

Review of the City Gate Conference

Held 14-19 August 2009 in Manchester

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How can we relate scripture, Old and New Testaments, to our daily life and work in a practical down to earth way? This conference explored the greatness of Christ and the relevance of scripture beyond and above personal salvation.

Introduction to the City Gate conference

For the past three years, the City Gate Conference has been held at the Nazarene Theological College in Didsbury, South Manchester.

The intention of the conference this year was to explore the interface between church and business with particular input from the key speaker, Landa Cope. Landa was born in Michigan, USA and currently lives in South Africa. She joined YWAM¹ in 1971, and since then her public speaking and work in missions have taken her to more than 110 nations. The main thrust of this global calling is to speak to religious, political, business and professional leaders on the subject of what Scripture teaches about discipling nations. In 2006, she published her research and thesis in a book entitled *An Introduction to The Old Testament Template: Rediscovering God's principles for discipling all nations*.

The City Gate conference has been initiated and organised in the past three years by Ged Tyrrell. Ged is a Lancashire businessman and entrepreneur based in Leigh just north of Manchester. With a ruthless focus on

practical living and an infectious enthusiasm for articulating the role of business in bringing both spiritual and material transformation to a fallen world, he explains how and why he came to set up the City Gate Conference, 'Business people want to work in partnership with the church, not to be isolated from it.'

The scope of Landa's work is broader than the role of business alone, but her teaching plays a vital part in encouraging business people and entrepreneurs to understand, articulate and activate their unique role in God's creative and redemptive purposes. Her message is quite simple, namely to urge the church to re-focus on God's revelation in Scripture. It is not more than this, but it is not less either.

The systematic approach she takes to unpacking the Old Testament template is resonant of the approach of the Jewish rabbi. Jesus himself taught his disciples through reference to the fulfillment of Scripture and thereby helped them to understand God's plan for how to live in the present in the light of what has been revealed to us in the past, and what his ultimate purposes are into the future. This is reflected in Landa's teaching

Note:

¹ Youth With A Mission
www.ywam.org.uk/



▶▶ style, which is driven by the desire to inspire a passion for Scripture, and to mine it systematically for the wisdom God has revealed in it for the everyday.

In this sense, her approach works with the drive towards whole-life discipleship currently pursued by others in the UK such as the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, Forum for Change run by the Evangelical Alliance, Transform Work, Transforming Business and indeed ICF and Faith in Business. For anyone seeking to make vital connections between God’s revealed Word and the practicalities of living everyday life to his glory, Landa’s passion and common sense convey an urgent desire to see the church grow not only in understanding but in subsequent action to see real transformation and spiritual change:

As a result, the only way we can live in the Kingdom of light is by integrating all that comes under the Lordship of Christ through integration of the Old Testament with the New Testament, the spiritual with the material, the heavenly with the earthly, the seen with the unseen. (p148)



Moses discipling a nation

Cosimo Rosselli, PROMULGATIO LEGIS SCRIPTE PER MOISEM (Promulgation of the Written Law by Moses) (ca. 1480) Fresco in the Sistine Chapel, Vatican

Also speaking at the conference were Crispin Fletcher-Louis and Sally Orwin. Crispin is Principal of Westminster Theological Centre, now based in Cheltenham, UK. With a passion for theology and how it can inform practical living, Crispin’s research and focus have recently been directed towards exploring the concept of God as entrepreneur.

I am a consultant in change and development, with experience of running a small business. The main thrust of my contribution was to focus on the role of imagination, beauty and grace in the practical task of running a business as a Christian.

The Old Testament Template

The publication of Landa’s *The Old Testament Template* in 2006 was the outcome of many years of thought, prayer, reflection, action, mission, teaching and travelling. She describes how she arrived at a point of realisation driving through the Great Plains of the USA whilst listening to a reading of Deuteronomy:

Moses’ job was to disciple a nation. His job was to teach a people who had been slaves for more than 300 years how to form and run their nation. Moses was to teach Israel God’s principles of government, economics, the family, the priesthood and every God-given domain of human society... Moses was discipling a real nation in the truths that will make them great in every area of life, and God inspired him to write it all down for you and me.. (p33)

In addition, Landa describes how this confirmed the idea that the evidence of life in the fallen world showed a clear lack of transformation in spite of many years of mission and evangelistic effort:

Crime, decrepit social systems, disease, economic discrepancies, racial injustice disqualify communities from having an adequate quality of life .. [the example in this case is Dallas, Texas, which according to various statistics was the most ‘Christianized’ city in America at the time] (p15).

She suggests this was partly the ‘.. fruit of preaching salvation alone, without the rest of the biblical message ... by getting saved and then standing inside the door of the Kingdom, calling others to salvation. We do not know how to move past the cloakroom into the greatness of God in all of life’ (pp. 40-41). She describes the intellectual and spiritual



<p>Box 1 Biblical Assumptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>God is and is who he says he is</i> ■ <i>God is the Creator of the universe both seen and unseen</i> ■ <i>Humans are created in the image of God and are his central purpose for all of creation</i> ■ <i>Everything, seen and unseen, is infected by sin and is fallen</i> ■ <i>Everything is redeemable</i> 	<p>Box 3 The four institutions of authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>The individual</i> ■ <i>The family</i> ■ <i>The church</i> ■ <i>The government</i>
<p>Box 2 Five areas of focus for prescriptive law of the Old Testament</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Life is sacred</i> ■ <i>The material world is real, good and essential for all of life</i> ■ <i>Words have power and we're accountable for them</i> ■ <i>Everything needs to be redeemed and is redeemable</i> ■ <i>Anything that takes us away from God's truth and values will begin to destroy us</i> 	<p>Box 4 Four sins that will destroy a nation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Political injustice</i> ■ <i>Economic injustice</i> ■ <i>Adultery and the destruction of the family unit</i> ■ <i>Idolatry in the individual believer</i>

►► challenges she faced as ‘.. my secular/sacred, dichotomized mind kept rising up in rebellion against what I saw in the Word and it accused me of socializing the Gospel and secularising the word of God. In reducing the gospel to salvation alone, we had also reduced our revelation of God to saviour when he is also King of Kings, Lord of Justice, Jehovah Jirah ...’ (p40).

In fact, she argues, we need a supreme Christ; we need God’s view of nations; we need a biblical view of vocations; we need biblical strategies; and we need the servant model of Christ himself. This will help us to develop a practical theology in every domain of life, in government, economics, science and technology, church, family, education, communication, arts and entertainment.

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Landa opened the conference with a clear call for Christians to ‘think like God thinks’, thereby affirming the main message of her book. She began with a set of underlying biblical assumptions presented on a set of small cards (see box 1). The challenge, she argues, is to base our view of reality on these rather than ingrained cultural assumptions which influence our motivation and behaviour but which are rarely recognised, acknowledged or articulated. By challenging these cultural assumptions and being clear about the biblical view of reality, we can begin

the work of thinking like God. His Word is a prism through which we see his view of reality and thereby begin to question and overturn the broader cultural assumptions which can work against the transformative thrust of our work.

Moving on in the Old Testament, she highlighted five areas of focus in the prescriptive law, four institutions of authority and four sins that will destroy a nation if they are allowed to prevail (see boxes 2-4). As a detailed example of how these values and beliefs inform behaviour, she explored the concept of time in relation to work, and particularly the role of the Sabbath in celebrating work. God has made us in his image, God works and God rests. As such, for example, unemployment is a moral disaster and we must resist stealing time, ensuring that an employee can accomplish his or her work and still enjoy a time of rest.

God as Entrepreneur

Crispin Fletcher-Louis began his talk focusing on common perceptions of the entrepreneur, and narrowed it down to a study of God as entrepreneur in the Genesis 1 narrative of creation. Using a detailed analysis of the structure and vocabulary of the text, he reminded the audience that God creates ‘ex nihilo’ and that his creativity is pervasive, systematic, disciplined and thorough. Genesis 1 reveals God as involved intimately with his



▶▶ creation. Crispin is concerned to encourage and nurture entrepreneurial ways of working within the church as much as to encourage and nurture entrepreneurs who sit within the ‘secular’ business sphere. Entrepreneurial forms of mission which go out and create and nurture disciples reveal a calling to represent something of God’s character as it is revealed in Genesis 1. Entrepreneurs have much to learn from the practical example of God as creator and its underlying theology; the church has much to learn in encouraging entrepreneurial activity as an expression of God’s image in his people.

On being a Christian in business

The purpose of my session was to begin a conversation to explore the experience of being a Christian in business. I focused on four aspects of our humanity in terms of how we exercise them as Christians in the business environment. Grace, imagination, creativity and beauty are integral aspects of our Christian identity and they are exercised daily in decision-making processes in business. Leading a small business can be a particularly lonely role. For a Christian it will be informed by an intimate relationship with God the Father through the revelation of his word in Scripture, his guidance in prayer and an appropriate accountability within community - whoever that might be, whether other stakeholders, the church community and business partners. The Christian business leader will face decisions which should see him or her wrestling with God to integrate the well-being of different stakeholders, the organisation’s team or community and its reputation in the marketplace. These decisions must balance the needs of clients with the needs of employees with the investment the business owners have made and these, I suggest, are the intimate places where it counts profoundly to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The classic view of creativity is one which focuses on the arts. I wanted to encourage Christians working in business to develop a broader understanding of creativity as an



Landa Cope's book

integral aspect of the fact that we are made in the image of God. God himself is creative. What can we make, develop, join together, create that was not there before? How can we join the dots? What talents can we develop and release, what connections can we make, how can we create an environment in which people can flourish? How can we take basic elements and make them more than the sum of their parts?

Conclusion

There is a sense in which none of this is new, or at least that it oughtn’t to be new to the inquisitive Christian. It is also true, however, that in human weakness the Christian forgets. Time and again, Scripture exhorts us to listen, to pay attention, to think, to act: ‘Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels...’ Isaiah exhorts God’s people in 46:8. Landa’s work on the Old Testament template encourages us in this, to apply some elbow grease: to get on with the whole gospel of the Kingdom which includes the gospel of salvation, through grace and the inherent power of the message to bring transformation.

I recommend Landa Cope’s work and approach to those who recognise theology as faith seeking understanding. The discipline of unpacking Scripture in this systematic way will, I suggest, go a long way to helping those in ‘secular’ ministry. It helps us understand more of the theology of everyday life and apply it in collaboration with the purposes God has revealed to bring about kingdom transformation before Christ comes again. ■

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