

# Creation and Revolution

H. EDWARD EVERDING, JR. and DANA W. WILBANKS

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

These sermons were prepared independently in response to a request from the Worship Committee that they speak from the perspective of their particular disciplines to the issue of Christian social responsibility in today's world. In retrospect, however, the professors believe there is an internal unity in the two sermons which illustrates the relation of New Testament exegesis to an understanding of Christian responsibility in the Black Revolution. Specifically, the unity is found in the dynamic creativity and reign of God which provides the basis for human hope for the transformation of men and societies.

## PART ONE

H. EDWARD EVERDING, JR.

THE apostle Paul, as one representative voice of the early church, affirmed a degree of detachment from the world in view of his understanding that "the appointed time has grown very short; . . ." (1 Cor. 7:29). He counsels his converts not to place too much investment in the concerns of this world. ". . . from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:29-31). It is striking, however, that this understanding of world history did not lead Paul to withdraw from the concrete affairs of this life into a monastic retreat for speculating upon other worldly things. Rather, the actual world did not lose its contours in the glare of the last day. He believed that the new age must show itself in connection with and not inde-

pendently of this age's structures of existence.

For example, throughout Paul's writings there is a presupposed recognition of the order of creation as this order was ordained by God. Creation is not intrinsically orderly, but it is under orders. For example, the basic order of creation is for man to acknowledge his creatureliness. To be human involves participating in the divinely prescribed arrangement of powers: the power of Creator prescribes the limits of the power of the creature. Thus, for example, when Paul and Barnabas were hailed as Zeus and Hermes in Lystra, the apostles proclaimed:

Men, why are you doing this? We also are men, of like nature with you, and bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Acts 14:15)

Similarly in Romans 1, Paul accuses the Greeks of being concerned with vain or "futile thinking" because they "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles" (1:23). The consequences they suffered is due, says Paul, to their disregard for the basic order of creation: ". . . they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!" (1:25).

In addition to this basic order, Paul acknowledged more concrete manifestations of the divine arrangement of creation. It was evident to Paul that God ordained the distinction between Jew and Greek. Even "salvation" comes "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). It was evident to Paul that one's state or station in life (1 Cor. 7:20), for example, as a slave, was ordained or "assigned to him" (1 Cor. 7:21) by God

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through his birth. It was evident to Paul that the male was "naturally" superior to the female, for "man was not made from women, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Cor. 11:8,9).

Despite these acknowledgements, Paul believed that God as Creator had acted again. He had raised Jesus from the dead and made him his Messiah. This meant for Paul that the messianic age had begun. He designated this age as God's "new creation", a theological term borrowed from apocalyptic circles. BUT — Paul understood this term historically. The new creation was not some other wordly ideal. Rather it was the revolutionary and transforming power of God already reshuffling the present order of creation — in effect, giving to creation new orders. Although, the dim forms of this new creation could be seen already taking shape within the messianic community, these forms constituted the outline which the world would take once God completed his new creation. The outline of the new order of creation was thus seen "in Christ".

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

This historical understanding of the "new creation" did not lead Paul to inaugurate a world movement for social reform, but it did lead him to some radical decisions within the church. For the believing community in which was being expressed God's new order of creation, the social distinction of Jew and Greek were no longer in force. Concerning slavery Paul could say: "For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a free man of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ" (1 Cor. 7:21f.). Concerning male and female, Paul says that "in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman: for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of wo-

man. And all things are from God." (1 Cor. 11:11f.).

Obviously we live in a different age for which Paul's vision is, in a sense, old hat; for most of it has become secularized through woman's suffrage and the emancipation proclamation. Nevertheless, Paul's understanding of God and the world is extremely disturbing. On the one hand, his belief that the form of this world was passing away did not obviate his acknowledgement of the traditional orders of creation. On the other hand, his belief that God was working a new creation in Christ evoked a new understanding of those "natural" orders. That is, the so-called "natural" orders of creation are only "natural" insofar as God gives the order that they should be! They are not natural in the sense of being fixed according to rigid laws of nature.

Is it possible that what we consider the fixed or accepted natural order of creation today is also subject to the change of command by the Creator? Are we, perhaps, not also called to evaluate God's work in Christ in terms of its revolutionary and transforming effect upon the "American" orders of creation? Is not, in fact, the ability to sit loose with the accepted orders of creation what it means to be a human being — a creature of God? Or — have we also exchanged "the truth about God for a lie, and worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!"?

## PART TWO

### DANA W. WILBANKS

"Revolution" has become a catch-all word that may refer to anything from the proposal of one of our presidential candidates to chunk the briefcases of bureaucrats and professors into the river to the extremely rapid pace of technological change in the world today. That so many varied phenomena can be labelled "revolutionary" points to the depth and thoroughness of the contemporary revolution. Revolution in this



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