Jaded No More: Renewing Moral Idealism in Nation-Building and Global Affairs

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ROBERT OSBURN*

INTRODUCTION

French philosopher Chantal Delsol’s *Icarus Fallen: The Search for Meaning in an Uncertain World*¹ suggests that the Greek mythological story of Icarus is a parable of postmodern life. Icarus’ father makes a pair of waxen wings that facilitate his escape from a labyrinthine prison, but in the process he flies too close to the sun and his wax wings melt. He falls back into the labyrinth, victim of his own freedom.

Delsol sees in this an apt description of the jaded, cynical state of postmodernists who first escaped the clutches of what they thought were the imprisoning confines of Christianity (from which Westerners had always derived the meaning of their existence),² and then made an idol of modernity and 20th century ideologies like communism and fascism. Modern man reaped a whirlwind of death, environmental destruction, existential alienation, racism, and inequality, and thus were melted the wax wings that transformed optimistic moderns into pessimistic postmodernists.

Is there hope, first for postmodernists as people and then for society as it sloshes around in the postmodern broth? Modernism, arguably the bastard child of orthodox Christianity, has profoundly failed, and religious alternatives, such as Islam, show little promise of renewing society in view of Middle East chaos and the violence of radical Jihadist Islam. The way forward may be the way back, that is, to re-visit the resources of orthodox

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Christianity, in particular its currently most energetic wing—evangelicalism—as a genuine force for social renewal, nationally and internationally.

The question I will try to answer in this essay is: "Are evangelicals capable of renewing a positive vision for nation-building in an era of extreme cynicism?" His wings melted, Icarus has collapsed back to his labyrinthine prison, defeated and demoralized. The question is not whether he needs new wings to fly, but whether anyone can come along and free him without re-inducing the hubris of a modernity that promised far more than it could deliver. I propose that evangelicals represent an untapped, albeit untested resource for renewal, but that evangelical engagement most certainly will require a shift in the reigning foreign policy paradigm from realism to some form of idealism.

The essay begins by identifying challenges to the thesis, followed by a larger exploration of the assumptions behind the current suspicion over global engagement. The positive argument for evangelicals as agents of national and international renewal is built on the theological touchstones of evangelical theology. Serious deficits within evangelicalism are not ignored, even as structural proposals are offered to mobilize evangelicals for the slow, grinding process of social renewal.

**SITUATING MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY**

Delsol wrote at the beginning of the 21st century that "our contemporary cannot imagine for what cause he would sacrifice his life because he does not know what his life means."3 Reviewing Delsol's book in the February 2005 *Policy Review*, Claire Berlinski summarizes Delsol's view of our predicament in this post-ideological, postmodern era: "Lacking any sense of purpose. . . [we] enshroud[...] [ourselves] in technological and physical comfort, leading a life that is at once free of risk and mediocre. . ."4

A century ago, when Icarus put on the waxen wings of modernity, the popular mood could not have been more different. Keen intellectuals such as Sigmund Freud and John Dewey expected a bright future for the 20th century, one based on science, reason, and ideology. Freud located human motivation in the subconscious—far from God—and thus malleable to improvement through psychotherapy. Dewey sought to create a new faith based on pragmatic reasoning and science rather than divine revelation.5 These new shapers of Western culture, often found in our colleges and universities where their secularizing efforts were more often intentional

3. Delsol *supra* note 1 at 3.
5. JOHN DEWEY, A COMMON FAITH (Yale Univ. Press 1934).
than realized, were ready to fly out of the Christian labyrinth and shape a
new age of rationality, progress, and enlightenment. Religious Americans responded in two very distinct ways. Fundamentalists, as they became known, retreated from public life when it became apparent that this notion of science as a substitute for God had triumphed. These predecessors to today's evangelicals embraced the Enlightenment distinction between the public and the private, between reason and faith because it provided a refuge for faith, much as it did for Kant more than a century earlier. Of course, this meant that fundamentalists retreated from the broader culture, thus losing their ability and authority to speak to society. This was the exact opposite of their spiritual ancestors, the Puritans, whose message deeply imprinted American culture from its founding.

Theistic modernists, on the other hand, embraced the results of science and a human-centered philosophy, and eventually came to form the backbone of what has become known as Mainline Protestantism. Their heady embrace of culture and science resulted in a gradual evisceration of their religion and their final denouement as one species of modern democratic liberalism. Ever since modernity's waxen wings melted, mainline Protestants have lost cultural influence, prestige, and relevance, as well as their members. For very separate reasons, American society has looked in vain since the 1960s for its historically religious heritage to offer any guidance with respect to social renewal (though, as we will see, this may well be changing).

Just prior to this religious realignment process, the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) was launched. This movement was led by John Mott and colleagues, whose spiritual fires were set ablaze in 1886 by Dwight Moody's explicitly evangelical sermons. As a result of SVM, within the 25 years between 1890 and 1915, the number of Protestant missionaries increased by 1000%. This was a time when there was "confidence about the role of America in world history, belief in the superiority of Western

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culture, and religious enthusiasm (was) on the increase.” Many truly believed that the 20th century would be the “Christian Century,” thus the magazine by that name.

Those days are long gone. There are no more great dreams, in part because of the debilitating effects of two world wars and a 40-year “cold war.” Udo Middelmann, a Swiss-based thinker who has worked for over 40 years among young intellectuals, wrote that today “few actually commit to anything more global than building toilets in third-world countries on two-week mission trips and caring for the rain forest through donations.” The absence of modern hubris is surely a good thing, but the lack of a larger vision that makes sense of redemptive projects is a far cry from the robust spirit of SVM and late 19th/early 20th century movements like it.

While vision has shrunk, a jaded cynicism has exploded. Denis Haack quotes Kristin of Peoria, AZ, who wrote to him with her concerns about the church (a common theme of many complaints). “I have long struggled with, on the one hand, a desire to be civic-minded and culturally engaged and, on the other hand, cynicism and despair over the world we live in and the direction we seem to be headed in collectively and individually.” This cynicism fairly drips from the pages of most campus papers and is for a common theme in the new media (such as the internet). Postmodernity is the era of shriveled dreams and muddling through. The despair is quiet, but palpable.

**SUSPICION AND CYNICISM OVER GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT**

The intellectual underpinnings of the current despair are two-fold. First, there is the political philosophy known as realpolitik that teaches that all relationships between nation-states are premised upon the self interests of nations and their leaders. Second, postmodernism, at least as a worldview, assumes that all reform efforts, particularly those grounded in metanarratives, or grand stories of the world, are riven through and through with the desire for dominance, control, and power. In the postmodern perspective, all claims are to be held in suspicion. Taken together these two ingredients provide a recipe for, at best, reluctance, endless word-games, and ineffectiveness, and, at worst, a steely-eyed, dripping cynicism.

That is not to say that realpolitik and postmodern thought are without value. While realpolitik may have great descriptive value, though, it largely fails to offer normative, or prescriptive, guidance on how nations should relate to one another. Furthermore, history teaches that many laudable, idealistic efforts have become victims of unintended consequences in spite of best intentions. This is roughly the state of things with respect to U.S. involvement in Iraq. I do not doubt the best intentions of most U.S. policymakers, nor do I believe there was a policy of deliberate deception; nevertheless, noble intentions are not enough in a fallen world. Best intentions regularly go awry, thus a caution to the moral idealist.

One very important value in this postmodern thought is its capacity for humility, as opposed to the almost self-evident hubris of modernity. This willingness to listen to international partners, to seek local wisdom (which often carries a kind of contextual superiority to the one-size-fits-all mentality of the policymaker), and otherwise recognize the limitations of one’s knowledge is a distinctive and positive contribution. Nonetheless, the suspicion and cynicism associated with postmodern realpolitik paralyzes proactive action in many spheres, especially in the matter of international affairs, whether Darfur, Rwanda, or Iraq.

The operative theory that thrives on this combination of postmodernism and realpolitik is neocolonialism, which in development circles goes by the phrase “dependency theory.” This theory teaches that the West decolonized Africa and the rest of the world in name only. The West now engages in a “colonialism of the mind,” by which enslaving ideologies, most notably democratic capitalism, reinforce the colonial masters’ power. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are an example of this conspiracy to make slaves of developing nations by loaning them into unimaginable debt. In some countries this debt nearly approaches the GNP.¹⁸

I see far more conspiracy theorists than conspiracies. These accusations of neo-colonialism thrive in society’s underbelly, however, because of the lack of a free press and responsive political leadership. In the West they live in the higher education institutions because neo-Marxists haunt these halls, and such ideas serve as an outlet for the guilt of relatively rich, Western young men and women searching for this-worldly redemption.

Pre-eminent among such academics is the famous MIT linguist, Noam

Chomsky. In “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” he wrote: “Perhaps the most threatening document of our time is the U.S. National Security strategy of September 2002. Its implementation in Iraq has already taken countless lives and shaken the international system to its core.” In essay after essay and book after book, Chomsky’s message is unchanged: “The West, in particular the U.S., is out to conquer the world, and subject it.”

The late Columbia University literary critic Edward Said had a similar influence. Particularly, through his monumentally significant work Orientalism he argued that one tool of Western domination was the ability to name the part of the world we know as “the Middle East.” Like Chomsky’s, his work has been mined by postmodernists looking for confirmation of their deepest suspicions.

Every positive claim is subject to a brooding skepticism, which, in a sense, is what academics should do, but the tragedy is that there is now no way out of the skeptics’ cul-de-sac. Having rejected revelation, Icarus flew away from what seemed to him the imprisoning Christian world-view, only to have made an idol of human reason. Thus, he crashed back to earth, his prison. This time his prison wardens are not priests and ministers, but the academics whom he has come to honor and adore.

One sees the impact of this impotent despair in the life of the Midwestern-born Unabomber, David Kaczynski. Alston Chase, former chair of the philosophy department at Macalester College, asserted, in the June 2000 Atlantic Monthly cover story, that the culture, environment, and ideas at America’s leading university helped to produce one of America’s deadliest and most terrifying criminals. Summarizing, he wrote: “Despite their historically unprecedented affluence, many middle-class Americans, particularly the educated elite, are still gripped by despair. The education system continues to promote bleak visions of the future.”

Another illustration of neocolonial theory, itself a product of postmodern realpolitik, is found in popular literature, where the imagination is shaped by these powerful narratives. Barbara Kingsolver’s The Poisonwood Bible asserts that instead of states projecting their power, the problem is missionaries. This book, though fictional, perfectly illustrates my point. The title speaks for itself. The Southern Baptist missionary father in 1960 Congo is a dangerous man bent solely on clubbing innocent Africans with the Bible. Just as damningly, he is subtly complicit with the CIA to overthrow the legitimately elected communist, Patrice Lumumba.

Near the end of the book, speaking with the regretful voice of one of

the missionary's daughters who was raised in Congo, but gave up her childhood faith in Jesus to instead become a public health worker, Kingsolver wrote: "In the service of saving Africa's babies and extracting its mineral soul, the West has built a path to its own door and thrown it wide for the plague." A few sentences later she wrote: "My colleagues accuse me of cynicism, but I am simply a victim of poetry." Finally, amidst the last few paragraphs of the book, Kingsolver concluded: "Illusions mistaken for truth are the pavement under our feet. They are what we call civilization." Missionaries made Africa worse. They conspired to open the door to a West filled with conniving missionaries, dangerous viruses, and rapacious merchants.

Because most of us generate counterexamples quickly, let me address the most obvious one: If there is so much postmodern cynicism about global involvement, what about counterexamples such as the tremendous response to the recent Indian Ocean tsunami? Suspicion and cynicism, fortunately, were not to be seen. Why? That multiple nations and their people suffered made political interest a less overt factor. Also, postmodernists, while suspicious of institutions and grand designs, actually favor causes with a human face. Short-term restorative responses are seen as much less prone to power interests than are long-term projects, whether military, political, or cultural. Food and water are inherent human needs, while a missionary's Bible is the projection of power.

**MORAL IDEALISM AND THE EVANGELICAL ALTERNATIVE**

An alternative political vision to *realpolitik* has been articulated by several thinkers, in particular David Lumsdaine. Morality, says Lumsdaine, really does matter in the relations between nation-states. In seeking to understand what he calls the "foreign aid regime" of 1949-89, which were the critical formative years for foreign aid, he writes that "cooperation stems not just from incentives but from underlying attitudes and values." His book is a complete argument showing that more than *realpolitik* can shape international relations, and that moral idealism is still alive and well. Other scholars, such as Douglas Johnston, have pursued the implications of moral idealism in international relations as well.

Why should we defy the cynics, profoundly suspicious of all

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22. *Id.* at 530.
23. *Id.* at 532.
25. *Id.* at 29.
metanarratives, and press the call for moral idealism and nation-building in the 21st century? After all, the 20th century is a historical monument to grand experiments that failed, and we have no good reason to think that any grand experiments attempted in the 21st century will be any different. Global inequality, whether political, economic, medical, or educational, in reality or in its appearance, is increasing, and cries out for solutions. We are damned if we don’t and doomed if we try.

Moral idealism is a far less tested approach to international relations, and there are few if any traditional institutions committed to this approach. Assuming Kantian language, is this idealism a “categorical moral imperative” in a world with such crushing poverty and injustice? Is there any group or institution in American society that is prepared to offer a vision for renewing nations with moral idealism as its’ roots? I propose that evangelical Christians are a potent source for renewal in international affairs and nation-building. Columnist Nicholas Kristof has penned a number of New York Times columns where he asserts just this, that conservative Christians have much more to offer in terms of humanitarian responses than is usually acknowledged.27

This assertion, tendentious as it may seem, raises a number of methodological and substantive problems. Methodologically, some may begin by asking whether it’s possible or whether it’s a good thing to pursue nation-building. The question gains validity because of decreasing faith in the Enlightenment project of establishing nation-states.28

A second problem concerns the term “nation-building.” We hear the term with modern ears. Since the rise of the modern era, it has referred to the establishment of bureaucracies with the political, economic, military, and judicial structures that enable nation-states to function. I want to consider nation-building in a different light. Real nation-building involves a concern for establishing the cultural preconditions that foster the development of political, economic, military and judicial structures aimed at empowering the citizens of a given nation-state.

A third problem concerns the existing backdrop of the unfinished war in Iraq. For many, the war demonstrates that neo-conservatives hold a modern vision, and want to imperialistically impose their values on the rest of the world. This unremitting hostility to neo-conservatives reflects deep postmodern suspicion of the modern project, and a disdain for ideologies of any kind.

There are a number of substantive concerns about the ability of evangelicals to successfully engage in nation building in an international

arena, and many of them are serious. At first blush, evangelical Christians seem like the last group that would be expected to help restore moral idealism and a vision for nation-building. They have spent an entire century on the sidelines of what became a very naked public square. Historically, they have had a rather shallow reserve, only now beginning to fill, of thoughtful academics prepared to engage these issues. This is beginning to change, however. Since the 1980s, evangelicals have begun to move from the sidelines to the center of the political stage. Whether or not one agrees with their positions or strategies, they are becoming increasingly sophisticated players. Only now are evangelicals beginning to mount a significant effort in the academy, though there, too, they are positioned to develop well-honed arguments and research projects. Scholars such as Jean Bethke Elshtain and Wilfred McClay offer bright hope for evangelical academic initiatives.

The last and strongest argument against evangelical involvement in nation-building is that Christianity is thought to be responsible for much of the violence on the planet, providing much of its motive, purpose, and mechanism. The argument usually has two parts when applied as a broader critique of religion, but it is the second part that has particular salience for evangelicals. The first part is the pragmatic argument, namely, that “not all Christians are violent...but given the right circumstances, those who espouse Christian peace will expose their claws and reveal their true nature.”

The second is the inherency argument, which “examines the philosophical, theological, and doctrinal elements of Christianity that either support or are characteristic of violence.” The reason that this is a particular problem for evangelicals is that much of the inherency argument revolves around the notion that an “exclusive” salvation (i.e., Jesus Christ is

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33. Laura Spelman, Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics, University of Chicago.
34. SunTrust Bank Chair of Excellence in Humanities, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.
37. Id. at 11.
the only way of salvation) and associated ideas of divine punishment lead to temporal punishment. The belief is that evangelicalism is inherently violent first because it holds a dualistic view of humans as either believers or unbelievers, and second because it legitimizes explicit violence on the basis of this exclusionary thinking. Evangelicals who proselytize, so goes the argument, are the worst offenders, and thus inherently violent (though many restrain these innate impulses). Mark Noll portrays this position as: “Whenever Christians have obtained power, they have transformed the conviction of their own spiritual superiority into attacks, acts, structures, and persistent patterns of violent aggression.”

Sociology recapitulates theology.

Unfortunately for my thesis, some of evangelicalism’s most respected predecessors, such as the Reformers and the Puritans, occasionally engaged in acts of violence, some of which were associated with exclusionary thinking. The 40 Years War, the treatment of American Indians by Puritans, and the complicity of southern U.S. evangelicals in slavery are a few examples of this. Others point to evangelical theonomist R.J. Rushdoony, whose theology calls for the reinstatement of violent methods of punishment utilized in the Old Testament, and whose goal appears to be the establishment of a theocracy in the United States. Even if modern evangelicals are not tagged with responsibility for these historical episodes, their insistence on proselytizing suggests to some that they are intolerant of other faiths, and therefore unreliable and threatening partners in any effort to build just, flourishing, pluralistic societies.

Noll, who as a historian admits to being pained by the evidence of Puritan brutality, carefully challenges the inherency argument by creating a balance sheet, and asking whether Christians have done more good than harm. Much of the violence done ostensibly in the name of Christianity has been the product of particular historical or cultural realities in which members of other religions would conceivably have been just as or more violent had they been in these settings at those times. In fact, he notes that the historical evidence shows that other religions and philosophies, particularly those that have been anti-Christian, have been much more violent. He cites the record of the Marxists and the fascists, at whose hands 115 million human souls were sacrificed for utopian ideologies. His third

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39. Id. at 81–83.
and strongest argument in favor of Christianity doing more good than harm
is that "without the legacy of Christianity, the West would never have
possessed the trajectory of moral critique that could lead to an indictment of
Christianity for its moral failings."\textsuperscript{42} He quotes the African-American
clergyman Howard Thurman who said that Christian violence is a "betrayal
of the genius of that religion."\textsuperscript{43} Noll goes on to note, in a section
particularly relevant to the burden of this essay, that Christianity has
actually offered some substantial civilizational benefits that its detractors
rarely acknowledge: its general, though not unblemished record of
egalitarianism, cultural sensitivity, abolitionism, principled opposition to
state-sponsored evil, and its universal literacy efforts, which often
unintentionally generated strong nationalist movements.\textsuperscript{44}

A third serious deficit, one that is endemic to evangelicalism, is its short
horizon, most notably exhibited in its immediate focus on conversion, or
"the new birth." Evangelicals are comfortable with dramatic, life-changing
conversions, one at a time, so much so that most evangelical narratives of
social transformation have been structured on the assumption that social
change comes "one soul at a time."\textsuperscript{45} Their emphasis on personal salvation
is deeply grounded not only in the revivalism of Charles Finney, but also in
a reaction against the social gospel emphasis of Walter Rauschenbush and
others at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Evangelicals rightly understand
that structural change without personal moral transformation is futile, but
fail to realize that social change does require attention to social structures,
whether laws, leadership, or institutions.

Evangelicals have some real and genuine assets, however, in nation-
building. First, they are well-suited to provide leadership in global
government, because, as noted earlier, they have a historical legacy of
promoting social reform, whether it be the abolitionist movement, education
for women, political empowerment in the face of monarchies, or medical
care for the indigent. Secondly, evangelicals are a relatively fast-growing
movement marked by tremendous entrepreneurial energy, some of it
dedicated to creative social reform efforts. While these efforts may be
poorly coordinated, the energy and the will is there. Thirdly, the inherently
populist nature of evangelicalism is very consonant with and supportive of
nation-building efforts which highlight democratic participation. Finally,
evangelicals are finding their political voice, and rapidly so, thanks in part
to the nurture and guidance of Roman Catholic friends who have a well-
developed social philosophy.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Noll \textit{supra} note 38, at 85.
\item \textsuperscript{43} \textit{Id.} at 86.
\item \textsuperscript{44} \textit{Id.} at 87–90.
\item \textsuperscript{45} BILL BRIGHT, \textit{COME HELP CHANGE THE WORLD} (Fleming Revell 1970).
\item \textsuperscript{46} \textit{E.g.}, Michael Novak and Richard John Neuhaus.
\end{itemize}
Many are surprised to know that for the first 200 years of the Protestant Reformation, Protestant Christians were much less concerned about foreign missions than were Roman Catholics. Rather, Protestants were deeply engaged with shaping societies. The 17th century bloodless British revolution and the bloodier American revolution of the 18th century were both preceded and followed by great intellectual energy devoted to shaping societies around principles derived from the Protestant Reformation. Jonathan Witherspoon, for example, was a well-known Scottish Presbyterian pastor invited in the 1760s to assume the presidency of what we now know as Princeton University. The generation of students under his presidency and tutelage were some of the key leaders of the American Revolution. In fact, the British singled out Witherspoon as one of the biggest causes of their trouble in the USA. 

As Judge Michael McConnell reminds us in his sterling work on America’s founding, 80% of the political pamphlets of the American Revolution were sermons.

Only in the late 1700s did the idea of foreign missions arise. William Carey, who left England in 1791 for India, is often considered the father of modern missions. He described his mission as primarily about translating the Bible into local languages, establishing a college, opening up education for women, and bringing an end to the practice of sati (widow-burning). With the exception of the Biblical aspect of his missions, he sounds more like a social reformer than a missionary.

Fast forward to the early 20th century, and we find that in the wake of the split between fundamentalists and modernists, missions increasingly took precedence over cultural engagement among fundamentalists, while modernists concentrated only on social reform. By the early 20th century, evangelical energy was solely concentrated in missions to “save souls” and not in saving societies. To return to Delsol’s image of Icarus, liberals took flight, with the waxen wings of modernity, from the labyrinth of historic Christianity, while fundamentalists (today’s evangelicals) stayed wingless and witnessed to other souls trapped in the labyrinth. However, as we showed earlier, liberals’ waxen wings melted because they made an idol of modernity, and Icarus crashed back to the labyrinth, deeply frustrated, cynical and jaded. They are deeply suspicious of all ideologies and comprehensive answers, including those of evangelicals.

The historic evangelical heritage in nation-building, significant as it is, must be grounded theologically in order for nation-building to gain

47. ALAN CRIPPEN II, JOHN WITHERSPOON: A MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (Family Research Council 2004).
significant traction among its adherents. There are four theological themes that they can readily mine in pursuit of moral idealism in nation-building: hope, sin, common grace, and the cross.

**Theology of Hope**

The theology of hope, for which German theologian Jürgen Moltmann is best known, is no pie-in-the-sky, Pollyanna-ish theology. The Scripture carries the inescapable message that God wills the renewal of His creation and that His followers must be engaged with the project. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” reads Romans 8:19. The passage is about the brokenness of the created order, which awaits the hero’s arrival to save the day. One of the final verses of the New Testament explicitly describes an immensely hopeful scenario, grounded in the return of Jesus Christ, in which nations will be healed and sin, sorrow, and injustice will be vanquished. As the chair of the political science department at the University of Oklahoma wrote, “hope... looks to the future where infinite possibilities are realized and which would otherwise be a realm of terror if not under the providence of God.”

Michael Novak’s recent book *The Universal Hunger for Liberty*, is deeply rooted in this theology of hope. As a Roman Catholic social philosopher who may be the neo-conservative’s theologian of choice, he has been criticized for his optimistic view of the prospects for democratic capitalism around the world. For example, he envisions a day when civilizations will be “connected by friendship” instead of clashing with each other.

This Christian version of hope, which is centrally grounded in hope for the return of Jesus Christ to “set the world to rights,” gently contrasts with Delsol’s version, which, for her, is realistically and rightly contrasted with utopianism. Delsol’s hope allows “what is most desirable in humanity to flourish, without however denying the reality of our condition.” It is this reality that delicately balances the Christian theological vision when engaging in nation-building from the posture of moral idealism.

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51. Romans 8:19.
56. DELSOL, supra note 1, at 223.
Theology of Sin

The Christian nation-builder must balance a theology of hope with a theology of sin which declares that human motivation and action is profoundly riven with an active hostility or complacent inability to obey God. It therefore fails to foster human flourishing. Sin not only alienates humans from God, but it also creates a profound alienation from self, society, and even the natural environment. Sin constructs a prison, as Romans 6 makes clear, in which humans are its slaves, enslaved, like Icarus, by the very idols that they thought would liberate them. Every human being, to one degree or another, is radically selfish, self-centered, and self-deceived. This is seen in the stories of Flannery O’Connor, who brilliantly unmasks our pretensions.

The theology of sin, which is entirely lacking in other worldviews, including naturalism and Islam, is perhaps one of the great intellectual triumphs of Christianity. Understanding human sinfulness forces the Christian to construct political and economic systems that enhance human creativity and productivity but do not grow so large that they end up squelching these very same fundamental capacities. This demands the kind of “vigilance” of which Delsol writes, precisely because, in our sinfulness, we collude to enhance the welfare, prestige, and power of government at the expense of those we serve.

Likewise, a high view of human sinfulness creates a natural suspicion when someone claims God’s mantle for his or her agenda. The Apostle John warned early Christians: “Don’t believe every spirit, but test the spirits, to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Claims and commands that appeal to divine authority are immediately and rightfully suspect because, as sinners, we have a natural desire to gain power over others. This could be the real meaning of the third of the 10 Commandments (“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”). One of the primary problems in the Islamic worldview is the absence of a theology of sin. The result is that one does not question one’s own motives or those of others who claim God’s mantle for their agenda.

57. Cornelius Plantinga, Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin (Eerdmans 1995).
58. Romans 6 (the idea of Christian conversion as “freedom from slavery,” that is, freedom from an inner compulsion to violate the moral will of God).
60. Delsol, supra note 1, at ch.19.
61. 1 John 4:1.
Christian nation-builders in a cynical age need a robust theology of sin along with a revitalized theology of hope. The world is both a glass half-full and a glass half-empty. Filipino social reformer Melba Maggay calls for the simultaneous practice of "radical pessimism" and "radical hope." It is interesting that Maggay ends her book \textit{Transforming Society} on this note of hope, just as does the Indian critic Vishal Mangalwadi in \textit{Truth and Social Reform}, a work penned during his unjust imprisonment for helping poor Indians convert to Christian faith.

Novak, aware that his book, clearly written to a Muslim audience, may be seen as an over-excess in a theology of hope and in desperate need of a theology of sin, penned one chapter entitled "Economic Realism." Elsewhere, he assures his readers that Augustinian theology (the sourcebook for many of his insights) is firmly grounded in a theology of sin.

\textbf{THEOLOGY OF COMMON GRACE}

Evangelicals can also draw on the theological insight, developed by John Calvin, that God gives gifts to people, often in contexts where the grace of God is not otherwise recognized or acknowledged. Acts 17:25 captures the spirit of this notion of common grace: "He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." Michael Novak describes this phenomenon of common grace in terms of "universal human experience," and there he reflects on his Catholic natural law tradition, in which God's law can be known not only through revelation but also through universal human experience. In the introduction to his book, which is written out of a deep belief that Muslims share in God's common grace, he wrote that "in every civilization there are stories of...a golden age, as if human hearts hunger for such a time." Romans 2:14-15 emphasizes natural law: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."

Edith Schaeffer (co-founder of the Swiss-based study center L'Abri),

\begin{itemize}
\item[63.] \textit{Melba Maggay, Transforming Society} (Regnum Lynx 1994).
\item[64.] \textit{Vishal Mangalwadi, Truth and Social Reform} (Nivedit Good Books 1996).
\item[65.] \textit{Novak, supra} note 54, at 73–92.
\item[66.] \textit{Richard Mouw, He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace} (Eerdmans 2002).
\item[67.] \textit{Acts} 17:25.
\item[68.] \textit{Novak, supra} note 54, at xvi.
\item[69.] \textit{Romans} 2:14–15.
\end{itemize}
having met hundreds of wonderfully brilliant, beautiful, and oftentimes deeply humane people who were not followers of Christ, spoke of God’s “leftover beauty” in each human being. She recognized that despite original sin, there is some flicker of God’s image in every human being.70

A theology of common grace also leads to the principle of equal regard, which Christian political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain developed in a 2003 essay in Ethics and International Affairs.71 Under this principle, the political boundaries of nation-states are not sufficient to prevent a person, organization or even another nation-state from coming to the aid of those in other nation-states, precisely because they are human beings who deserve equal regard. This is the basis for the current appeal to do something about the horrible genocide among the Darfur in Sudan, an appeal made against the backdrop of the world’s inaction while 800,000 Tutsis were systematically murdered in Rwanda in 1994. If God offers His grace freely, and if humans are truly made in His image, then there is a responsibility to act on behalf of other human beings in whatever political entity they find themselves.

With a theology of common grace, evangelicals have a capacious readiness to work with those holding very different, but religiously-grounded worldviews. For one thing, they can be great allies in nation-building, especially because they share concerns for the spiritual dimension of development. One standard Islamic critique of Western societies is their excessive materialism, and on this very point evangelicals will wholeheartedly agree with their Muslim friends that development must be human, rather than merely economic.72

A theology of common grace also fosters pragmatic coalition-building. In a Winter 2005 lecture at the University of Minnesota, Christian bioethicist and theologian Nigel Cameron spoke on the need for a global ban on therapeutic cloning, only hours after arriving from a two-week UNESCO conference in Paris on this topic. The effort was joined by both feminists and environmentalists, people who often hold very different world-views from his own evangelical perspective. To gain support on this policy issue, he made pragmatic alliances with those with whom he disagreed on many other issues. Likewise, most of the successful nation-building initiatives in the 21st century will be gently led by those infused with a Christian view of reality who will publicly and pragmatically join as equals with those from very different worldviews in pursuit of a common quest to build healthy societies. This work cannot afford a doctrinaire

70. EDITH SCHAEFFER, FOREVER MUSIC (Thomas Nelson, 1986).
spirit. Along these lines, evangelicals have been engaged as members of the Save Darfur Coalition, a media-savvy effort to alert the international community to the need to pressure the Sudanese government to end the genocide in that central region of Africa.73

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The fourth theological construct that supports evangelical engagement in nation-building is a theology of the cross. Christians, say both social reformers Melba Maggay and Vishal Manglawadi, must be prepared to die rather than to kill in pursuit of Christ-oriented change.74 John 12:24 says, “I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But, if it dies, it produces many seeds.”75 Maggay says this speaks of the twin principles of solidarity and fertility: Christians will stand with others, rather than as solitary, individualistic seeds, and will reproduce themselves into many, many others, but only if they are prepared to die.

A theology of the Cross means abandoning the theology of the sword. While it is the prerogative of governments to bear the sword, Christians don’t build nations at the end of a gun.

For this reason, the theology of the cross leads to the necessary principle of ordered liberty, or the idea that public order is not imposed from without, but from within. “You, my brothers, were called to be free, but do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”76

In our postmodern age, people jump on relief bandwagons, as we saw in the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami. It’s tangible, temporary, and media-friendly. The task of nation-building, that is, the effort to establish the cultural conditions that foster the growth and development of a politics and economics that justly and peacefully promote human development, is arduous and media-averse. It is perfect territory for those who believe God has spoken through Jesus Christ, because they know they are called to the long and hard road of long-term renewal. “Love. . .always perseveres,” Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:7.77

EVANGELICALS AND THE PRACTICE OF GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

What most outsiders fail to realize is that for evangelicals to make a
positive impact on nation-building in the 21st century, they must also deal with internal institutional obstacles. The most serious is the fact that mission commissions—organized bodies within local churches that fund efforts at world evangelization—are not joined by efforts that foster international development. The old evangelical predilection for the individual soul creates a blind spot to social need. Cultural engagement needs to become as high a priority as foreign missions.

Institutionally, this means the development of cultural commissions alongside of traditional foreign mission commissions. Sociologically, authentic Christian communities will have to multiply. These Christian communities will not only be havens where jaded postmodernists find hope and a context for renewing moral idealism, but also a place where evangelicals learn to practice and develop their cultural apologetic. Such communities will be testing grounds where maximum pressure is placed on ideas and relationships, to ensure that they can sustain the heavy challenges of nation-building. Intellectually, the scandal of the evangelical mind must be replaced by robust research programs that completely reinvent the practice of making and shaping societies. Such programs will be deeply informed by Christian theological presuppositions—theologies of sin, hope, common grace, and the cross—and thus better shielded against the re-emergence of modernity’s horrific pretenses and hubris.

The one dimension that will stay the same is evangelicals’ strength in calling people to personal faith in Christ. The breach between the personal gospel and the social gospel, between cultural engagement and evangelistic missions, must be repaired. Transformed societies without transformed people are not possible, and evangelism, not contemplation and meditation, remains the best hope for cynical, suspicious postmodernists.

**EMERGING MODELS OF EVANGELICAL ENGAGEMENT IN NATION-BUILDING**

The challenge, as I have tried to show, is sustaining moral idealism in the wake of postmodern disillusionment with failed 20th century ideologies. The church, in particular its’ growing and vibrant evangelical wing, can serve as a source for renewing that vision. However, evangelicals will have to discover a Christian social philosophy, rediscover their historic heritage of nation-building, and intentionally relate common theological themes to nation-building in order to be a genuine source of renewal.

The good news is that in the past five years, four significant evangelical nation-building initiatives have sprung up:

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78. *See SCANDAL supra note 30.*
The Institute for Global Engagement\textsuperscript{79} publishes an academic journal *Faith and International Affairs*\textsuperscript{80} as a faith-based organization that "promotes sustainable environments for religious freedom worldwide" and emphasizes what it calls "relational diplomacy" in pursuit of "respectful dialogue and practical agreements."	extsuperscript{81} The organization is headed by the son of the former president of the world's largest evangelical relief and development agency, World Vision. Besides sponsoring the only journal that presents research at the intersection of religion and international affairs, the organization conducts lectures, conferences, task forces, and fellowships, all to foster "a pluralistic forum where people of different faiths and worldviews can constructively discuss religion's impact on the world today."\textsuperscript{82}

Disciple Nations Alliance (DNA)\textsuperscript{83} is the brainchild of Darrow Miller, a vice president of Food for the Hungry (a large evangelical relief and development agency),\textsuperscript{84} and Dr. Robert Moffitt, an author\textsuperscript{85} and the founder of another evangelical relief and development agency called Harvest.\textsuperscript{86} DNA aims to empower and train leaders and members of local churches around the world so that these churches can have a direct influence on their communities, and, ultimately, their nations. Their programs primarily involve short-term training conferences and workshops that are designed to train churches and their members to embrace "a biblical worldview and equip them to practice a holistic, incarnational ministry affecting all spheres of society."\textsuperscript{87}

Transform World\textsuperscript{88} is a major international initiative headed by Argentinean-born evangelical theologian Dr. Luis Bush. The organization is an international mobilization effort that seeks "the healing and blessing of the nations so that all may experience the presence, power, and peace of God."\textsuperscript{89} Programs include annual conferences in different nations around

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{81} GlobalEngage.org, About Us, http://www.globalengage.org/about/index.aspx (last visited Apr. 5, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{82} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Disciple Nations Alliance, Home Page, http://www.disciplenations.org (last visited Apr. 5, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{84} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Robert Moffitt, *If Jesus Were Mayor* (Harvest, 2004).
\item \textsuperscript{86} Harvest, Home Page, http://www.harvestfoundation.org/ (last visited Apr. 5, 2007).
\item \textsuperscript{87} Disciple Nations Alliance, About DNA, http://www.disciplenations.org/about.html (last visited Apr. 5, 2007).
\end{itemize}
the world, as well as regional consultations.

The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) is headed by Dr. Douglas Johnston.90 His two Oxford University Press books offer detailed accounts of case studies where religion has provided the means, the motive, and the morale to sustain and develop peace-making initiatives between and within nations.91 The organization, which aims to link politics and religion symbiotically in order to foster peacemaking, conducts projects in various nations of the world (e.g., Pakistan) that aim to affect both practitioners and policymakers.

At least for Americans, evangelical moral idealism, while cultivated in international, national, community-based, and scholarly platforms, begins locally and is activistic. My friend, a single mother, lives with her four adopted, foreign-born children in one of Minneapolis’ toughest neighborhoods. During the past year alone she rescued two neighborhood children from drug-infested dysfunctional home environments, protected a couple who was being abused by a neighbor, consoled a teacher whose student was the son of a gay couple splitting up as one of them was near death, counseled and assisted international scholars at a nearby university, and still raised her four daughters whom she involves in an evangelical church. From her vantage point, she wonders who will love and care for this host of vulnerable people in her fragile neighborhood. Rhetorically, she asked me, “Why doesn’t the church commission people to go and love their neighbor?”

Her 20-year commitment to live in this neighborhood is the fruit of perseverance borne out of love for neighbor, and deeply driven by her evangelical faith. What she needs is an institutional ethos within the evangelical church which provides support for her effort, while also providing an intentionally theological and historical context for her efforts. As it is, she is frustrated by being alone (with several evangelical neighbors who carry the same vision), lacking the necessary framework that would not only sustain her personal efforts, but which would also systematically reproduce her valiant efforts in other neighborhoods and nations. Nevertheless, while acknowledging these current limits, evangelicals are increasingly framing their faith in terms of making a positive difference in communities and nations. They are giving new birth to a kind of moral idealism that trumps the cynicism of postmodernists and the hubris of modernity.

91. JOHNSTON supra note 26.
CONCLUSION

Icarus’ wings were melted, and he has fallen back into what is now a labyrinth of postmodern skepticism and cynicism over any hope of making a difference in our world. The scholars of realpolitik, so very dominant in the world of political science, are no liberator, for they judge politics by the pursuit of selfish interests. Post-colonial theorists are no hope, for they focus all their energies on the negation of suspected injustice by powerful nations.

Icarus can be freed to fly again and to make a difference in the difficult and hard work of building nations, but only by a renewed moral idealism rooted in the ancient and profound truth of the Bible, truth that calls us to love our neighbor, to turn the other cheek, and to use personal freedom not for self-aggrandizement but for the common good.