

**Jubilee Institutional Norms:
A Middle Way between Creation Ethics and
Kingdom Ethics as the Basis for Christian
Political Action**

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1. Introduction

Christians are divided into two main camps on goals for social policy. Those who follow 'creation ethics' base their ethics on the norms laid down by God for all men, in the early chapters of Genesis. In practice, they tend to be right of centre and Capitalist in their political orientation. Those who follow 'kingdom ethics' find their authority and ethics from teaching about the Kingdom of God in the New Testament. This group tends to be left of centre and Socialist (or even Marxist) in political orientation. Both sides claim to base their views on scripture. Such diverse interpretation undermines the credibility of using the Bible as 'the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct'. Some now argue that Christians should give up hope of defining an agreed approach to social action and adopt an entirely pragmatic stance. What works is right.¹

Two substantive issues underlie the debate between those of creation ethics and kingdom ethics persuasion. The first is the theological basis which should be used as the authority or motivation for Christian political involvement. The second is where in the Bible it is appropriate to look in order to discover norms for social policy. These two issues are closely bound together; the theological basis for involvement points towards the appropriate source of ethics within scripture. This paper will argue that middle ground exists between creation and kingdom ethics, which provides not only a clear mandate for political involvement, but also a more precise set of institutional norms as goals for social policy.

II. The Mandate for Social Political Action

Creation

The mandate for Christian political action is drawn from God's creation of the world. As creator, God has the right to order the lives of all men, and all aspects of their lives. In the Old Testament, God calls all nations to account for their actions, and in the New Testament Paul refers to the fact that *all* men are 'without excuse' because God's invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made' (Rom. 1:20). Thus, Christians have the right as God's children to seek to influence the political and social order so that it conforms to what God wants for all men.

In public life, the appeal to 'the world' to conform to God's standards is made on a pragmatic basis without any specific reference to God or Christ. 'We recommend that Britain has one day off in seven because man needs a day of rest if he is to work efficiently.' The Christian draws this knowledge from biblical revelation, but does not use revelation as the basis on which to make the case to the nominal Christian or unbeliever, as he believes it would not carry any weight. Why should the non Christian listen? However, out of love for neighbour, and to please God, the Christian still wants to try and influence the system.

One problem with this approach is that it fails to place Christ at the centre of the Christian's social involvement. His social action would be the same even if Christ had not come. Paul argues that, 'in

¹ Tony Walter, 'Christian Hedonism', Third Way, September 1984.

all things Christ should be pre-eminent' (Col. 1:18), and that 'No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11). It seems as if creation ethics only indirectly looks to Christ for its mandate, and thus perhaps does not bring honour to God as directly as Christians would want.

A second problem with the approach is that it seems unrelated to evangelism and the spread of the Kingdom. Those following creation ethics rightly emphasise that the kingdom refers to those who are fully committed to Christ, and that the ultimate goal must be to bring people into the Kingdom, for this has eternal rather than merely temporal benefits. However, how does social action help to extend the Kingdom, in terms of bringing people to Christ and confronting them with Christ? Because there is no direct appeal to biblical revelation in discussion of social policy, the only 'witness' is through any outstanding qualities of the individual or group which propagates creation ethics. We wonder if this is enough, when social policy involvement is so time-consuming and the issues of the Kingdom so urgent.

The Kingdom

The mandate for Christian social ethics in this case is drawn from the term, 'Kingdom of God'. The Kingdom has a universal dimension. The lordship of Christ does not extend just over believers, but over all men. There are no boundaries to Christ's authority (Matt. 28:19). The social polity is part of Christ's Kingdom and therefore must be claimed for him through reform. The Kingdom is even interpreted by some as a socio-political entity, With a programme defined by the ethics in Jesus' teaching. It follows that the values of the Kingdom, or some would say the Kingdom itself, are spread wherever social reform takes place so that injustice is rolled back.

A further dimension is added to the kingdom ethics understanding of the nature of evil in society by the references to 'the powers' in the epistles. Yoder, for example, regards these as symbolising evil structures and systems of oppression.² Therefore, the Christian must fight evil, not just in personal behaviour, but also in institutional behaviour. Often, analysis of injustice within the structures or institutions of society is carried out in a Marxist framework, as both New and Old Testament emphasis is on 'oppression', 'injustice' and 'the poor'.

A second branch of the kingdom ethics school stresses the extent of Christ's reign over all of life. The Kingdom here is defined as the church, the Christian community. The ethics of Jesus are exclusively for the church, Which confronts the world with the rule of God, as Jesus confronted the Pharisees (Matt. 12:28). The rest of the world is under the dominion of Satan. Therefore, Christians should withdraw into communities, where Jesus' ethics are applied in a radical way to all areas of life. This includes communal sharing of all possessions as in the first few months of the Christian church.

As with creation ethics, there are many positive aspects to this approach. By making Christ the source of authority, there is bound to be a self-evident witness to Christ through social action. The appeal to the unbeliever is, 'I am doing this good work, or supporting this social policy, because this is what I believe Christ the Lord would want'. Whether people listen or not, they have been confronted with Christ and his word, and the glory will go to him.

However, an important confusion has crept into kingdom ethics, we believe, because it has failed to distinguish the *de iure* and *de facto* dimensions of the rule of Christ. The word *basileia*, or Kingdom, in the New Testament, we wish to argue, refers exclusively to the acknowledged rule of Christ-the *de facto* rule of Christ. This is the true church, the community of God's people. The term 'Kingdom' only applies to 'the world' in teaching about the return of Christ, when Kingdom (God's

2 J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Wm. Eerdman, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972.

acknowledged rule) and world become synonymous because all evil has been thrown out. For example, the field is 'the world' in the parable of the tares because it is about the expulsion of evil at the Day of Judgement (Matt. 13:36-43). Until then, Jesus speaks repeatedly of the Kingdom as applying only in a limited way, i.e. to those who have 'entered' it (e.g. Matt. 18:3). So, too, the references to unbelievers confronting the Kingdom, rather than being a pall of it, suggest the Kingdom is still limited in scope (e.g. Matt. 12:28).

The limited application of the *de facto* rule of Christ, his Kingdom should not lead us to limit his *de iure* rule, his authority. In this sense, Christ's rule is over all men, indeed over the whole universe, and the apostles never tire of telling us this. Jesus himself indicates how the world belongs to him, even in his absence and even though many will be rebellious against him, in the parable of the talents.

'There was once a man of high rank who was going to a far away country to be made king, after which he planned to come back home' (Luke 19:12).

In this story, the nobleman who goes away to be king asserts his authority over all citizens left behind, even over those who were opposed to him (Luke 19:11-27). The same idea is present in the parable of the vineyard (Luke 20:9-18; Matt. 21:33-34). God now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). This is not the language of a beggar, but the language of a king. Christ makes moral demands not just on those who acknowledge his rule, but on all men (John 3:19-21; 7:7; 8:26; 13:33; 17:18).

If it is right to distinguish the *de facto* and the *de iure* rule of Christ, it is probably important to coin a new term for his *de iure* rule. In English, the term 'kingdom' is ambiguous. The Oxford Dictionary defines kingdom as 'a state or territory ruled by a king', which may refer to *de iure* or *de facto* rule. For example, England was still King Arthur's kingdom, though some of the barons resisted his rule. However, in Greek, the word *basileia* seems to refer only to where Christ's rule is acknowledged, so to translate it by the ambiguous term 'kingdom' has led to confusion. An appropriate term for Christ's *de iure* rule over the world might be 'reign', which is the term Stephen Mott uses in his recent articles.³ The key Greek word used in the New Testament in connection with Christ's *de iure* rule is *exousia*, generally translated 'authority'.

Christ's Authority

John, throughout his gospel, underlines the significance of Jesus' life and death for all men. We find that God's love, his concern, extends to all mankind (John 3:16). This is illustrated in detail by the time and care he gave to a Samaritan in the middle of a hot day's walk (John 4), and in the way his miracles at times were done for the benefit of all men regardless of their response to him personally. Christ did not always require faith before showing God's power and love, but would sometimes perform miracles for those who would turn against him or start to seek him for the wrong reasons (John 5:1-16; 6:1-26). Also, Christ made moral demands not just on those who acknowledged his rule, but on all men. It was not just the faithful, but all men who were forced to respond to the light he was to the world (John 3:19-21; 7:7, 8:12). Christ also said his message, and that of his followers, was for all men (John 8:26; 13:33; 17:18). And in some sense, even Christ's death was for the whole world (John 3:16; 12:32).

This was also a theme in the synoptic gospels. Jesus' miracles are not confined to those who have faith. Jesus feeds 5,000 and 4,000 without any discussion of whether they believe. He heals ten lepers, but only to one does he say that faith has made him whole (Luke 17:11-19). Several times we are told Jesus healed 'many people' (Mark 1:34 = Matt. 8:16 = Luke 4:40). We find, too, that

³ Stephen Mott, 'The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics', Transformation, 1984.

Jesus' message was not directed only to those who would respond, but is given to all men. In the parable of the sower, the seed is scattered throughout the field (Matt. 13:1-9). Jesus preaches to many who reject him, including those in Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 11:20-24), and in Jerusalem itself (Matt. 13:37-39). When the twelve are sent out by Jesus, they are commissioned to preach in all the villages and to all who would listen (Mark 6:8-11). All this underlines that Jesus is concerned not just for those who respond to his word, but for all men.

Jesus' concern for the world, and the way in which he makes moral demands on all men, raises the question of the right by which he makes such demands, and why he feels such concern. To some extent this is answered right at the beginning of the gospel where John reminds us that 'the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not' (John 1:10). It was because Christ had made men that he had the right to demand their allegiance. But John has more to say about Christ's authority, for Christ says at the Last Supper:

'Thou hast given him (the Son) authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom hast given him' (John 17:2).

It seems that Christ's authority over mankind is an essential prerequisite for evangelism. If Christ does not reign over all men, then man cannot have the opportunity to enter his future Kingdom. The idea that Christ's authority, or rule over all the earth, is an essential prerequisite for evangelism is also clear from Jesus' last words to his disciples in Matthews account:

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations . . .' (Matt. 28:19-20).

This authority over the world was not just claimed by Christ as existing after his death. It was one of the most conspicuous characteristics of his whole ministry on earth. Jesus had authority in his preaching (Mark 1:22); he had authority over demons (Mark 4:29); and over the dead (Mark 5:41). His authority extended over the wind and the sea (Mark 4:41) and did not end with his death, but continues (Matt. 28:19-20). His authority, it seems, cannot be limited to those who believe, or to his future Kingdom where all will acknowledge him. Authority is the word used to show Christ's rule over that part of his creation which is not his Kingdom.

The apostles are equally concerned to show how unlimited is the authority of Christ in their speeches and writing. Paul says at Athens, 'God now commands all men everywhere to repent'. This is not the petition of a servant, but the command of a ruler. If Christ did not reign over all men, he could not give them the command to repent. In the epistles, Paul emphasises how even the demonic powers of the universe are subject to Christ (Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:20-21). This is not to deny real *de facto* power to Satan in the world while we wait for Christ's return. Satan is still the 'Prince of the Power of the Air' (Eph. 2:2). But since the Cross, the Devil's position has fundamentally altered.

The Cross

To understand the centrality of the Cross in establishing Christ's authority over the world, it is helpful to distinguish three distinct ways in which human affairs are influenced:

- (1). Through God's providence - the sovereignty of God.
- (2). Through God's word - the law of God.
- (3). Through God's Spirit - the Kingdom of God.

In the Old Testament dispensation Rule (1) was universal, embracing all events and persons (e.g. Ps. 135:6). Rule (2) was characteristic of Israel (e.g. Deut. 4) and Rule (3) was a prophetic hope for the future (e.g. Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:27). These are illustrated in Figure 1. The messianic hope of the

Kingdom included the expectation that all nations would be brought within the privileges of Israel (Micah 4:1-5; Isaiah 42:1, 4, 6-7; 45:22; 49:6-7).

Before the Cross, God exercised providential sovereignty over the nations but did not assert his rule through his word except in Israel. God overruled in the circumstances of Cyrus, Nebuchadnezzar and Esther, but he did not assert his rule over the nations before Christ by his word. The prophets spoke of God's judgement in the surrounding nations, but they always did this to a Jewish audience at home. The only time in the Old Testament when the word of God is sent directly to a nation other than Israel is in Jonah's mission to Nineveh, which points forward to what God will do in Christ. The exception proves the rule.

Up to the time of Jesus' death, Satan seems to have 'ruled' the world in some sense. Jesus directly acknowledges Satan's rule over the world, but insists that this power is about to be destroyed when he says to his disciples shortly before his death:

'Now *is* the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out, and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (John 12:31-32).

It is through the death of Jesus that 'the ruler of the world' is cast out. Jesus also refers to the 'ruler of the world' when speaking of the end of his earthly ministry, for he says:

'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me. . .' (John 14:30).

Jesus shows repeatedly that he has overcome Satan through his ministry and death. Perhaps this is most strikingly portrayed when he speaks of 'binding the strong man' (Matt. 12:29), and of seeing Satan 'fall like lightning from heaven' when the seventy return from their mission of preaching and healing in his name (Luke 10:18). Jesus makes this victory over the powers of evil explicit when he says he has 'overcome the world' (John 16:33). The theme of Christ's victory at the Cross over Satan is taken up in the epistles. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul describes Christ's victory in these terms:

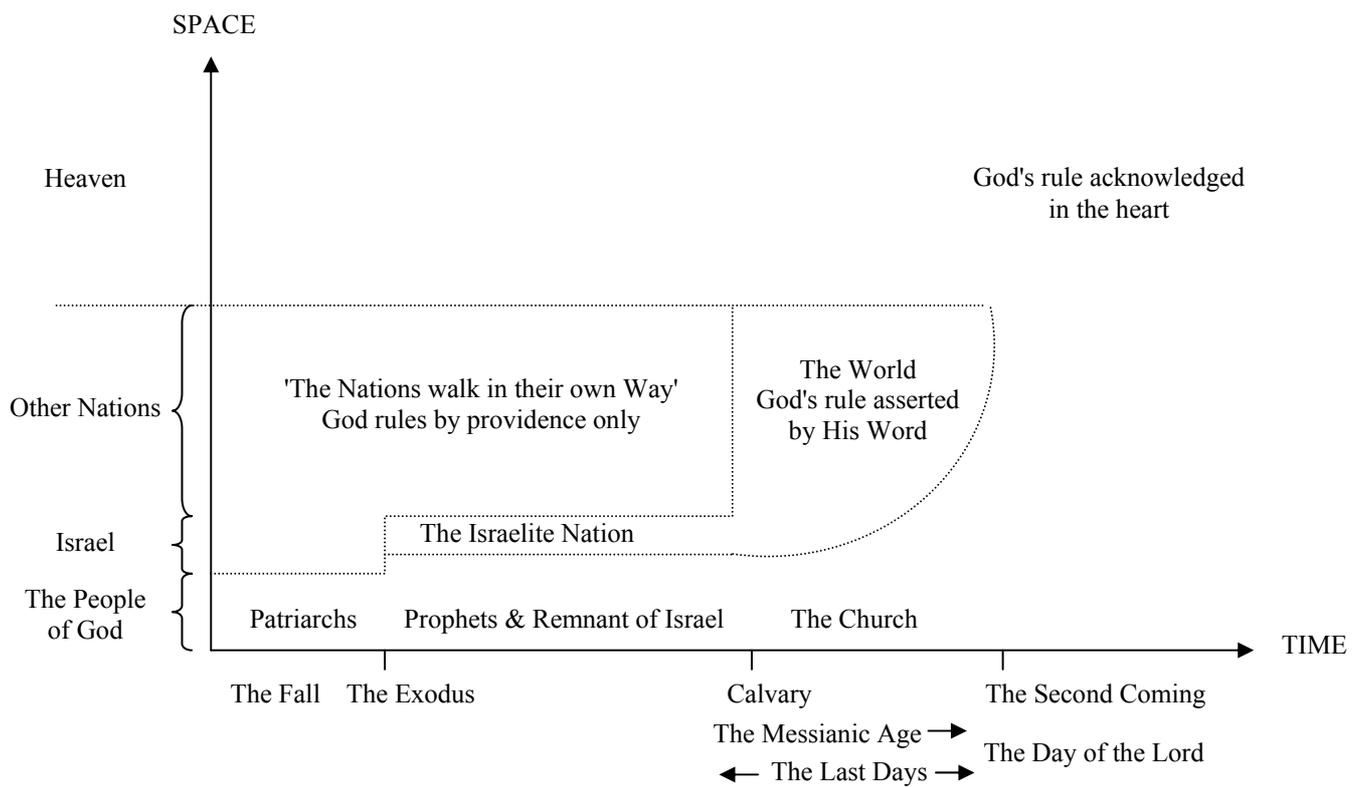
'He has made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it (the cross)' (Col. 2:15)

and Paul speaks of Christ's triumph in the resurrection in similar terms:

'Which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion' (Eph. 1:20-21).

Something new happened at the Cross. God's relationship with the world changed. Not only did Jesus save his people from their sins. He overcome Satan decisively and won back supreme authority over all the powers of evil, which man's fall had in some sense wrested from God. One result of this is a new message to the whole of the unbelieving world: repent. 'The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). Now God asserts his rule over all men by his word, just as he did over Israel in the Old Covenant. The Law-word which had only been for Israel before becomes applicable to all men, as we shall see below.

Figure 1. The Extent and the Nature of God's Rule in History

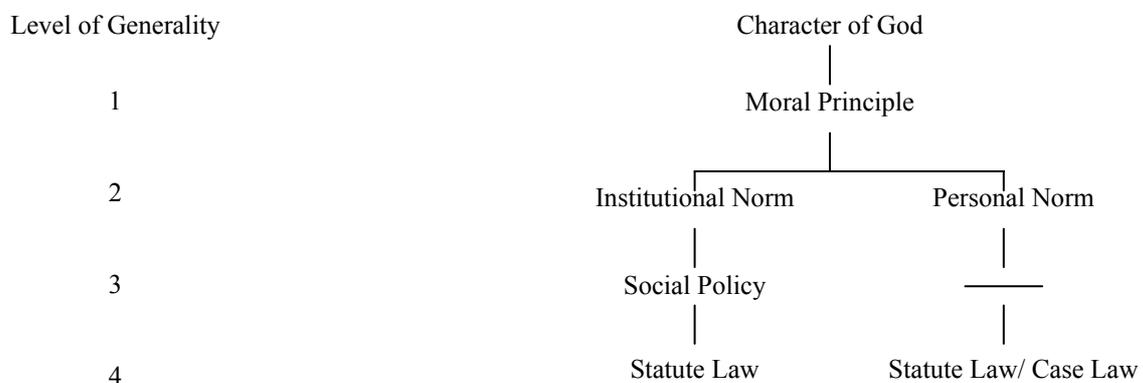


III. Definitions

The Ladder of Abstraction

In discussion of ethics, different levels of generality are involved in stating norms or rules of behaviour. It is possible to go from the highly specific, 'You shall not eat breakfast in bed on Sundays', to the highly general, 'Love your neighbour as yourself. In jurisprudence, 'the ladder of abstraction' is defined as, 'a continuous sequence of categorisations from a low level of generality up to a high level of generality.⁴ In social ethics, four different levels of generality may be differentiated, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Relationships of Principle, Norm, Policy and Law



⁴ William Twining and David Miers, *How To Do Things with Rules*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976, 45

The term, 'social ethics' seems to refer to both moral principles and institutional and personal norms. The essential difference in our definitional framework between principle and norm is in the level of generality. Both appeal to conscience in invoking the idea of 'ought'. However, while principle refers to 'General laws as a guide to action' (Oxford Dictionary), covering simultaneously many institutions or types of personal relationship, norm is a more specific term applying either to a particular institution or to a person's relationship with a particular person or institution. Social ethics, therefore, may refer to general principles or specific norms, and may apply to behaviour of institutions or individuals.

In practice, there may be several additional steps in the ladder of abstraction for a specific law-norm-principle. The decision about where norm ends and principle begins in our definition is determined by the point at which the rule of behaviour ceases to be specific to a particular institution and begins to apply to multiple institutions. For example, for the Jubilee land laws, two possible ladders of abstraction are characterised in Figure 3:

Figure 3. The Ladder of Abstraction for Application of the Jubilee Land laws Today

		Ladder A	Ladder B
Level	1	Relationships Matter	Justice in economic life
	↑	2 The extended family should meet regularly	All economic assets should be redistributed
	↑	3 There should be a family-land link	All property should be redistributed
	↑	4 All families should own land	All land should be redistributed
	↑	5 Jubilee land laws	Jubilee land laws

To speak of 'applying the principle', rather than applying the law itself, does not make it clear how far up the ladder of abstraction to go. It is not possible to decide the appropriate level up the ladder for application to life today without studying other parts of scripture to determine the intention of the law, as well as how the particular law relates to other laws. The discussion of paradigms below takes this point further.

Institutional vs Personal Norms

Three types of individual or personal norms can be identified. Firstly, there is the norm governing attitudes or thoughts which have no direct impact on another individual, such as the covetous or lustful thoughts condemned by the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17), and by Jesus (Matt. 5:28). There are norms governing the individual's relationships with another individual (love your neighbour), and others governing the individual's relationship with an institution or 'established group of people', i.e. 'let every person be subject to the governing authorities' (Rom. 13: 1). Many personal norms can equally well apply to the individual's behaviour in relationship to another individual as to his/her relationship with an institution. For example, 'you shall not steal' should govern an individual's conduct as much in the company for which he works as with his rich uncle.

Institutional norms need to be distinguished from personal norms. The former govern both how the institution is structured and what decision it may take. Frequently, they are given in scripture through apodictic commands which are directed at society as a whole, (i.e. 'do not charge interest on

loans' Deut. 23:19). They can be distinguished from casuistic commands (if your brother is in need, you shall ...) which are personal norms applicable only to an individual in a specific situation. A second type of institutional norm is the command given to an individual in his capacity as office-holder, such as the laws given to the king, or given to the 'goel', who is the officially-responsible nearest relative to an individual or family. For example, when the king is told not to accumulate silver or gold, the command is not for every individual in society, but only for the person who is king because of the nature of the office he holds. A third category of institutional norm in scripture is that which governs the use of resources like land and capital, such as the Jubilee land laws. These cannot be implemented fully by the individual in isolation. They require collective action by society as a whole.

Institutional norms are of special importance for social policy, as they have two vital functions. By defining the structure and function of institutions, they determine the political, economic and social system. This has widespread ramifications for the welfare of individuals, although norms only affect them indirectly via the institution. Secondly, social policy is largely concerned with making sure that institutions are effective in carrying out the functions assigned to them. As institutional norms define what those functions 'ought' to be, they become the basis for defining the goals for social policy. For example, if society believes the nuclear family is a normative institution, it will seek suitable social policies to try and prevent its disintegration. This will then lead to laws passed in parliament to try and bolster it up, directly or indirectly. As another example, the norms governing the structures of central and local government will determine which of them is held responsible to sort out a problem like unemployment.

In seeking to apply today institutional norms in the Old Testament, those governing both structures and behaviour, there is a choice between trying to implement them directly, as far as practicable, or trying to derive some more general principle to apply to contemporary institutions. So, for example, from the ban on interest, some have derived the general principle, 'it is wrong to exploit the poor', and then sought to apply that principle to contemporary institutions like Trade Unions or large company management. It is vital to decide if the aim is to seek reform within existing institutions using the principles derived from God's word in a general way, or to seek to apply the norms directly to contemporary institutions, where necessary seeking to recreate the institutions originally specified. To this issue we now turn.

Principles and Paradigms

A popular method of trying to bridge the cultural gap from the Old Testament to contemporary societies has been to derive principles, or 'middle axioms', from the Old Testament law, and then seek to apply those principles to contemporary issues. William Temple used this approach in the 1930s, taking his principles to a high level of abstraction such as the dignity of Man and the importance of social fellowship.⁵ More recently, Brian Griffiths has followed this route in his book, 'Morality in the Market Place'. He stresses principles such as that property should be privately held, that each family should have a stake in economic life and that economic injustice should be remedied.⁶

Clearly, it is important not to seek to apply the law literalistically. The meaning of the law must be understood in its historical and cultural context, and it is the *intention* of the law rather than its letter which must be implemented, as Jesus emphasised in his interpretation of the application of the Sabbath (Mark 3:4). However, there are at least four major problems in deriving principles from specific norms given in the text, which we have noted elsewhere, as follows:⁷

⁵ William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, Penguin Books, 1942; republished SPCK 1976.

⁶ Brian Griffiths, *Morality and the Market Place*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1982.

⁷ Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, *Reactivating the Extended Family*, Jubilee Centre Publications', 1986, 31-2

- (1). Deriving principles involves going up the ladder of abstraction. By what criteria can one evaluate how far up the ladder of abstraction it is legitimate to go?
- (2). Different interpreters may derive different principles from the same law. By what criteria can we determine which of them is correct? For example, which ladder should be followed in Figure 3 above?
- (3). When two principles conflict, such as 'private property' and 'economic injustice should be remedied', how is the resolution of the conflict to be carried out, or who should decide which principle should take priority? At a more general level, we may ask how different principles fit together: what is the general framework of which they are presumably a part?
- (4). Who can or should decide which principles have been left out? The procedure of deriving principles becomes a very subjective exercise, too easily reflecting the bias of the interpreter. They can too easily be limited by our prejudices, and a means of evading the message of the text.

The most obvious need is to have some sort of framework or system through which all the laws can be interpreted so as to understand their relationship to each other. It is then possible to relate this system to a society of a different culture. In describing this holistic approach for transfer to another culture, Chris Wright speaks of a paradigm, which he defines as 'a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged ... A paradigm is not so much imitated as applied'.⁸

While Wright emphasises the transferability of the system in his uses of the term 'paradigm', we also want to stress the holistic nature of the transfer. In a paradigm, all the parts bear a relationship to each other, and they bear this same relationship when the paradigm is transferred to another situation. Wright cites patterns of grammatical inflexion as examples of a paradigm -for example, a verb taken to exemplify the way endings or prefixes will apply to other verbs of a similar type. It is the relationship of the verb endings to each other which we see as the significant aspect of the paradigm, for the pattern of those interrelationships is what makes the paradigm observable in a different situation.

So we suggest it is the pattern of relationships between institutions and resources - family, kinship, state, land, capital, community - as well as the pattern of relationships of all those institutions with God himself - which God wants us to replicate in societies today. Geography, language and many other aspects of culture may differ, but God wants the inter-relationship between certain key institutions to remain the same. This makes it impossible to stray far up the ladder of abstraction from norms to moral principles, for a jump up the ladder to some abstract principle and down again to some different institution upsets the pattern of institutional relationships which is the hallmark of the Old Testament paradigm. It is institutional norms, not simply general moral principles, which must be Christians' focus of concern if they wish to replicate in some way the Old Testament paradigm in society today.

IV. The Programme

Creation Ethics

In the creation ethics framework, the authority for what Christians are trying to achieve in the political arena is derived from the place of God as creator of all men. So the programme or goals are derived from Genesis chs 1-11 which record the early history of Man before an election of a particular 'people of God'. Catherwood also adds the moral law, notably the Ten Commandments,

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Living as the people of God*, WP, 1983, 43.

using the Reformation distinction between ceremonial, civil and moral law.⁹ He argues Israel's civil law went out with Israel as a nation in A.D.70 and the ceremonial law was fulfilled by Christ and therefore no longer applies directly to the Christian. No guidance is given on how to split up the material, but one could argue that moral law is the moral principle behind any law: i.e. that which guides the individual on how to relate to God and his neighbour.

In practice, what are called creation ethics are, in terms of our definitions above, a mixture of moral principles, institutional norms and personal norms. Because they take into account the Fall, they are clearly directed at all men, and take into account the hardness of men's hearts. Thus, they have the advantage of political realism, of what it is possible to achieve in unregenerate society. The kind of moral principles and personal and institutional norms which can be, and have been, derived are illustrated in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Illustrations of Some Creation Ethics

<i>Biblical Statement</i>	<i>Moral Principle</i>	<i>Institutional Norm</i>	<i>Personal Norm</i>
1. Man made in image of God (Gen. 1:26)	Dignify of Man	The murder, manipulation or torture of Man by the state is wrong	You shall not commit murder
2. To Adam: 'You shall subdue the earth' (Gen. 1:28)	Work is glorifying to God	Societies should seek economic development	The individual should work hard and use his talents to God's glory
3. A man shall leave father and mother (Gen. 2:24)	Human relationships have to be prioritised	Marriage is the primary social institution given by God to all men	Priority to wife over parents within marriage
4. Thou shalt not steal (Ex. 20:15)	Private property is ordained by God	The state has not the right to appropriate property	You shall not steal

Note: A fuller list of 'creation ethics' and how they can be applied to contemporary issues is given in Appendix A.

While creation ethics - principles and norms - are helpful as a guide to political action, the guidance they provide is at too general a level to be helpful in providing a definite Christian position on many of the complex issues of our day. Some examples can best illustrate this point. A major question in political theory is the extent to which the state should exercise control over the individual. For Plato, the individual exists to serve the state, while for Locke, the state exists primarily to serve the individual by protecting his life and property. It is difficult to provide a biblical critique of these views based on creation ethics alone. And yet the Christian faith should surely have a viewpoint on such an issue as it affects so profoundly the social milieu in which millions of Christians live, and in which they preach their message of salvation.

⁹ Sir Fred Catherwood, *A Better Way*, WP, Leicester, 1975.

Another issue is the balance of equality versus incentive. Marxist theory lays emphasis on human equality in material wealth, but this is incompatible with incentives or rewards for individual effort. If extra rewards are given on the basis of effort, inequality will quickly reappear. Until recently, the Chinese called the Russians 'Revisionists', in part because they had abandoned attempts to achieve material equality and had accepted tacitly the need for material incentives in the interests of economic growth. Where does a Christian position lie? Almost all Christians feel strongly on this issue - either for the theoretical Chinese and Marxist position of equality, or for the need for incentives.

On the basis of creation ethics alone, it seems possible to support either position. All men were created equal before God so Christians should strive for equality. Alternatively, Man's fallenness makes it necessary to provide incentives to persuade men to work hard. Issues of this sort cannot be resolved without some 'system' or 'paradigm' which shows how all the different principles and norms interact with one another so that tensions between apparently conflicting principles or norms can be resolved or prioritised. Creation ethics does not provide this kind of overall paradigm.

So the issue becomes whether God has given any further help in defining the application of his moral principles to institutional and personal norms of behaviour. What would be ideal would be for God himself to take his own creation ethics and apply them in detail in specific institutional and personal norms to one particular society to show how they can be fitted together. Then we would like to hear God's comment on that society's performance and historical experience on the basis of those norms.

We believe that is exactly what God did in Israel's law and in the commentary of the prophets on Israel's subsequent history. However, creation ethics hesitates to use that material on two grounds. Firstly, Israel's institutional norms are regarded as inapplicable to societies today because they are given in the context of a 'covenant community' to whom God is simultaneously revealing his plan of salvation. Secondly, changes of culture and technology are felt to make much of the material of limited applicability to the twentieth century. These objections are considered below in the section which considers Jubilee Institutions.

Kingdom Ethics

The moral principles and institutional and personal norms for the Kingdom of God are generally sought within the teaching of Jesus himself. Most, if not all, of Jesus' teaching on human behaviour is given in the form of moral principles, such as 'love your neighbour as yourself, or personal norms such as 'turn the other cheek', and 'everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement'. Jesus did not specify any new institutions except the church, and did not give many rules to govern the behaviour of institutions, or individuals acting as members of institutions. As men in society are compelled to have institutions to govern behaviour and resolve differences, three ways forward are possible:

(1). Conclude Jesus has nothing to say about norms to govern social institutions outside the church. Therefore, Christians should apply his norms within the church and just try to influence the behaviour of individuals through preaching personal salvation. These individuals will then apply Jesus' personal norms to their behaviour within institutions.

(2). Try to extrapolate from personal norms to moral principles, and then derive institutional norms from those moral principles. An example might be, 'turn the other cheek'. This is a personal norm. The moral principle might be that of non-violence, and the institutional norm might be unilateral disarmament for the state. A list of such moral principles and institutional norms derived from the ethical teaching of Jesus is given in Appendix B.

(3). Argue that Jesus' teaching was clearly built on Old Testament foundations, and that he endorsed Old Testament teaching on institutional norms. His own teaching, then, aimed to show the full implications of Old Testament moral principles, especially for personal behaviour. This approach points back to the Old Testament as the source of institutional norms, so the sources are, first, the early chapters of Genesis and, second, the law and history of Israel in the light of New Testament teaching.

The problem with the first of these three approaches is that it seems to deny the Lordship and authority of Christ over all men, and over all parts of their lives. What does it mean that all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Jesus if he leaves so much of life without any specific word of instruction? If God is only interested in personal norms and in the saved community, it seems surprising that he laid down such detailed institutional norms in Old Testament revelation.

The difficulty of the second approach is the ambiguity of so many of the moral principles in application to institutions. The problem of Liberation Theologians in South America, for example, is what they should do after the, revolution. Do 'love your neighbour', 'deliverance from oppression' and 'concern for the poor' argue for Capitalism or Marxism? Should land be distributed so as to achieve equality, or a free land market be encouraged to ensure land is used as efficiently as possible so as to maximise production? So few institutional structures and norms are specified that it becomes possible to defend almost any political system or framework on the basis of the same moral principles. To go up the ladder from personal norm to moral principle is the first big jump, and to go down again from moral principle to institutional norm is another. To have any agreed basis for political action among Christians will require a much higher degree of specificity from biblical revelation.

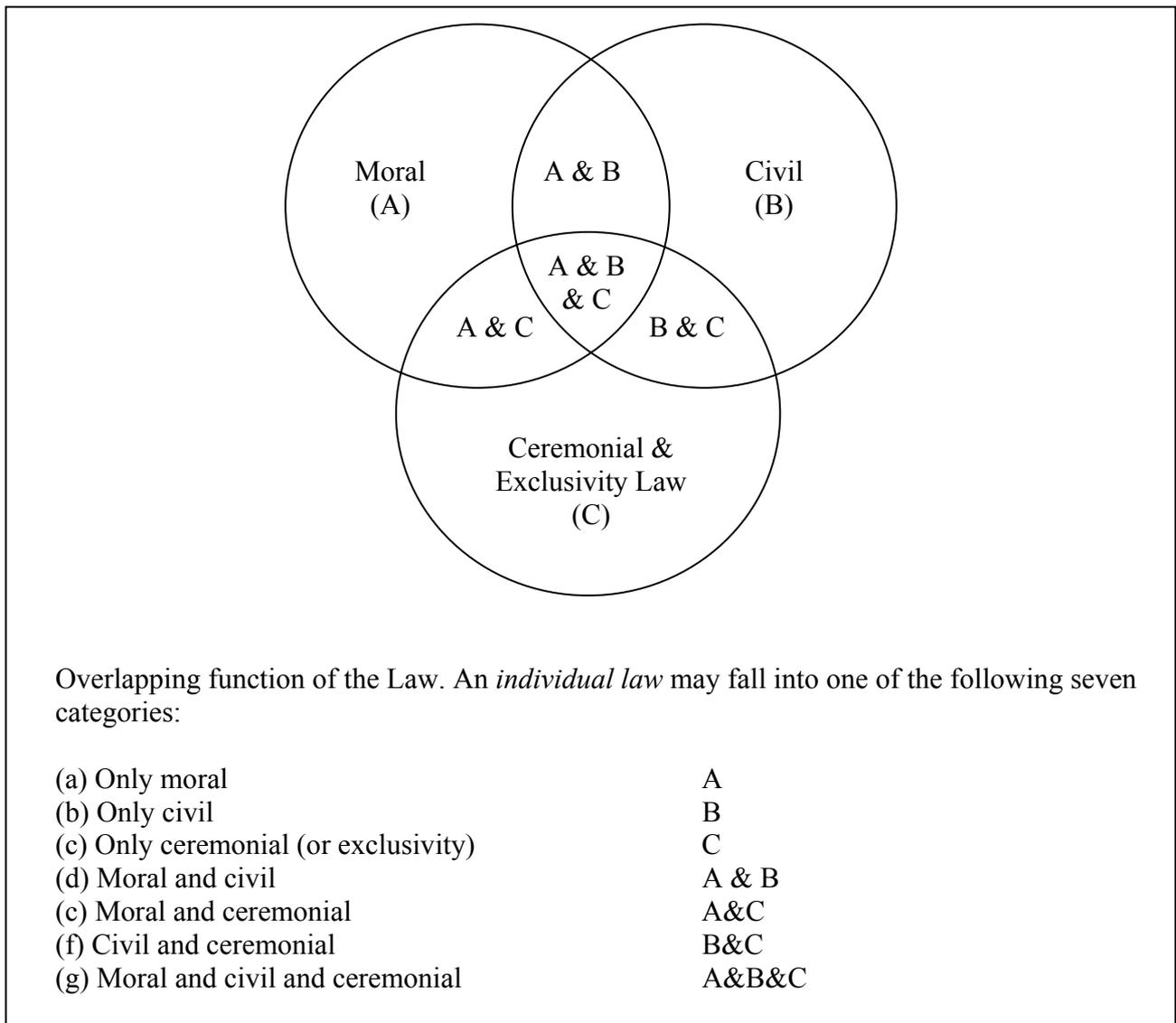
A further problem with the application of Jesus' personal norms to institutional behaviour outside the church is to know how to take account of the hardness of men's hearts. Jesus says that certain of the Mosaic ethical norms were specified to take account of this factor (Matt. 19:9). If people outside the church are corrupt and evil, how can this evil be minimised or controlled most effectively? Jesus shows how high God's standards are, thus revealing the extent of Man's sinfulness (Matt. 5:48) and indicating to his disciples how God wants them to order their lives (e.g. Matt. 16:24). Jesus does not teach how to control or limit Man's lust for money and power, except through entrance into the Kingdom. So perhaps the application of Jesus' ethical teaching to limit evil through social structures is in fact inappropriate. It is not 'using it as it should be used'. Perhaps it was the Law, not the gospel, which was given for this purpose (1 Tim 1:8).

Jubilee Institutions

The term 'Jubilee Institutions' is used here as shorthand for those parts of the Old Testament law which are concerned with the structure and behavioural rules of social institutions. As argued elsewhere,¹⁰ it is not necessary to divide the Law into passages which relate to moral, civil and ceremonial norms, such as the Sabbath law (see Figure 5). So here we are concerned exclusively with those aspects of all laws which deal with social institutions. These were God's word to Israel on how to organise its political, economic and social life.

¹⁰ Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, op. cit., 27-31.

Figure 5



This still leaves unanswered a number of objections to using the Law for social policy. Many point to the statements in the New Testament which suggest that the Law no longer has any role in the life of the Christian. Christ is the end of the Law (Rom. 10:4), and Christians are no longer under law but under grace. However, Paul also argues that 'the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good' (Rom. 7:12), and the work of the Spirit is so that 'the just commandment of the law might be fulfilled in us' (Rom. 8:4). The resolution of the apparent paradox in Paul's statement about the law lies in asking the question: what do you want to use the law for? If the law is to be used to make a ladder of good works by which to reach heaven, Christ should indeed be seen as the end of the law. But if the law is to be used to define what God wants (1 John 3:4), and to limit evil in society, then it has a continuing role. Paul sums it up like this: 'The law is good if it is used as it should be used, not for the just but for the unjust. . .' (1 Tim. 1:8). God intends the law to be used in lawless society.

A further argument against using the law is that it is given to God's chosen people. God's people in the New Testament, it is argued, are the church, so that we should apply the law not to the world, but to the church. In practice, Christians do not follow this hermeneutic. The Ten Commandments, given specifically to Israel after the Exodus, are applied by many Christians as personal behavioural norms to all men. Sider, in his book on world hunger, repeatedly applied Old Testament passages

on social justice given to Israel to nations in the twentieth century.¹¹ We have argued elsewhere that Israel is not just a model for the church, but a model for society as well.¹² The Law is intended partly to teach God's people about their relationship with him, but at the same time God uses it to show how he wants societies of fallen men to be structured.

Some are concerned at the cultural and technological gap between the Old Testament and the twentieth century so they fear that to apply the civil aspects of the Law would be harsh and anachronistic. They point to the statements of the Theonomists to reintroduce the death penalty for homosexuality as an example.¹³ However, to want to use the Law does not require literalistic interpretation. The intention of the Law must be sought by asking the question: what evil was this law trying to avoid or what good was it trying to promote? In addition, Jesus required the principle of love should be applied to all interpretation of the Law as the primary underlying hermeneutic (Matt. 22:37-40). However, the opposite danger is that we do not want to use the Law because we want to absolutise contemporary culture. Instead of seeing kinship and community as normative for all societies, we want to regard Western individualism or the nuclear family as normative because they are 'modern'. To take God's word seriously may require major rethinking of how we believe society should be organised.

Perhaps the most complex part of applying the Old Testament Law in the New (Christian) Age is deciding at what points it has to be modified by the coming of Christ. Clearly, the New Testament teaches that the ceremonial law - that dimension of all laws which dealt with the exclusivity of Israel and with the institutional aspects of Man's approach to God - has been fulfilled and superseded by the coming of Christ. So food and sacrificial laws, and institutions such as Temple and Levites, are all given new content under the New Covenant. The family of the church, and allegiance to Christ himself, has to take precedence over human family and kingship loyalties (Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:34-39). Singleness is now a blessing, not a disgrace (Matt. 19:10-12). But the family continues to be the primary human institution, and to involve considerable responsibilities for the Christian (Mark 7:9-13); 1 Tim. 5:3-8; etc.). Christians have to live in the New Age, but at the same time in the Old Age, until Christ returns or they die. Although loyalties of the New Age take precedence, those of the Old Age still matter. The issues of social policy being discussed in this paper are those of a Christian's responsibility in the Old Age.

So what are the Jubilee Institutions and the norms from the Law which should govern their structure and behaviour? Compared with the material available for study for either Creation ethics or Kingdom ethics, the Old Testament Law, history and prophets contain a vast storehouse of teachings on issues of political economy. The key institutions, as we understand them, are the state (within restricted bounds), the family (in extended form), and the local community governed by elders. Each of these finds some form of endorsement in the New Testament (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 22; Mark 7:9-13; 1 Tim. 5:3-8; etc.). The detailed norms governing each of these institutions in their Old Testament context are still largely unexplored by Evangelical Christians. For example, there is no theologically conservative book in print (that we are aware of) on the Old Testament concept of 'Family' 'State' or 'Community'.

So there is much work to be done. We have made a small beginning in our book on the Extended Family,¹⁴ and it is the purpose of the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge to pursue this area of study. It is

11 Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1977.

12 Michael Schluter, 'Can Israel's Law and Historical Experience be Applied to Britain Today?', Cambridge, June 1984.

13 Two of the chief books of the Theonomist School are:

Greg Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, The Craig Press, New Jersey, 1979.

Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973.

14 Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, *op. cit.*

the author's view that when this has been completed, a system or pattern of political and economic institutions and norms will emerge as an alternative to both Marxism and Capitalism. As it is centred on relationships, love being its foundational principle (Matt. 22:34-40), those who follow this paradigm might be termed 'Relationists', as opposed to the 'Materialists' who endorse Capitalism, Marxism or Socialism.

V. Summary and Conclusions

If Christians want to address issues of social policy, the main concern needs to be with just one aspect of social ethics. This aspect is termed in this paper 'institutional norms'. These norms need to be seen holistically, not as isolated from one another, in order to provide a framework for interpretation of individual laws. The term 'paradigm' is helpful as it emphasises the transferability of the norms as well as their inter-relationships with one another. Biblical norms describe what society should be like, not in a static sense at one moment of time, but in the dynamic sense of providing guidelines within which society may develop and change. Like the banks of a river, they keep the flow of movement within bounds.

Two key interrelated factors are important in developing a Christian paradigm as the basis for political action from biblical teaching. The first is the source of authority for Christian political involvement, and the second is where in scripture it is appropriate to look for this paradigm. We believe kingdom ethics is right in insisting that authority for political action must depend on the rule of Christ, but does not distinguish carefully enough between Christ's authority over unbelieving society and his acknowledged rule or Kingdom in the hearts of believers. Creation ethics has been right to insist that the hardness of men's hearts must be taken into account in defining institutional norms, as unregenerate men are necessarily involved in their implementation, but has not gone far enough in using the Old Testament material available, nor has given sufficient weight to the centrality of Christ's authority over the unbelieving world.

Jubilee institutional norms are those described in the Old Testament Law, but interpreted in the light of the changes that have come in Christ. The authority to implement Jubilee norms in society today derives from Christ's authority over all men, and over all aspects of their affairs. These norms are not to be spread by the sword; rather, Christians are to communicate them by word and by example (Matt. 5:19). As the world is confronted with the challenge of Christ's rule through his word over every part of their lives, some will turn to Christ and enter into his Kingdom. So Jesus promises that those who teach and obey the Law will be great in the Kingdom (Matt. 5:19).

The great advantage of this understanding of biblical teaching on social ethics is that it unlocks a huge storehouse of new material for study. Little is heard in churches today of great books like Deuteronomy, because Christians can find no framework for their application. The same is true for much of the Old Testament. Using the law as God's paradigm for the social order gives it immediate relevance, and provides Christians with a wealth of material to define structures and goals for political and social action today.

However, even if Christians were to agree on this paradigm and on specific principles or goals, there would still be room for them to disagree legitimately on social policy. They might differ on priorities - which reforms should be carried out first. Even biblical reformers like Josiah, Hezekiah and Nehemiah had to decide what should be given priority as they could not re-establish all aspects of the Law's demands at once. There may also be differences in the timescale to be adopted - how radical the political programme should be.

There might also be differences in the calculation of the likely social and economic consequences of pursuing a particular policy. However, a much higher degree of consensus would be established among Christians today if we could all agree on the goals of social policy, even if we cannot agree on the methods or policies to achieve those goals. We believe it is in Jubilee institutional norms that these goals can be found.

Appendix A

List of Some Important Creation Ethics and How They are Used for Social Policy Today

1. *The dignity of man* can be derived from the descriptions of Man as being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26). From this it can be argued that it is wrong ever to degrade Man through murder, manipulation or torture (Gen. 4:10). The 'pure' Capitalist attitude to labour treating men merely as a factor of production, or the Marxist reduction of Man into purely materialistic categories, can both be criticised on the basis of this truth.
2. *The work ethic*. Because it was clearly God's intention that men should work, and because Man is given a mandate to subdue the earth (Gen. 2:15), the Protestant ethic of hard work and savings to develop the world's resources is defended as biblical. This can be used to provide a critique of Marx's idealised society where he imagines no more than two hours of work a day would be necessary, and also to defend the view that development is inevitable, against supporters of the zero-growth thesis.
3. *Scientific enquiry* is legitimised by God's command to Adam to classify the animals by giving them names (Gen. 2:20). Popper, amongst others, has defended the thesis that all scientific enquiry can be summed up as an attempt to reclassify data.
4. The primacy of the nuclear family, *vis-a-vis* the extended family, is discussed in the first three chapters of Genesis (Gen. 2:24; 3:16). This provides the basis for a critique of certain social systems where the son lives with his parents after marriage, so that the parent-child relationship dominates within the family. It can also be used to defend the thesis that it is the family rather than the commune which should be used as the basic unit for society.
5. *Capital punishment* for murder is laid down, as a corollary of the fact that Man is made in God's image (Gen. 9:6).
6. *National identity*. God did not allow Man to continue in unity as a race but intends a plurality of human groups as a means of limiting the degree of human rebellion achievable through technological development (Gen. 11:9). On the basis of creation ethics, it is possible to argue that God does not intend national identity to be sacrificed in favour of some 'world government'. Such a government would only serve to accelerate and magnify the extent of Man's evil.
7. *Private property*. The command not to steal recognises implicitly a person's legitimate right to certain property (Ex. 20:15). Here creation ethics takes issue with the Anarchists, and also with the Marxists: the former emphasise communal property and the latter state property. It was an anarchist, Proudhon, who provided the antithesis of the biblical commandment when he made his famous statement, 'All property is theft'. (In some other respects, however, Anarchism is perhaps closest of all ideologies to a biblical position.)
8. *Rest day*. The need for one day in seven to be a day of rest is derived from God's own pattern of work (Gen. 22-3). No major ideology seems to have disputed that this is correct, although experiments in France and Russia tried unsuccessfully to develop an alternative work pattern.
9. *Respect for parents* is another principle in the Ten Commandments. (Ex. 20:12) This principle provides the basis for a critique of the structure of contemporary Western society, where social and economic forces have combined to make such filial respect a relatively rare phenomenon. Such a critique can take the form either of a simple denunciation of younger people as morally lax, or a more far-reaching questioning of the whole system which has brought about such a breakdown of respect for parents.

10. *A man should not exploit his neighbour.* The law expressly forbids at three points the charging of interest, twice in the context of loans to people, in situations of poverty and once in general terms for all situations, (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:19). This is regarded not as a ban on all interest, but as a ban on excessive interest. Those following the creation ethics approach argue that in a primitive agrarian society excessive interest was charged on loans, and this became a form of exploitation of the poor. So the universal moral principle has nothing to do With the use of money, but is concerned only to limit exploitation. (However, why interest should be permitted on loans to foreigners, who generally in the law receive more rather than less protection, is not clear from such exegesis.)
11. *Human and material property must be treated as qualitatively separate in human judicial procedure.* Wright argues that this is a principle throughout the criminal law of Israel, which combines both 'moral' and 'civil' aspects of the law.¹⁵
12. *Compassion in economic dealings should be built into the economic system.* Wright derives this principle from the Jubilee legislation, and throws out a challenge to Christian economists to develop a system embodying such a principle.

Appendix B

List of Some Kingdom Ethics and How They are Used for Social Policy Today

1. *Non-violence.* This principle is derived mainly from what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:39). It is also supported by Jesus' refusal to take the military option in the Wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:8-10), and refusal again to take this option in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:53-54). This has been a special emphasis in the writing of Yoder, a Mennonite.¹⁶
2. *Concern for the poor.* This emphasis is found repeatedly in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5:39; Luke 4, etc.). It obviously has relevance in formulating economic priorities and social goals in contemporary societies. However, there is no basis for deciding if it should be the state of some other institution which should provide the help.
3. *Deliverance from oppression.* Those advocating kingdom ethics do not want to differentiate between spiritual and physical oppression, for they see both as different sides of the same coin. Christ is Lord of the body as well as of the soul. So often they interpret Jesus' teaching on deliverance from oppression as applicable equally to political and social liberation as to spiritual release (see Luke 4:18). This has become a major theme of those arguing for Liberation Theology.
4. *Non-racial society.* On the basis of Paul's statement that in Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Eph. 2:14), advocates of the kingdom ethics approach argue that Christians should seek to see a non-racial society With no social discrimination of any kind, for such a society is Christ's intention.
5. *The security of family life.* The emphasis on family life in the teaching of the early church is used to highlight this as the norm for social structures. Yoder points out that there is some kind of standard liturgy discernible in the repetition of the form Christian family relationship should take (see Col. 3:18; 4:1; Eph. 2:21-6:9; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7). To motivate women, children and slaves to subordinate themselves Within the family authority structure, the apostles rely on 'typical' example.
6. *Redistribution of wealth.* Yoder again, sees the Jubilee as a vital part of the Christian programme of economic action.¹⁷ He argues that Jesus was not referring only to the spiritual dimension. When he says he has come to declare the year of Jubilee (Luke 4:18), Yoder points

¹⁵ Christopher J. H. Wright, op. cit.

¹⁶ J. H. Yoder, op. cit.

¹⁷ J. H. Yoder, *ibid.*

to a number of Jesus' sayings which suggest that he intended his disciples to take radical economic action in cancelling debts (e.g. the Lord's Prayer) and lending without expecting repayment (e.g. Matt. 5:42). These are precisely, he argues, the ideas contained in the Jubilee which emphasise debts being remitted and people being restored their former economic position and freedom.