

▶ THE ESCHATON & EVANGELISM BY RACHEL SHAIN

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# Deep Roots *big reach*

## The Eschaton & Evangelism by Rachel Shain

*Leading People to Christ and to the Kingdom of Heaven*

In discussions of how to present the gospel we often intently consider the past events of the work of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. We may also include a discussion of the life to which a believer is called in light of accepting this good news. While our presentations rightly focus on these things, it is a temptation to see the second coming of Christ or the eschaton as irrelevant to the more basic Christian truths presented in the gospel. But the eschaton is not an inconsequential theological abstraction, and it actually informs gospel preaching in a key ways.

The gospel is good news to the sinner that his sin has been atoned for, that forgiveness is offered, and that his relationship with God can be restored. What is offered to the person who accepts this good news is not only forgiveness but includes a promise of inheritance in the kingdom of God.

This kingdom is promised to come in fullness when Jesus returns. However, until this event, Christians can now live in and extend to others peace, healing, goodness, freedom, and joy. These present blessings point to the fullness of the Kingdom which is to come. This reality means that the church lives in an eschatological tension, in a time when evil is still present but the power to overcome it has been made readily available by the Holy Spirit who has been poured out into the church as a guarantee of the glory to come.

This tension informs every aspect of Christian life: We know that the power of sin over us has been broken but its presence is yet to be removed. We experience our characters growing in holiness while our bodies decay. We hope in the promise of the resurrection, that these same bodies will one day be raised from the dead to experience the same gift of life that our souls

experienced when we first accepted Christ. We see the games of one-up-manship and name-making played all around us while we strive to obey a new order where the last are first, where the servant is greater than the served. In preaching the gospel, we are calling new believers into this eschatological tension.

As young evangelicals have increasingly turned our eyes to justice issues, we feel the impulse to incorporate works of justice into our missional life as we proclaim the gospel. This can only be done successfully if we live in hope of the eschaton. While non-Christian activism is very capable of producing positive policy changes and bringing some justice to situations (and has done so on numerous occasions), it can ultimately only act as a mitigating force to agents of evil. The vision of secular activism is reform, a transition from a corrupt or unjust situation to an ethical or just one. But the vision of Christian

## The Coming Acceptance of Modern-Day Slavery

*A Call to the Philosophic and Theological Work of Defending Life*

I believe that within one or two generations, we could see an acceptance of the modern day slave trade. While I believe it may take longer to conceptually legitimize and commercialize formally, the process for acceptance is already underway. When I began speaking against the evolving human trafficking industry 10 years ago, audiences were horrified as I shared the degrading experiences and overwhelming statistics of victims of bonded labor, sexual exploitation, and human defilement. Over the years, however, I have seen such horror fade though the conviction that these realities are wrong has not yet dissipated. In the early years, I had people stand up during presentations, write me angry e-mails, or call me denying what I was sharing.

After speaking in Los Angeles concerning sexual slavery, a woman in the porn industry and an active prostitute called me and yelled, "You are a liar. If what you are saying were true EVERYONE would know about it. This just can't be true!" Such anger and disbelief has yielded these days to a general acceptance of the pervasiveness of modern day slavery. While this may seem like a good trend, the reality is that we have never been on the right track with regards to dealing with slavery because we have not gone beyond the inherent assumption that it is wrong. The fact that the commoditization of people is an inherent evil is a "felt fact," not a demonstrated one. With regards to the normal slippery slope of socialized ethics, true, inherent evils are often conditionally accepted, legitimized and then institutionalized over time because we have not done the philosophic or theological work to establish them beyond their "felt fact" status.

A felt fact is one that people could not initially conceive of being any other way. Over time, felt facts are often challenged and regardless of whether they are objectively true or false,

come to be softened or even rejected: Blacks are less evolved and therefore less capable and/or intelligent than other races; unborn embryos have the same rights as human beings; the earth is flat; the sun revolves around the earth; homosexuals are degenerates and thus disqualified from equal rights...all of these illustrations and many others at one time were felt facts for a variety of people. A felt fact may be objectively true or objectively false but often they begin and remain for a time as mere assumptions. With regards to the inherent evil and ethical wrong of the commoditization of people through the trafficking industry, who really is to say that this is anything more than a felt fact, one that for a time we react viscerally to but cannot fully articulate why because we have no philosophic or theological foundation to do so. While it may be difficult for most to conceive of a day when slavery would be accepted conditionally, conceptually legitimized, and then institutionalized commercially and politically, such a process has already occurred.

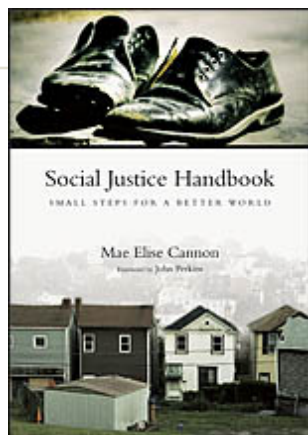


While the great global trans-Atlantic slave trade is the shining horrific illustration of such a process, this same evolution of legitimization is playing itself out all around the world today. The fact that modern day slavery is the fastest growing illegal enterprise, third only to the trafficking in arms and narcotics, demonstrates there is a hunger and demand for the product. The consumption of human beings as household slaves, as sexual play things or as workers for various industries is a growing assumption amongst many people groups. Before the dis-



## IVP's Social Justice Handbook

For the last several years, I have done the judging for the "Justice" category for Outreach Magazine's Resource of the Year. This year, I gave first place to IVP's [Social Justice Handbook](#) by Cannon. The Social Justice Handbook offers practical guidelines for a plethora of community, national and global justice issues with corresponding background data and action recommendations per issue treated. As a resource, readers will be especially helped by the contemporary illustrations of justice engagement and the "further study" lists of literature in each section. Cannon's comprehensive yet succinct treatment of such a wide body of issues is remarkable. In brief treatment, the Biblical, historical, practical guidance and contemporary examples of justice engagement provide a powerful sketch on each issue and with the "further study" list, the reader will truly find this handbook an invaluable source in leading change. A resource like this is long overdue in the passionate discussion on justice!



## The Coming Acceptance of Modern-Day Slavery (cont.)

aster in the small country of Haiti, there were over 300,000 bonded or forced slaves, many of which were children who did not go to school but rather served as the family cook, household maid, and by night sexual play thing. In various parts of Thailand, forced prostitutes and the brothels in which they serve exist in plain site with the full knowledge of the government and police force. Throughout popular tourist destinations off the boarding docks of cruise ships and all inclusive resorts is a seedy underbelly not advertised on Orbitz or Priceline but nevertheless a strong selling point for Westerners seeking the ultimate in sexual gratification, all made possible by rape-for-pay message parlors, dance bars, and mobile brothels. If it is true that there are more slaves today than were trafficked during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, if it is true that this is a \$32 billion dollar industry, if it is true that the average age of women forced into sexual slavery is 15 in many countries than it must also be true that there are an awful lot of people who, with our without guilt and shame, are engaged in and endorse through their spending the concept of the commoditization of peoples.

Because of the lack of the perceived value of human life in many places, this process doesn't always take long. Nevertheless, as Americans emerge from an assumed era

of Judeo-Christian ethics and education, we can expect this process to play itself out over and over again with many moral issues. Felt facts will give way to an initial phase of conditional acceptance, then eventually conceptual legitimization, and finally commercial and political institutionalization. What is needed know is for the philosopher and theologian to rise up and begin to lay again the rationale, not necessarily against slavery, but for the a priori value and right for human life. A simple definition of "a priori" knowledge is "knowledge that exists in the mind independent of experience." A less technical way of saying what we need is a strong, compelling rationale as to why people matter, why they shouldn't be aborted, bought, sold, raped, butchered, allowed to suffer the evils of dehumanization and all the other ways in which we see and experience the commoditization of people. To be sure, continuing to hear and see the stories of people who suffer at the hands of their powerful oppressors will be needed but this can only go so far. An inherent value must be established, a bulwark conceived in the mind of the philosopher and theologian, birthed in the expression of the arts which can mature in popular culture. This is what we need.

For the philosopher and theologian, it is imperative that their work not be done in a vacuum, some dark room or

amidst the dust of irrelevant books whose time has come and gone. The work of theology and philosophy must always be done with the painter, the dancer, with the musician, with the poet--these must be the friends of the philosopher and the theologian. So seamless should this friendship be that to the outside audience there is little to distinguish where the work of theology and philosophy end and the work of the artist begin. Philosopher and prophet, Dr. Francis Schaeffer, understood this relationship--it drove him to envision the transformative community of L'Abri and much of his works on culture. Dr. Schaeffer made the case\* for the line of influence on culture beginning with the philosopher and theologian to the artist and musician before being enfolded into our cultural understandings and expressions. This process of influence, even in our postmodern milieu, is so undeniable, so tried and true that when it comes to the horrific evils of modern day slavery, any serious treatment of the issue must always extend through all of these levels, beginning with the establishment of a prior truths from the philosopher and theologian in partnership with the artists and exported to society.

I believe that the heroes of our time represent a strange hybrid, a striving for political and academic engagement and way-making for the arts, on the ground involvement with victims and engagement with policy makers and police forces around the world. A lawyer like Gary Haugen, a scholar like David Batstone, and a visionary leader like Richard Sterns are the

kind of philosopher/theologians we need in our time. Such men have taken up the philosophic and theological work of establishing the inherent value of life in the fight against the commoditization of people but have done so through working alongside the activist, the artist, the politician, business leader, medical and social work community--every sector of society has been engaged through these and other heroes in the fight against modern day slavery. The greatest accomplishment of organizations like the International Justice Mission, the Not for Sale Campaign, and World Vision I believe is not merely the actual successes they have in law, academia, and philanthropic execution but in the philosophic and theological work their leaders have provided for the rest of us. This can endure and produce the needed energy to raise up a new generation of heroes who seek to stem the tide of the wickedness of human commoditization so that humans can flourish to the glory of their Creator.



\*The God Who is There by Dr. Francis Schaeffer, chapters 1-4, IVP, 1968.

## The Eschaton & Evangelism (cont.)

mission is resurrection, a transition from death to life. In gospel proclamation, therefore, we do not call people merely into a life of working to make things better, but we call them to a life of proclaiming the lordship of Jesus, which is over "all rule and authority and power and dominion." It is our view of the eschaton, of all things being made right by the righteous Judge, that teaches us to set the bar higher than reform to renewal. We are not satisfied with restraining evil but look to a triumph over evil.

Furthermore, heaven (the immediate afterlife) and the eschaton have often been spoken of as serving as a crutch to Christians who look more to escape from the trials of the world than to embrace the call to change the world in the here-and-now. It is true that some have over-emphasized the rewards of the afterlife to the detriment of the call to participate in the mission of the church on earth. But let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater. One day as I listened to repeated references to the longing for heaven in old black spirituals, I realized that maybe I--the justice-minded college student--had something to learn from, of all people, the oppressed. Saints and martyrs for the past 2000 years have looked to the promise of both the afterlife and the return of Christ to guide them through the darkest times and places in this world. The New Testament itself is permeated with the hope of the return of Jesus.

If through the gospel we are calling non-believers to place faith in the work of Christ and submit themselves to the lordship of Jesus, we do so knowing that we are not calling them to a fruitless battle, to toil without hope of reward. They are called to ultimate victory. Furthermore, as proclaimers of the gospel, we do not place ourselves in potential situations of embarrassment, or perhaps even severe forms of persecution, "just because"--we do so in the same manner that our forebears did, in the hope of the promises given to us--the promise that we are inheritors of a kingdom and that "all things will be made

new." These promises are why Christians often go to the worst of places, even to sure death, with joy and peace.

In this respect the postmodern contempt for narrative resolution is naive. Such a view cannot fully enter into and challenge the realities experienced by those on the Trail of Tears, in Auschwitz, or in the brothel where a prepubescent girl is raped day in and day out. Contrary to heaven and the eschaton serving as a crutch, they instead provide us with the ability to bear suffering and trials, both our own and others', in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Though we hope for the kingdom to break forth sooner rather than later, when this does not happen and we face momentary failure, the church can still abide in strength and be a prophetic voice in midst of imminent death because we know that death will ultimately be swallowed up.

The eschaton is a significant part of the backdrop to gospel proclamation. Indeed, we cannot really proclaim the gospel without proclaiming the eschaton, because the past fact of Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruit of this coming glory. So even when we do not verbalize the eschaton in an unchurched person's first exposure to the gospel, let us not forget what the resurrection, which we do discuss, ultimately points to. Jesus will return. There is a resolution to the story. We will be resurrected. All will be made right.

May the thought reverberate within us: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Rachel Shain was a student leader with Ohio State's undergraduate InterVarsity movement, where she was primarily involved with campus evangelism. After graduating with an M.A. in linguistics, she joined Wycliffe Bible Translators with her husband Cory. They will serve as translators in Mali.

## SMARTER OUTREACH: Creative Activism



After conducting many campus-wide events, I have found using event t-shirts to be a mixed bag. The upfront cost can be overwhelming and the risk of recouping such huge cost is huge. Another visually striking yet inexpensive substitute for creating campus-wide buzz can be found in "temporary tattoos." In the up-coming Ohio State Price of Life Invitational this April 18-22, 2010, we will replace our t-shirt campaign with a temporary tattoo campaign with tattoo options for the face and other exposed body parts. Moving from t-shirts to tattoos is expected to reduce our upfront out of pocket expense from over \$40,000 to just over \$2,000!



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