

Beyond the News

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Metaxas to Power

By Peter Eng

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Wilberforce

William Wilberforce was nominally Christian as were most people in 18th century England. At the age of 26, he met Jesus, and knew the religiosity around him was not about the true Jesus. Then as now, true faith in Jesus is always met with ridicule. And that ridicule always starts within established and secure religiosity. In the case of Jesus, it was the Pharisees and the Sadducees. In the case of Wilberforce, it was the millions of nominal Christians warming pews in England on Sundays. Too many just wanted a predictable, secure, Churchianity in the midst of flux.

Wilberforce began to see the great evil of his time: slavery. Slavery had been from hoary history. It is inconceivable that anyone would have the temerity to

challenge this institution. Or why challenge it?

There are two levels of what God expects from us in acceptable action: our actions by his design, and our actions by his concession.

By Design

It is clear from Scripture that when God made us in his image, he gave us worth based on himself. This worth is found equally in all humans because we are all made in his image. This militates against the notion that one person should own another person as property. Of course, there were those who affirm this falsehood. They argued that the black person was not really human; the same way Nazis would say Jews were not really people. But this is flimsy irrationalism which we need not pause to refute.

By Concession

The other level of our actions is not by God's design but by his concession. This means human ignorance, or wickedness, has increased to the extent that God's design would be so alien to us, we will never be able to accept it. So God exercises forbearance and lowers the bar for us so we can clear it.

This is exemplified in Jesus' teaching on divorce. He explained that God's ideal is for a life-long relationship between a husband and his wife. But the OT law permitted

divorce because of the hardness of man's heart (Matt 19:3-11). That is to say, if the law did not make provision for divorce, men will do worse things to their wives, who are generally weaker physically, and can be victimized. Divorce was not good, but it was not as bad as a prohibition to divorce with the result that men kill their wives (think of King Henry VIII).

In the case of slavery as the result of defeat in war, slavery prevented the wholesale slaughter of the vanquished. In the case of slavery by debt, it would prevent the harsher solutions, and provide for a way of redemption.

Slavery was never an ideal. It was an act of concession so worse things may not occur. But the slavery imposed on people of African origin was horrendous. They were deliberately kidnapping people to become slaves. Slavery as concession to prevent great wrong had fallen apart because it was used to create a wrong, not to prevent a greater wrong.

Slavery of Africans in Europe and America was no longer an act of divine concession. It was the deliberate rejection of people as being created in God's image. It was the systematic abuse of a defenceless people. It was naked evil. What was permitted by divine concession to preserve life became a convenient way for people to enjoy their lives better at the expense of another person's freedom. There can be no justification of this undisguised evil.

Wilberforce spent the next 26 years of his life to abolish the slave trade. This is more limited than the abolition of slavery as it only abolished the trading of slaves. But this was more achievable, so he went for it. In 1807, he finally succeeded in achieving his goal, and the Slave Trade Act of 1807 was passed. It was not perfect. It concerned only the British Empire, but the British did rule the world, so to speak. He continued to work for the emancipation of slaves, but his failing health forced him to leave political

office in 1826. But the momentum would carry the cause; and in 1833, slavery was outlawed in most of the British Empire. God granted him the grace to live to hear the reading of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. He died three days later.

We must not think Wilberforce was powerful. His fight for the emancipation of slaves was the oddball position. It was radical. It was what the Quakers asserted. It was what these extremely passionate Christians were saying. It was not the message of the comfortable masses. If we think about it for a moment, we will realize the enormity of what Wilberforce accomplished and set in motion. The naked evil of slavery by abduction was the norm. Christians easily justified a particularly evil form of slavery by using a concessionary slavery found in the Bible.

Wilberforce embraced the notion that it was time to resist this great evil, and he was specially gifted and placed to do it. What Wilberforce did changed the course of human history forever. Today, the entire world has embraced the Christian value that one person cannot own another person. This came out of a titanic struggle to abolish first the slave trade, and eventually, slavery.

Wilberforce could not act alone. He did not formulate his own value system. He had to work through a nation that would vaguely accept the precepts of the Bible, and he had to work through the most powerful nation on the earth to have effect.

Bonhoeffer

Wilberforce spoke truth to power. So did Bonhoeffer. Wilberforce succeeded. Bonhoeffer died trying. But Bonhoeffer succeeded in something equally important.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in Breslau, Germany. He was one of very few who spoke against Hitler as the nation was mesmerized by a man who turned nationalism into a great evil. Hitler would

not regard Jews as real people. He would set out to eradicate them.

Bonhoeffer was eventually killed by Hitler. But his testimony against Hitler would be the redemption of Germans and Christians alike. Even though the vast majority of Germans supported Hitler and ignored his unspeakable wickedness, there was a Christian pastor who would live and die for the truth of God in Scripture.

Bonhoeffer was also converted. He grew up in the heyday of Liberal Theology, but was convinced by Karl Barth (Neo Orthodox) that Liberalism was not true Christianity. Bonhoeffer grew beyond Barth, and paid the cost of discipleship. His life changing experience came when he went to Union Seminary (NY) in 1930. He was not satisfied with the seminary, but while in Union, he attended a black church in Harlem and saw Christianity from below. He saw the pain, the suffering, and the reality of Jesus lived out among people living in perpetual need. His view of how the Gospel should be applied to the world changed radically.

When the Nazi party came to power in Germany in 1933, he denounced Hitler, but Nazism was a tide he could not stop. He was only 27 years old, and with the Nazi tide flooding Germany, he took up a two-year appointment to serve two German speaking churches in England. In 1935, he returned to Germany to lead the seminary in Finkenwalde, which trained pastors for the Confessing Church. This group was considered fringe. It was a "sect" (as the Germans would call it), a group without legitimacy. In 1937, the Gestapo closed the seminary and arrested 27 pastors. This was a severe blow to the small Confessing Church movement.

With war imminent, Bonhoeffer who was known for his outspoken opposition against Hitler knew he was a likely candidate of the Gestapo. He went to America in 1939, but immediately regretted this action. He was convinced he had to live this hardship with

his fellow Germans, and returned to Germany. He was closely monitored and forbidden to print or publish. He then joined the Abwehr, a German intelligence organization, as a cover, and functioned as a double-agent spy for the German resistance. He was eventually arrested in 1943 because of Gestapo-Abwehr rivalry. Following the failed attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944, documents of the Abwehr were discovered that implicated Bonhoeffer. He was executed on 9 April 1945.

The camp doctor who witnessed Bonhoeffer's execution wrote: "I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer ... kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the few steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God."

As Germans ask how they could have been mesmerized by the evil of Hitler, they can still look to a few Germans who were true Christians, not deceived by evil. They thought independently from their community by thinking according to Scripture.

Bonhoeffer was a faithful witness of Jesus Christ. His call was to die for Christ and Wilberforce's call was to live for Christ. Both men saw an evil they had to address. God used the labor of Wilberforce to abolish slavery, but he did not use Bonhoeffer to get rid of Hitler. Today, the work of Bonhoeffer lives on. He will be the voice of intimacy with Christ through pain and suffering.

Metaxas

[Eric Metaxas](#) was the keynote speaker today

(2 Feb 2012) at the National Prayer Breakfast.

Eric was in deep personal pain, as failure after failure dogged him. One might expect a graduate of Yale to enjoy some modicum of success! His pain opened him to God in a way his success never would. And he found God in an intimate way.

Metaxas recounted his own conversion and talked about Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer, two of my favorite characters. I wondered where Metaxas would take us. How would he be applying Christian truth expressed in the life of these two great men of God?

As Metaxas was speaking, I noticed a tremor in his hands when they peeked above the stand. Why was he nervous? He was really humorous and the audience was loving it. "Maybe," I thought, "he is nervous because he is about to say something momentous."

The ax fell. Metaxas then called on his listeners to make a difference, to value the personhood of the unborn child. He spoke for those infants unable to speak for themselves. He asked for a Christian value to be placed on unborn children. They are people too.

I don't think I heard him use the word "abortion." But there is no mistake about what he was saying. It was a masterful coup de grace and his case was made. He did not dwell on it, for he said enough. Some in the audience clapped as he spoke for the unborn. At that point, Metaxas spoke truth to power.

Obama and Abortion

Obama is a staunch supporter of abortion. His support for abortion is nothing short of fanatical. In an earlier article, I investigated Obama's support of infanticide. This practice of infanticide was practiced on new born babies born alive despite attempts to abort the child. The child is left in a sink or among

soiled linen as it cries and dies alone. A nurse alerted the nation to this gruesome practice in Illinois where Obama served as senator. Almost every law maker in America agreed this is too great an evil, but Obama feels the legislation might compromise the right to abortion, so he refused to vote for it when he was a senator. The only suitable way to describe Obama is that he is a fanatical supporter of the evil of abortion on demand. He would not have pity on an infant gasping for a little air, and would have the child exposed to die. A pity many of you would extend even to an abandoned puppy or kitten.

Metaxas was talking to Obama, and Nancy Pelosi, and all the other pro-abortion legislators in his audience. I was amazed at Metaxas willingness to speak the truth to all those who are so wrong on the abortion issue.

There is always justification for evil. There is justification for abortion as there was justification for slavery or for Hitler's genocide. There are even some who call themselves Christians who support abortion. God forbid! You can be a Democrat, but you cannot support abortion. Abortion is not a Christian option. Perhaps I was so taken aback by the boldness of Metaxas that I was no longer noticing his hands. But if I recall correctly, they were no longer shaking. The truth is declared, fear is gone.

Metaxas followed up with another application. He spoke of our need to embrace the biblical teaching of our sexuality. Again, he did not dwell at length, but it was long enough. Again, he spoke truth to power.

Obama

Then came Obama's turn. He looked out of his element. Obama had a Muslim father, and a hyper-liberal mother. And by God's grace, he came to Jesus, if nominally, in the highly perverted brand of Christianity called Black Liberation Theology.

It is clear that with such a background, Obama cannot get this theology right. But it is possible for him to eventually come around on the two issues that Metaxas spoke about: the personhood of the unborn child and biblical sexuality. Pray for Obama. Pray that God will turn his heart from the perverted Black Liberation Theology and his fanatical support for the evil of abortion on demand. Was there not a time when black people were not considered people? Will he turn around and see that abortion kills people, not just cells?

Pray that Obama will see that he cannot deny the right to life of the unborn any more than we can deny the right of the black man to live in freedom. Pray that he will see the evil of killing millions of babies is not any better than Hitler killing millions of Jews he did not consider people.

Us

When we kill a baby while he is in his mother's womb, it is legal. But that same baby, if born into the world, cannot be killed, for that is murder. Imagine a law that says if you are murdered when you are asleep, it is legal and but illegal when you are awake. Allowing abortion on demand is allowing the murder of babies because they are covered up and we cannot hear them cry – but they can feel the pain of being mutilated or poisoned.

Slavery is an evil practice because it forcibly robs a person of his freedom. But abortion that kills a person is right because the mother wants it! Wasn't Hitler evil when he killed about 11 million people in concentration camps? How about abortion that kills 42 million babies each year?

I am not a Wilberforce, and not everyone will be a Wilberforce. But we can support the Wilberforce when God raises one. Perhaps you are the Wilberforce God is calling.

America today has the leadership potential of Britain in the 18th century. Together with this very imperfect leadership comes the responsibility of moral leadership. The rejection of abortion on demand is an enormous undertaking. It is global, it is entrenched, and it is the status quo – just like slavery.

We need the Metaxases around the world to speak truth to power. We need to point out the horror of abortion. We need to recoil at the babies we kill each year. We need to say that abortion on demand is a fundamental evil that must be prohibited in every society the same way slavery or murder is prohibited.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.