Luke offers a variety of perspectives on Christian relations with the empire. When the empire is friendly and acting justly, believers can expect the state to allow them freedom to bear witness to Jesus and to speak ‘unhindered’. Models of this situation include Paul’s eighteen-month visit to Corinth (Acts 18:1-18a), Paul’s two years plus of (relatively) peaceful ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-22), his visit to Malta (Acts 28:1-10), and the closing scene of Acts, where Paul is allowed to proclaim the Gospel unhindered (a technical legal term) in Rome (28:30-31). Luke presents Paul and Jesus as innocent of the charges against them, and this would encourage Christians to live at peace with the authorities as far as it lay with them to do so. For a modern Western democracy, this implies Christians should engage in the political sphere, not least by voting in elections.





But Luke does not have a romantic, idealised view of the empire – he knows that politics can be a dirty game. He is well aware that Christians can be harassed, persecuted and arrested for their witness to Jesus, both officially and unofficially. Jesus before Pilate (Luke 23), the death of James (Acts 12:1-2), and Paul's trials (Acts 22–26) each offer pictures of faithfully maintaining the Christian confession under pressure – sometimes leading to deliverance and sometimes to punishment or even death. Luke thus calls his readers not to fight with the enemy's weapons, whether violence or falsehood. Rather, they should offer testimony to Jesus in similar manner to these great figures, relying on Jesus' promise that the Spirit will show them how to speak (Luke 12:11-12). With Paul, they should maintain their innocence (Acts 25:8) and with Peter and John they should 'obey God rather than human beings' (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Luke would not be surprised by corruption in politics or opposition to Christians in the political sphere – he is not naïve about politics.

Luke applies to Jesus key terms which were normally applied to Caesar, and by doing this shows that those who rule must ultimately answer to Christ. These terms include 'Lord' (especially 'Lord of all', Acts 10:36), 'king' (e.g. Acts 17:7) and 'saviour' (Luke 2:11; Acts 5:31; 13:23) – all highlight that Jesus, not Caesar, truly reigns. Indeed, in raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that the empire's verdict on Jesus was wrong. Not only does God deliver Jesus, but God reassures Paul that he will stand before the emperor (Acts 23:11; 27:23-24), and Paul's arrival in Rome underlines how God kept his word. Throughout Luke and Acts God works his purposes out, whether or not he receives human co-operation, and those purposes are not ultimately frustrated. The greatness of God's power is an encouragement to Luke's readers – including us – to keep trusting God when the state opposes them, for God is at work and his purposes will come to fruition in spite of state opposition.

Overall, then, Luke offers his readers a strategy of critical distance from the empire. He thus falls at *both* ends of the spectrum we sketched between Romans 13 and Revelation 13. Where co-operation and mutual respect are possible, Christians should do nothing to harm those. Where the empire or its representatives turn against the Church, the believers' stance is to be twofold: to call the state back to justice and right action, and to bear faithful witness to Jesus – in the political sphere no less than in the private.

**Dr Steve Walton – Senior Lecturer in Greek and New Testament, and Director of Research, LST**

Steve has written more fully on this topic in his article, 'The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire' in Peter Oakes (ed.), *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), pp 1-41.

# POWER TO SERVE



**We are responsible before God to hold them accountable to the people by whose authority they rule. It is part of our ministry to 'speak the truth to power'.**

In book two of *The Republic*, Plato posits the account of a young man named Gyges who discovers a ring that allows him to appear invisible. The question is raised, what would any of us do if we thought we could get away with it? Surely, we only do good because we are compelled to do so. Remove the constraint of compulsion, and any of us will do whatever we think we can get away with, unseen. Amongst those who rule, however, we might have a higher expectation of some degree of ethical code or display of virtue. That was the way of Plato's philosopher king.

In recent months, we have been inundated again with reports of many governing

representatives attempting to siphon off extra expenses from the public cash pot as though they were wearing rings that made them, and their actions, invisible. It is simply another round of scandalous behaviour that no longer surprises us with the lack of integrity displayed. Used to the resounding dissonance of corruption, we may yawn at the mention of public money paying for a moat; but injustice agitates us still when we hear of claims submitted for cat food and toilet seats. Moreover, it decimates our credibility in confronting political corruption abroad when it is so entrenched in the corridors of power at home. Show me your gold taps and I'll show you mine.



In another place and time, two rulers also thought they wore the ring of Gyges. King David saw something that he wanted and took it, killing a man in the process. The sulky King Ahab and his conniving wife abused their power to swindle a man out of his ancestral land, also killing him in the process. They did what they wanted because they thought they could get away with it. But God sent prophets to remind them that their power was provisional, and their actions visible.

The prophet Nathan confronted David with a story that brought David to a point of conviction before the Lord; Elijah pronounced judgement on Ahab who was perhaps too far gone from his faith

to be recalled to a renewed relationship with God. Walter Brueggemann calls this 'speaking the truth to power' and he suggests that Christians need to do the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

In a democracy, authority rests with the people. Our government leads only as we have invested its members with the authority that comes from God, and they are accountable to God through the electorate. They, like us, are obliged to be accountable, not only because of God's judgement on wrongdoing, but as a matter of conscience. They, like us, are to pay dues, taxes, and honour, as a matter of justice. There can be no ring of Gyges for the people of God – no

pinching the office pens when nobody is looking. And we are to bring that same light to bear on the actions of our elected officials – not in an act of judgement, but because we are responsible before God to hold them accountable to the people by whose authority they rule. It is part of our ministry to 'speak the truth to power'.

But for most of us, the thought of meeting with an MP to tell a story of corruption and judgment is not one that we intend to pursue. We are not likely to join a protest, or even write a letter to our elected officials, though such actions are part of what it means to speak the truth to power. Many of us are so disillusioned with politics that, as a general election nears, we throw up our hands in futility, wondering not how we should vote, but whether. It won't make any difference anyway.

To refuse to vote is to propagate the myth that people of power wear a ring of Gyges. To vote is to send a very clear message of visibility and accountability.<sup>2</sup> It says we know you care, and so do we, you are not alone. You are not alone in the responsibility of nurturing our society; you are not alone in seeking the common good. What you do for good or ill is seen, and makes a difference. When we vote, we engage an ethical act and encourage ethics; we speak the truth to power. We remind our rulers that there is only one Ruler whose power is absolute; he unmasks principalities and powers; he shines light into the darkness. He is more than a philosopher king; he is a servant king.<sup>3</sup>

Anna Robbins – Senior Lecturer in  
Theology and Contemporary Studies, LST

<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Word the Redescribes the World*, Fortress, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 12:48

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 2:3-8

# WHO DOES GOD VOTE FOR? PERSPECTIVES FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE

God judges that the outward, the external in a human being is not essential for leadership. God does not attach any importance to someone's age, strength, beauty, physical stature or the size or level of intelligence.

**A**lthough it is intensely concerned with the political, the Hebrew Bible does not idealize any particular political order. Instead it provides a set of values against which a system or a would-be leader can be judged.

'Not as human sees, does God see. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' (1 Samuel 16.7).

God looking at the desires and motivations of a person explains why, on countless occasions, God's choice of a leader is so unexpected. God seems to favour the least, the last and the lost, and so a shepherd will make a suitable king.

God judges that the outward, the external in a human being is not essential for leadership. God does not attach any importance to someone's age, strength, beauty, physical stature or the size or level of intelligence. So out go photo ops, publicity stunts, talk show circuits, photo releases, chief communication officers and spin doctors.

What will matter to God, however, is how many of the key ethical values that

he cherishes and that are unavoidable to create a just and flourishing society, will be included and will control the aims and policies of his candidate.

His candidate manifesto will always seek to promote and implement *mishpat*, and *tsedaqah*. Jeremiah addressing his king says:

'Listen to what the Lord says: "do what is just (*mishpat*) and right (*tsedaqah*); rescue from the defrauder the one who is robbed; do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless and the widow; commit no lawless act and do not shed the blood of the innocent.'" (22.3).

*Mishpat* has to do with fairness, equity, impartiality. It means that the voice of the defenceless, weak and underprivileged in society, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant worker, for example, must be listened to, as they would be listened to by a judge in a tribunal. Executive decisions must not be influenced by the powerful and wealthy at the expense of the defenceless and the poor. Ruling by exercising *mishpat* means that bribes, pay-offs, corrupting gifts must be rejected. It means that the rights of the powerless and destitute must never be ignored when

executive decisions are taken and that, in any case, political decisions must never make the innocent suffer.

But justice alone is not sufficient. A politician who only adheres to norms of fairness, equity and impartiality will not be able to create a decent and humane society. Equity needs to be complemented by *tsedaqah*. *Tsedaqah* describes an attitude of generosity towards fellow human beings. It is a virtue that causes people to take care of others, to give them their due. In the Hebrew Bible *tsedaqah* is exemplified in three institutions that reflect the agricultural background of ancient Israel. In the year of release, debts were cancelled. In the year of the Jubilee, the ancestral fields were returned to their original owners, and the slaves were able to go free in the seventh year of service.





*Tsedaqah* mitigates the rigour of bare justice and impartiality, as is shown in the example of the creditor who must return a pledged coat to the debtor who needs it to keep warm by night (Deuteronomy 24.13).

Behind *tsedaqah* lies the idea that what we possess we do not own, but we hold it in trust for God, and one of the conditions of that trust is that we share some of what we have with people in need. There must be justice not only through a fair legal system, but also in how the means of existence are distributed. God's candidate will have to make sure that no-one should be without the basic requirements of existence.

Finally, God's candidate will know the central importance of a third virtue that is mentioned numerous times in the Hebrew Bible: *hessed*.

'What the Lord requires of us is this: to do what is just, to love *hessed*' (Micah 6.7). *Hessed* is the virtue that makes a bond between people work and endure: it is fidelity, faithfulness, loyalty that results in acts of kindness, and love, of help and support. It is love-as-deed exercised toward the neighbour. *Hessed* generates habits of cooperation and care. It humanizes society and as such is a vital social ingredient. Because of its very nature, because it springs from the love and compassion of the individual, *hessed* cannot be legislated or imposed by an act of Parliament. However, it can be taught and the acquisition of *hessed* can be encouraged. It will certainly have to appear as a subject in the Educational programme of God's candidate.

The candidate for whom God will vote will have a manifesto shaped by the knowledge that God is a liberating God; the history of Israel starts with the liberation of an enslaving people from an enslaving power. He will know that society exists in virtue of a covenant between the people and God, in which both sides pledge themselves to mutual loyalty and to the task of constructing a society and communities in which the human person, regardless of rank, power, or privilege is honoured as the bearer of the image of God.

Jean-Marc Heimerdinger – Lecturer in Hebrew and Judaism, LST

# LAING LECTURE 2010

London School of Theology warmly welcomed Professor Alister McGrath – Head of the Centre for Theology, Religion and Culture, King’s College – to deliver the 2010 Laing Lecture entitled “The Lord is my Light: In defence of a discipleship of the mind”. Different from the format of previous years, the 2010 Laing Lecture dedicated a whole day to examining the importance of loving God with the mind through three sessions: an opening chapel, an academic seminar and a public lecture.

Prof. McGrath initially emphasised the importance of discipleship of the mind as an act of worship flowing from a Christian’s love for God. This discipline starts with the construction and maintenance of a threefold vision: (1) the vision of a God, who calls, transforms, empowers, and works *in and through* His people, (2) the vision of the Gospel as a transforming power that meets the deepest human needs, and (3) the vision of the Christian individual and collective identity in the light of God’s all-sufficient grace. The continual journey of faith, argued the professor, is not about the bombardment of information but about a slow and careful process of internalising every aspect of the Christian’s daily life.

The sermon was then followed by Prof. McGrath’s academic seminar: ‘The Gospel and Our Vision of Reality: The Church as a Community of Perception’. In this seminar Prof. McGrath carefully unpacked what was meant by ‘a passionate defence of the life of the mind in Christian discipleship’ and ‘the need for Christians to be involved in cultural debates’. The Church’s distinct perspective, as the result of the transforming power of the Gospel, must be sustained in pointing the culture toward truth. Christians from all walks of life are called to sustain the ‘saltiness’ in their walk with Christ through the disciplines of Scriptural meditation, Sacraments and Worship. At the same time, in confronting the postmodern quest for ‘truth’, Prof.

McGrath urged Christians to actively engage themselves in the ‘contacting points’ with the culture and believe that the intellectual capaciousness of the Gospel is more than capable of providing attractive and persuasive answers.

The event concluded with a lecture to the public at Emmanuel Church, with a specific emphasis on the importance of being theologically informed and professionally competent. Prof. McGrath once again encouraged the Christian community on the whole to continue to engage and involve in cultural debates regardless of professional and vocational circumstances.



It is imperative for the Evangelical community to keep the Christian influence active in professional and vocational contexts on a daily basis.

In a world of juxtaposing glares ‘The Lord is my light’ is a pivotal statement. Overall, the 2010 Laing Lecture was indeed a great encouragement and a refreshing breeze of inspiration and motivation, a valuable and much needed opportunity for Christians of all backgrounds to reflect on the importance of the discipleship of the mind in the daily journey within every corner of a postmodern world.

Dan Lé, PhD Student, LST (LST 2007-2010)

## LAING LECTURE 2011

Next year’s Laing Lecture, scheduled for Tuesday 8 February, will follow the same format as 2010. We are delighted to be welcoming as guest lecturer, Professor Don Carson, a Canadian born evangelical theologian and Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the USA. He has written or edited 57 books including major Bible commentaries. He has also written on prayer, suffering, free will and predestination.



# CHRISTIAN BOOKSHOPS: WHO NEEDS THEM?

Is there a Christian Bookshop in your town? Do you use it? If not, why not, and what would it take to persuade you to do so?

The past two years have seen massive changes in the Christian book trade which culminated in a major meltdown in November 2009 when Biblica (the new name for IBS-STL, International Bible Society – Send The Light) decided to pull the plug on its UK operations, a decision blamed largely on a failed IT systems upgrade. Biblica were the owners of Authentic Media (which includes Paternoster Press, a leading evangelical academic publisher), STL Distribution (which was Europe and the UK's leading Christian wholesaler and distributor) and Wesley Owen, a chain of 40 Christian bookshops that had expanded across the UK. To many in the trade it felt like death by a thousand cuts, one that we had seen coming, but were powerless to do anything about as Biblica pressed on regardless with its disastrous IT systems changes for more than a year until the inevitable happened.

The fallout has been huge, leaving a multi-million pound trail of debt and a raft of redundancies impacting not only Biblica's own subsidiaries and employees but many of its trading partners: witness as but two examples Scripture Union, owed more than £360,000, and Spring Harvest, owed £20,000.

Combining the impact of this debacle with the phenomenal growth of online bookselling, the Christian retail trade is in dire straits: 'money for nothing' it ain't, if you'll pardon the expression! For me personally, this year, 2010, is something of a milestone, my 10th year in Christian bookselling: I came to LST (LBC as it was then) in the autumn of 2000 at the suggestion of Conrad Gempf, who emailed me when my predecessor departed. As

an LBC graduate (1994) who had found my way into bookselling, it proved an ideal opportunity to bring together my book trade experience and my theological education, and I think it's fair to say that it's paid off for both LST and myself.

But the traumas and changes I've outlined above have taken their toll and like most bookshops, we're now struggling to make ends meet – which is where you come in. Not necessarily to LST, although that would be wonderful, but to your local Christian bookshop. I believe that Christian bookshops have a vital role to play in the Church's mission: done right, they can be places where people who wouldn't normally darken a church doorway can begin to explore the Christian faith without feeling threatened

or as though they've stepped foot on another planet. Done wrong, of course and, like many churches, they can be appalling places that make you feel ashamed of the Gospel. But let's focus on getting them right, on keeping the light of Christ shining on our high streets and back streets: please support your local Christian bookshop. Finally, please remember that your local shop isn't a showroom for Amazon: treat it like that and it won't be there for much longer – it is, quite literally, a case of use it or lose it. Visit [www.christianbookshops.org.uk](http://www.christianbookshops.org.uk) to discover your local Christian bookshop; and [www.christianbookshopsblog.org.uk](http://www.christianbookshopsblog.org.uk) to join in the conversations.

**Phil Groom, Bookshop Manager, LST**





## VOTEWISE NOW! HELPING CHRISTIANS ENGAGE WITH THE ISSUES

Rose Lynas

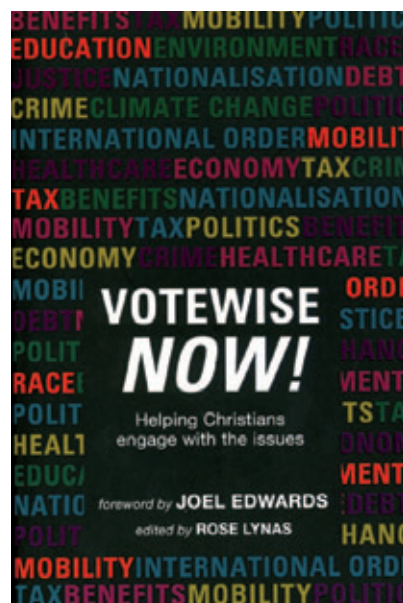
SPCK 2009, £8.99, pp116,  
ISBN 978-0-281-06192-1

Some readers will be familiar with this slim book's predecessor, *Votewise*, put together by Nick Spencer on behalf of the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge in 2005. This is not to imply that if you've got the earlier volume you don't need this one. You do! 'A week is a long time in politics', said Harold Wilson. And he should know. And at the risk of stating the obvious, five years is even longer. A great deal has happened in the intervening weeks and years, not least the elevation of a new and hitherto unelected Prime Minister, British withdrawal from Iraq, the credit crunch and the expenses scandal. Many of us will need a great deal of foundational guidance, faced as many of us will be with the usual confusion over what lies between what is said and what it really means and lots of unfamiliar and hence thus far untrusted people to vote for.

Now more than ever you need to exercise your right to vote. Without the prophetic voice of the Church, the country really will hasten more quickly down the road to ruin. With our voice we may yet turn our nation to wise and spiritually acceptable values. Apathy is not a Christian option. There has been a downturn in the number of voters in the UK over the last 13 years. Trust in the process has been seriously fractured as a result of disappointment following the New Labour landslide of 1997, but has received a body-blow as a result of the expenses scandal. Hope frequently follows trust down the grid. I hope that will not be the case for us as we approach the forthcoming election.

*Votewise Now!* is comprised of 10 chapters on crucial issues which will decide the next election. At least I hope that is so rather than the simple genuflection to celebrity exposure. Those ten subject areas cover the economy, criminal justice, health, education, the environment, international order, nationhood and immigration, tax and benefits, employment and housing. All are written by well-informed Christians with a background in these topics. All lay out the basic issues and seek to elucidate the challenges which confront us and the values which might be relevant. Three more chapters feature committed advocates of the three biggest parties, all MPs and all well-respected for their faith commitment and their work in the Houses of Parliament.

# REVIEWS



I cannot recommend this book's 116 pages highly enough. Whilst much deeper treatments of all the subject areas could be consulted in the coming weeks and perusal of the party manifestos is also important, none of those will help you decide where to put your cross come the day. This is obviously the value of a manageable volume written by trusted fellow Christians. So get *Votewise Now!* And get voting with greater confidence.

**Reviewed by: Robert Willoughby,**  
Lecturer in New Testament, LST

Rose Lynas is a writer and researcher, particularly involved in public policy research on the effectiveness of relationship education

## RELIGION AND IDENTITY: DIVIDED LOYALTIES?

Sean Oliver-Dee

Theos, 2009, £10\*, pp 37,  
ISBN 978-0-9554453-7-8

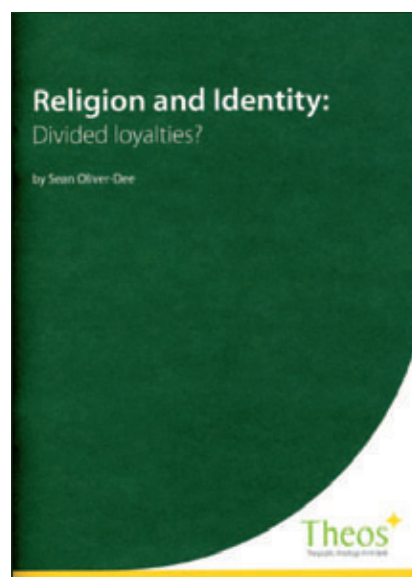
This book came as a reaction to the two speeches; one by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams and the other by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Phillips who backs the Archbishop's view that some aspects of *Shari'a Law* should be adopted in Britain. Both speeches attracted criticism and national debates from different paradigms including politicians, religious leaders and journalists.

Sean Oliver-Dee's viewpoint of a 'political theory' addresses the question of whether an individual living in modern Britain can be loyal to both religious and state identities. He proposes 'a Two Tier theory' derived from the Bible. The theory is an ambitious attempt to formulate a conceptual framework that can help British citizens, religious communities and policy-makers make sense of why is it important to recognise and engage religious identity in the British plural state.

This book's central theme is that 'there is ... tension between religious and state identities'. This is because 'religious identity' is a growing factor in the 'national and international affairs today'. It argues that there is no need for religion and state to be in conflict, 'there is a solution'. Both identities 'can co-exist peacefully and profitably' because they are 'identity layers rather than competitors'. A 'Two Tier theory' can be 'a viable and valid formula' to resolving these tensions.

The book only contains an introduction, two chapters and a conclusion. The introduction explores the concept of two tier identity. Chapter One argues that 'Christian and British state' is compatible. Chapter Two claims that 'much of the recent tension between religious and state identities is because of a particular Islamic theology of state'. The book concludes that, the British state needs 'to articulate what it demands of its citizens, without overstepping the mark', and 'religions' are urged 'to recognise the validity of this Two Tier theory'. It hopes that British Muslims will consider the proposed model to overcome cultural differences, integrate and improve community cohesion.

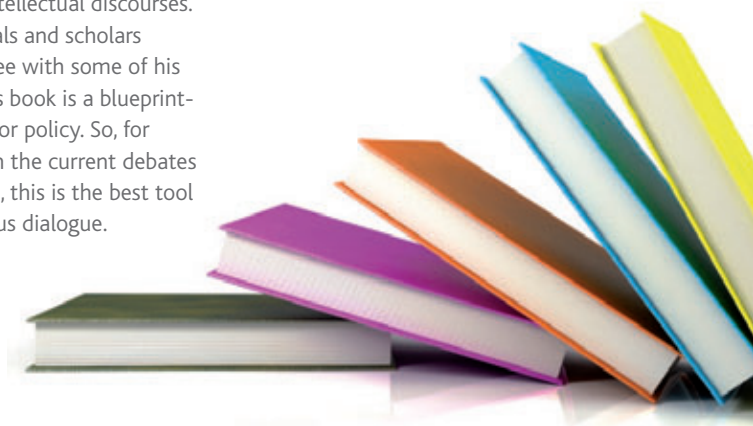
Oliver-Dee presents his argument with great skill and clarity. His simple but objective framework is evident throughout the book. His scholarly sound bite in which he describes Islam 'the elephant in the room', the positions of religious extremists on religion and state 'mono-loyalism' and the liberal approach 'poly-loyalism', makes this book a lively essay to read, and an impressive argument in the current debates on the rights of religious groups within a secular state. His well-researched historical background aims to explain and persuade the reader to understand the key theological and political issues in Islam, in step with current intellectual discourses. Yet some intellectuals and scholars will probably disagree with some of his conclusions. But this book is a blueprint-provoking thought for policy. So, for anyone interested in the current debates of religion and state, this is the best tool for interfaith religious dialogue.



Reviewed by: Joseph Bilal – an Episcopal Minister (part of the Anglican Church) (LST 2004-2009)

Sean Oliver-Dee, Associate Research Fellow at LST and Associate Researcher for the Church of England Representative at the European Union (LST 2006-2009)

\*Religion and Identity: Divided Loyalties? can be purchased at LST's bookshop for £5.



## ENCOUNTERING JESUS CHARACTER STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

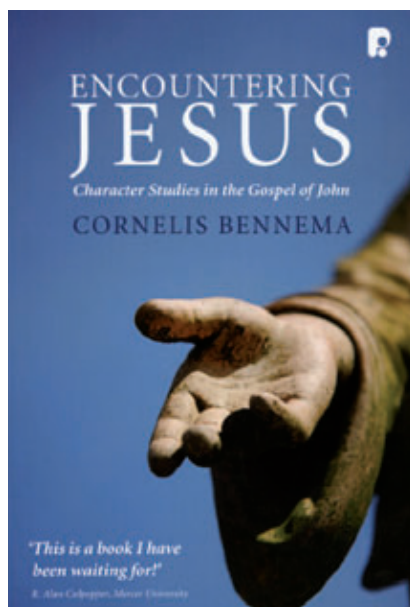
Cornelis Bennema

Paternoster 2009, £14.99, pp213,  
ISBN 978-1-84227-666-2

It is great to see our former students producing books that will really make a difference in biblical scholarship!

Cor Bennema, who – after completing both his undergraduate training and his PhD at LST – now teaches New Testament at the South East Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies in Bangalore, has produced a book which will advance johannine studies in significant ways. And it's also a great read for anyone who wants to understand the 'characters' in John's Gospel better.

How should we study 'characters' in the Bible – or indeed in any ancient text? One of the real advances in Cor Bennema's study is his attention to this methodological question, and his careful construction of an answer to it. The full technical details are in a long article published simultaneously in the journal *Biblical Interpretation*, but he summarises the discussion and his approach here in an introductory chapter, and then has 23 short chapters applying his approach



to characters in the Gospel – usually individuals, but some composite characters like 'the world', 'the Jews', 'the crowd' and 'the twelve'. Then, in a concluding chapter he summarises his results and draws conclusions about what the characters might represent for modern readers.

Cor shows that all the johannine characters are there to illustrate various responses to Jesus – and he shows well how varied and subtle the range of responses is, even though they can all be called either 'adequate' or 'inadequate', from John's perspective. Cor classifies the characters on a spectrum from 'types' (simple, flat characters just representing one response), to 'personalities' (characters with some real personal depth), to 'individuals' (real people we can imagine

meeting and understanding). One of the real gains of his study is that, whereas previously scholars have tended to view John's characters as cardboard cut-outs with little depth, Cor's analysis leads us to see new depths in them: of the 23, only eight are just 'types'. All the rest have aspects of 'personality', and three characters (Pilate, Judas and Peter) qualify as 'individuals', with considerable complexity in their portrayal.

This is a great book, written with great attention to detail but with a light and readable touch, a compelling style and solid skills in argumentation, as well as with a winsome eye to contemporary application. I think that Cor could have reflected a little more on what he brings, as a personal reader, to the analysis of these persons: alongside the textual and historical analysis, in what ways does he see them clearly also because he relates to them, person-to-person, as he reads? And if this is the case, is his reading devalued, or not? I missed this hermeneutical reflection. But the wonderful value of this book is not in the least undermined because he avoids pushing my hermeneutical buttons in this respect!

**Reviewed by: Steve Motyer, Theology & Counselling Course Leader and Lecturer in New Testament and Hermeneutics, LST**

**Cornelis Bennema, Associate Professor of New Testament at the South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, India (LST 1992-1995 and 2001)**



# REVIEWS

## CHERISHED BOYS, BODIES AND BECOMING A GIRL OF GOLD

Rachel Gardner

IVP 2009, £6.99, pp157,  
ISBN 978-1-84474-389-6

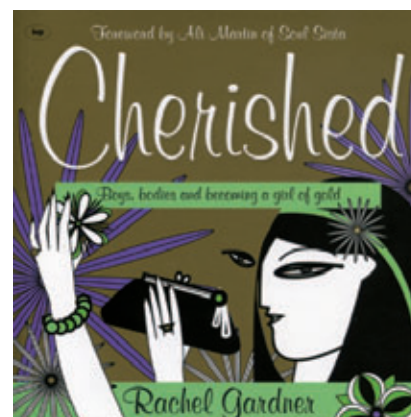
**C**herished is an encouraging and informative book written for teenage girls. Rarely have I heard this word uttered in today's society, let alone from the lips of teenagers on the streets of London. Although cherished seems to me to be an old fashioned word, Rachel has refreshingly brought this concept back in a new and positive way. She challenges the status quo of the negative connotations related to puberty by presenting a journey that leads the girls to discover treasures in themselves.

The chapters are easy to read and include hot topics such as beauty and appearance; acceptance and belonging; sexuality and promiscuity and identity and self-worth. Rachel's empathetic nature and personal stories help dissolve any alienation and loneliness by voicing the issues the girls may be facing. Gardener's straight talking tone and shameless stand for God's truth is a credit to the book.

Closing each chapter are two sections called 'Wonderland' and 'My Sanctuary'. In 'Wonderland', Rachel asks some challenging and direct questions to the reader to help unlock their thoughts and emotions to the said topic. The section 'My Sanctuary' is a place for the reader to reflect and discover more about themselves, and God, in a safe and

quiet environment. I was impressed with Rachel's ability to create to the reader a safe environment for self-exploration. Consequently these exercises, geared towards teenagers, would also be an asset to me in my professional capacity as a counsellor working with adults. The book is accessible for the individual reader, but I feel it could be more suited as a workbook with a group of friends, so these sections can really be used to their full potential and not be skipped over.

I can conclude that this book would be a great resource for those who are under the age of 16 or people working or living with teenage girls. As someone who is in her mid-twenties and does not have a teenage daughter, the book was not relevant to my personal journey at this moment in time! Yet, it left me wondering about my own transition and wishing a resource existed for me a decade ago. I am hopeful that there are women of God out there who are walking with these girls in the rawness of a physical and emotional transition that is scary and confusing. We are girls of gold, cherished and loved by God.



Reviewed by: Bethan Edmunds,  
Counselling Coordinator at Girlabout (a  
pregnancy and post abortion centre) and  
Counsellor (LST 2007-2009)

Rachel Gardner, Creative Director of  
Romance Academy and a youth worker  
by profession. She appeared in the BBC  
TV series No Sex Please, We're Teenagers  
(LST 1995-1998)



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