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A Tribute to E.L. Hebden Taylor (1925–2006): British Export to North America

by Steve Bishop

Introduction

One of the first British nationals to embrace and popularize Dooyeweerd’s philosophy was Rev. Eustace (Stacey) Lovatt Hebden Taylor (1925-2006). Hebden Taylor adopted a thoroughly Dooyeweerdian approach and, despite his sometimes polemical writings, has provided in The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State and his Reformation or Revolution some excellent popular introductions to Dooyeweerd’s thought.

However, the philosophical and ecclesiastical climate, with an established state church and a largely pietistic approach to faith, meant that Britain was not ready for this Reformational approach. Hebden Taylor thus spent most of his academic career outside of the UK at Dordt College. This brief article provides some biographical details and an analysis of some aspects of his work.

Belgium Congo

Hebden Taylor began life as the son of missionary parents, who met and married in Mwanza, Africa, on October 17, 1923. His father, Rev. Cyril Eustace Taylor, born in Streatham, South London, read medicine at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, after which, in 1920, at the age of 28, he left England for Ngoimani in Katanga, Belgium Congo, now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo, to serve as a medical missionary. Taylor’s mother, Marjorie Victoria Hebden Taylor, likewise left for the mission field in the Congo, at age 21, to work with the Emmaus Pentecostal Mission. After marriage, Taylor’s parents moved to the Ngoimani station, where they contributed to the planting of 38 churches, with a combined congregation of over 3000. This was the context in which Hebden Taylor was born, on July 25, 1925, the first of six children.

His father, who died of pneumonia in Switzerland while raising funds for the Congo Mission, is buried in Vevey.

After Rev. Cyril Eustace Taylor died, a letter sent to Mrs. Taylor from the people of Ngoimani, after his death, January 27, 1935, shows the high

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regard in which Taylor’s father was held. In it, they express their deep sorrow, their gratitude to God for sending “Bwana Taylor” to lead them from darkness to light, and their desire for their “grandmother,” “Madam Taylor,” to return to them, as she did.

His father’s death and the beginning of World War II changed Taylor’s life. Within a year after his mother gave birth to his brother, Cyril, she returned to the Congo, his eldest sisters were sent to Worthing to stay with their paternal grandparents, and Taylor was sent to live with his maternal grandmother and uncle and attend Fulneck School in Yorkshire. With the outbreak of World War II and the return of Taylor’s mother to England, the family reunited in 1942, living for a while in Scarborough, where Taylor attended high school. Then he served in the British Royal Navy on HSM Diadem, including convoy duty to Murmansk, Russia. After the war, he studied history at Trinity Hall, Cambridge.

By this stage, the horrors of war and the writings of H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell, read in the hammock during “tedious trips to Murmansk,” had seemingly robbed him of his Christian faith, leaving him with contempt for all things Christian. This attitude changed when he met two “men of [a] caliber” he didn’t think still existed at Cambridge: his tutor and the College Chaplain. God used these men as well as Taylor’s studies to shake him “out of the doubt” with which he’d gone up to Cambridge. Two books helped reveal the “shallowness of modern rationalism”: Charles Cochrane’s Christianity and Classical Culture (1940) and Emil Brunner’s Christianity and Civilization (1947-48). He writes,

Convinced beyond all doubt that the Gospel of God’s love for men revealed in Christ could alone provide an adequate foundation for a true humanism and personalism I finally took the plunge and was confirmed by the late Bishop of Ely in Jesus College Chapel in March 1948.3

Canada (1949-1963)

Even though Taylor became convinced that “Anglicanism was the most purely and truly ‘catholic’ expression of Christianity,” and even though he felt a calling to ordination, he couldn’t hold to the establishment of the Church of England, where a “secular” British government appointed bishops. His views on the relationship between church and state were already beginning to take shape: “In my opinion it is NOT the business of the Church of God to provide the ideological cement for any political or economic power.” It was this ecclesiastical atmosphere that took him abroad.

As emigration was the only option, so too was ordination in another Anglican province: a choice of either New Zealand or Canada. Since one of Taylor’s ancestors had served as a soldier in Quebec during the 1812 War, Taylor decided on Canada. In August 1949, he moved from England to Canada to work in Vancouver with the Hudson’s Bay Company, making use of the University of British Columbia library to study semantics and Alfred Korzybski’s Science and Sanity (1933). Then, in response to an appeal from Archbishop Adams, he volunteered as a lay reader for missionary work along the Alaskan highway of the Yukon. Even though he intended to teach the works of Kierkegaard and Korzybski, he was soon dissuaded of the wisdom of that approach.

After teaching for a year, he returned to Vancouver in the summer of 1950 to begin his studies at the Anglican Theological College, where, two years later, he received his Licentiate in Theology, was ordained into the Episcopal Church by the Bishop of New Westminster for Yukon, and married Gillian. During those two years, he also returned to the Yukon to work in Teslin, moving there with Gillian, after he completed his seminary degree.

It was during the early 1960s that he was introduced to the Reformational perspective of Herman Dooyeweerd through a book and providential meetings. The book was Henry Van Til’s The Calvinistic Concept of Culture. In the foreword to the second (paperback) edition Taylor wrote,
It is with pleasure that I welcome the publication of this important book in a paperback edition, thus making it available to a wider audience, especially to students. It was partly by reading this book in 1961 that I recovered my faith in the full authority of the Word of God over the whole of human life, society, and culture.6

Similarly, in the preface to his Christian Philosophy of the Law, Politics and the State, he acknowledges his debt to a number of North American Reformational scholars:

I would also thank my esteemed Christian brothers, Bernard Zylstra, Gerald Vanderveende, Harry Antonides and Professors H. Van Riessen, J. M. Spier, H. Evan Runner and A. L. Conradie for bringing me in touch with the most exciting intellectual development in Christian thought since the time Thomas Aquinas wrote his famous apologies in defense of Christian truth as he then understood it. I would especially thank Bernard Zylstra for his enthusiastic help in so many directions and for his guidance in the interpretation of Dooyeweerd’s thought.7

Elsewhere he describes Dooyeweerd as “my spiritual ‘father’” and H. Evan Runner as his “holy uncle.”8 Embracing Reformational thought was not just a theoretical change but also a political change: he became involved in the then ten-year-old Christian Labor Association of Canada (CLAC). In March 1962, he presented a paper for them on the need for Labor Unions; this paper was subsequently published.9

It was also in 1962 that he became involved in a dispute with the Anglican hierarchy in Toronto: a report for the Bishop of Toronto made it clear that plural representation was a peculiarly Dutch concept and would not work in Canada.10 In the report Summers also (falsely) accused the CLAC of using union meetings as a means of seeking conversions to Calvinistic theology. As a result, Bishop Hunt refused to permit Hebden Taylor to assist CLAC in their struggle with the Ontario Labor Relations Board.

Hebden Taylor, it seems, had a number of conflicts with Bishop Hunt, conflicts that precipitated his move back to England. It was this newly found Reformational perspective that had brought him into conflict with Hunt, and it was this perspective that he took back with him to England.


During Taylor’s brief return to England in the 1960s, his views on church and state didn’t prevent him from taking up a leadership role in the Church of England. He began a curacy at St. Mary the Virgin, Langley Marish, Berkshire, in 1963, and then moved north to become the vicar of Greengates, Bradford, from 1964 until 1969. He brought back to England a strong Dooyeweerdian perspective. It was this thinking that saturated his books. One of his major works, The Christian Philosophy of the Law, Politics and the State, was written during this period. It was also at this time he got to know Elaine Storkey (nee Lively). Storkey had been in touch with Stacey by Paul Schrotenboer when she returned to England from studies in Canada.11 Throughout this time, he was greatly concerned with the liberalizing tendencies of the government, particularly in regards to marriage and divorce. Most of these concerns he expressed in his New Legality. At Elaine and Alan Storkey’s wedding, at which he presided, he proclaimed, “Those whom God has joined together, let no man, or government, rend asunder.”12

The title of his 653-page book — The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State — was something of an embarrassment to the international Reformational community. At the time, they were attempting to be less polemical, and with “The” rather than “A” in the title, Hebden Taylor was perceived as being too dogmatic and assertive. Elaine Storkey observes,

Dooyeweerd wrote to him and said he didn’t know whether he had greater admiration for him as the author of the book, or the publisher who was will-
ing to take the risk of publishing! I visited Dooyeweerd in the Netherlands and he said he had been flattered by Stacey’s commitment.13

Still, in the UK, Geoffrey Thomas, a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary and a minister in Aberystwyth, Wales, wrote a positive review in the Banner of Truth. He wrote, “It is difficult to be unbiased about this publication.... I am convinced that an understanding of this school can only lead to a great enrichment of insight and strengthening of the Kingdom of God in Britain.”14 This wasn’t, however, the typical British response. More typical was Colin Brown15 in the Churchman:

It might justly be said that this book is too long. It is therefore all the more odd that in a work of such massive proportions, written by an Anglican, dealing with the subject of church and state, no mention is made of Jewel and Hooker, and no discussion is offered of the Reformed Anglican position.

This review shows the great distance between Reformational Calvinism and the traditional, Old-School Calvinism. Taylor began this book with a statement that could be true of the Calvinism in the UK at the time of publication:

One of the greatest tragedies of the Protestant Reformation was the failure of the great Reformers of John Calvin and Martin Luther to develop a doctrine of law, politics and the state upon truly reformed and biblical lines. The Reformers did not bring about any radical departures in the spheres of political science, statecraft and jurisprudence for the simple reason, as the German scholar August Lang has shown, that they were so involved in theological disputes, religious controversy and the very struggle for survival that they did not have any time left in which to develop a reformed and biblical government.16

If Hebden Taylor had thought this book would open up an academic career for him in Britain, he was mistaken: he was not short-listed for any of the academic posts that he applied for. His Reformational stance was too radical and polemical for the reserved British academy, which was at best skeptical of a Christian philosophy and usually viewed it as a contradiction in terms. Most of the academy at this time was still influenced by logical positivism, analytic philosophy, and the acceptance of the neutrality of theoretical thought. Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, and Wittgenstein were still very influential, and philosophical analysis was on the increase with the works of A.J. Ayer, Antony Flew, and R.B. Braithwaite being particularly dominant.17 The sharp distinction between the facts of science and the values and opinions of religion was sharply contrasted by Taylor’s approach. While the consensus for the British academy was that religion was part of the private world and shouldn’t be seen in public, Taylor’s view was that religion shapes all of life. This view wouldn’t get him a place at the academic table in Britain; in fact, his approach was too polemical even for British evangelicalism. For most Christians at the time, faith was a matter of church attendance only; to suggest otherwise would lead, it was thought, to a social gospel and liberalism. Taylor’s voice fell on deaf ecclesiastical and academic ears.

The book—although written in Britain, it took a North American company to publish it—was, however, instrumental in obtaining him a professorship at Dordt College, a place where this all-of-life Christianity would be appreciated.

Dordt College (1969-1982)
The then-president of Dordt College, B. J. Haan, reminisces on Hebden Taylor’s twelve-year stint at Dordt:

I was first introduced to the book [The Christian Philosophy of Law, Politics and the State] by Nick Van Til, then-professor of philosophy at Dordt. He enthusiastically recommended that I buy the book. A few years later, I heard that Taylor, an Anglican minister living in England, would be available for a position. We sorely needed someone with a solid Reformational perspective to head our sociology department. Stacey seemed to be the person we were looking for.18

However, the board of trustees needed more persuading, and they needed justification for the cost of importing an eight-person family from Bradford to Sioux Center. It was recommendations from others such as Gerald Vandzande of CLAC, a friend of Taylor’s, as well as the board’s
trust that prompted them to give Taylor the post. Vanderzande described Hebden Taylor as “a real ‘character’ who needed some direction.” Haan was the person to give him that direction.

After Taylor, his family, and Tekla, their dog, set off from Shannon Airport in Dublin for Sioux Center via the Chicago airport, Taylor remained at Dordt until Haan retired in 1982. During this time, he taught sociology, history, and economics; and he wrote another major book, *Reformation or Revolution*, as well as numerous papers and smaller books. Even though his teaching methods weren’t appreciated by all, Haan notes,

> He produced mimeographed notes that were thoroughly Reformational. The better students respected his ideas highly. I loved him, but had to keep a tight rein on him. Fortunately, he could take it from me, and we remained good friends. When I retired, Taylor was not ready to work under a new administration and took a position elsewhere.

Hebden Taylor moved from academia to the pastorate. In 1982, he became the rector of St Alban’s Anglican Church, Tacoma, Washington, serving as a supply rector on Easter Sunday 1982 and then becoming the full-time rector in July 1982. He served there until his retirement in September 1993. St. Alban’s was and still is an Anglo-Catholic church, which suited well Taylor’s ecclesiastical temperament. He continued to write for *Outlook* and for *Christian Renewal* as well as writing book reviews for the reconstructionist magazine *Chalcedon Report*. He died on September 1, 2006.

Reformational perspective

Thoughout his writing, Hebden Taylor relied heavily on Dooyeweerd, as is clearly shown in one chapter in *Revolution or Reformation*:

> “As Dooyeweerd [D] says …”
> “[D] says …”
> “According to [D]…”
> “[D] writes…”
> “[D] rejects…”
> He [i.e., D] writes…”
> “As [D] puts it …”
> “This [D] makes clear …”
> “[D] replies …”

But this heavy reliance isn’t a mere regurgitation of Dooyeweerd. Instead, Taylor applies Dooyeweerd’s ideas to fresh situations, as the discussion on race shows (see below), and his book makes Dooyeweerd more accessible for a Western audience. But Dooyeweerd is not the only Reformational thinker he draws upon. He quotes, sometimes extensively, works from Kuyper, Seerveld, DeGraaf, VanderStelt, Schrotenboer, Riddlerbos, Vanderzande, and Popma. Others quoted or drawn upon, sometimes to show disagreement, include Henry Van Til, Emil Brunner, Mascall, Harnack, John Murray, Karl Barth, F.W. Beare, K.L. Schmidt, Lewis Smedes, A.M. Ramsey, Karl Adam, Noel Green, and Rudolf Sohm, indicating his knowledge and the wide range of his reading.

While the consensus for the British academy was that religion was part of the private world and shouldn’t be seen in public, Taylor’s view was that religion shapes all of life.

Comparison with Duffield

Hebden Taylor’s Reformation perspective is especially evident in a comparison with a British contemporary, Gervase E. Duffield. Both were British, Anglican, and Calvinist; both had written for the *Churchman* and for the *International Reformed Bulletin (IRB)*. However, their ideas about Calvinism differed considerably. That both wrote for the *IRB* is a testimony to its breath, as it accepted a broad view of Calvinism. The competing strands of Calvinism can be seen in two articles that appeared in the October 1964 issue of *IRB*, one from Taylor and the other from Duffield. Both articles look at the state of the church at the time. By looking at what they see as the problem and the remedy, we can see their differences.

In essence, Duffield’s critique of the contem-
porary church is that it is not Reformed enough.34 Duffield suggests that the problem is that Church of England is “going back on its Reformed practices, rather than just allowing un-Reformed alternatives.”35 One example he cites is its stance on communion—the Church of England has always allowed other Protestants, but now it seems it is going back on this practice. The reason he cites is the role of the episcopacy—non-episcopal churches are viewed as inferior. Evangelicals, he asserts, are beginning to abandon their Reformed heritage and become Anabaptist: “They became pietistic rather than Reformed Churchmen.”36 In order to stem this tide, the first move was to establish Latimer House, Oxford. And now two Evangelical publishing houses have been formed: The Marcham Manor Press and The Sutton Courtnay Press.37 Duffield’s remedy is apparently through education, putting into the hands of church leaders good, solid, Reformed works.

Hebden Taylor’s approach is a marked contrast to Duffield’s. While Duffield laments the loss of the past, Taylor critiques the present.38 Taking as his starting point two contemporary discussions of Christianity and society—Walter James’ *Christian in Politics* and D. L. Munby’s *The Idea of a Secular Society*—Taylor deplores their idea that we must accept the neutrality of politics with respect to religion: “Unfortunately Christians in Britain have too easily conceded the claim of the experts and social scientists to neutrality.”39 In a rhetorical flourish he adds,

> If Christians in Britain accept James’ and Munby’s thesis, not only will the Christian case go by default but Christians themselves will inevitably become traitors to Christ’s cause. In fact all that is now necessary for the complete triumph of apostate secular humanism is for British Christians to sit back in their pews at church singing hymns and do nothing outside in the work day world of business, education, labour relations and politics.40

The remedy for Hebden Taylor is to expose “the hoax implicit in the claim to neutrality.” This was not a message British Christianity was ready to hear: Christianity was very much a private rather than a public religion. Elsewhere, in a lecture given at the fifth IARFA conference, he concludes,

> In our view the only way by which the Body of Christ can today accomplish its great mission to the world is for Christians throughout the world to take effective Christian action in the spheres of labour, business, politics, education, medicine and communications. The taking of such action and the forming of such Christian professional, political and social organizations must bring about an important spiritual re-alignment of political and social forces in the modern world.41

Here he does not advocate an ecclesiastical response but, rather, Christians organizing for action. This was an unwelcome message for the culture in Britain at the time. The notion, or even the possibility, of a Christian trade union or a Christian political party was foreign to British minds and hearts. As Hebden Taylor later put it,

> British Christians have … denied in practice if not in theory that God’s law has any relevance or application outside one’s private and personal life. By so doing they have implied that either God is “dead” outside the walls of the church buildings or that He is not concerned with such mundane matters as politics and economics.”42

Politics, business, and social action were considered worldly activities. Individuals as Christians could be involved, but their role was to act as salt: being a witness, evangelizing, and stopping the corruption and immorality where possible. Christian communal activity was reserved for church activities. Increasingly, Taylor felt that his message was unappreciated in the UK.

**The Race Question**

Another issue addressed by Hebden Taylor was that of race relations, an issue that most British Christians did not see as part of the gospel. While issues of politics, business, and race were the issues that concerned liberal Christians, good evangelicals were only to be concerned with preaching the gospel, personal holiness and ecclesiastical issues. In looking at race from a Christian perspective, once again Taylor was swimming against the tide and was ahead of his time. For Taylor, the matter of race relations was an important part of the gospel, not just a concern for liberal Christians. For much
of his life, he too had to face the race issue, first as a young boy in Congo, then during his schooling in the province of Natal, South Africa, and then as a missionary in Yukon, where he was particularly sensitive to that issue.

Whenever Hebden Taylor deals with race, he follows the same approach. In *Reformation or Revolution*, he starts by identifying four erroneous and sinful approaches to the race question: annihilation and genocide, expulsion and partition, segregation and discrimination, and assimilation. The solution that most appeals to “apostate ‘liberal’ humanists” is full racial and cultural integration, or assimilation. Taylor’s approach to race relations would involve worldview questions. First, as to who we are, he would remind us that we are image bearers of God—we are created equal but different. Second, as to where we are, he would say that we are in a good but fallen creation. Third, as to what is wrong, he would explain that while the model for the US is based on assimilation and integration, we must understand the norms and values that white Anglo-Saxon protestants sought to impose in this assimilation and integration, the values of justice, equality, and liberty. However, he would say that since humans are not defined as religious beings but as rational beings, it is believed that we can be free individuals and part of American society, as we are all reasonable. He would remind us that it is the imposition of (these idolatrous) values masquerading as the American ideal that are the problem. In the American ideal, equality and justice are assumed to be the same, a natural and rational result of freedom. But he would say that this cannot be the case; for if we are all completely free, the result will be anarchy, not equality and justice. There can be no equality outside of God’s word; there can be no true justice between humans outside of obedience to God’s word. This lack of justice between humans, according to Taylor, is the result of and results in an individualistic society. Since there is no awareness of sin, freedom cannot be free from sin or even possible cause of sin. Sin, not skin color, is the issue.

In the assimilation model, all other views have to be subsumed to the one ideal, the American ideal. Differences are to be smoothed out. As Taylor puts it, “It is the failure to distinguish between assimilation and integration in the sense of equal rights before the law which is responsible for most of America’s present racial troubles.” In America, different cultures are expected to meld into one common culture, a flattening process where different values, cultures, and ideals must agree. This process has been seen to fail. The only option, the only remedy, according to Taylor, was cultural pluralism.

As to the remedy for race relations, his answer would be, then, a pluralist society: “Only by means of cultural pluralism can freedom now be preserved in America.” Here he draws on Acts 15 in an attempt to gain biblical support for his position. This emphasis on cultural pluralism and the limited role of government and state are important themes that dominated Taylor’s approach. They were also themes that didn’t play well in the British philosophical, theological, and cultural milieu. It’s not surprising, then, that Hebden Taylor was more at home in North America.

**Conclusion**

Hebden Taylor’s Dooyeweerdian perspective was at odds with the philosophical and ecclesiastical climate in ’60s Britain. In an established state church, with British individualism and the remains of analytic philosophy shaping the academy, Britain was not ready for this integrated, all-of-life Reformational approach; Hebden Taylor, as a result, became a British export to North America.

**Endnotes**

1. Received from Sir Cyril Taylor, GBE in an e-mail dated 30 July 2012. Sir Cyril is the brother of Stacey Hebden Taylor.

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 664-665.
5. Ibid., 665.
11. I am grateful to Elaine Storkey for much of the information in this section. E-mail conversation August/September 2014.
12. Storkey, personal communication.
13. Ibid.
20. E-mail conversation Rev. Leusing, present rector of St. Alban’s.
22. Ibid., 368, 392.
23. Ibid., 383, 391, 403.
24. Ibid., 395.
25. Ibid., 400.
26. Ibid., 401.
27. Ibid., 402, 403.
28. Ibid., 403.
29. Ibid., 404.
30. Ibid., 404.
31. Ibid., 407.
32. Ibid., 413.
33. Duffield was for a while the editor of the *Churchman*, the journal of the Church Society.
35. Ibid., 13.
36. Ibid., 14.
37. Both presses were based at Abingdon – both published material by or edited by Duffield.
39. Ibid., 19.
40. Ibid., 19.
44. Ibid., 521. Italics in original.
45. Ibid., 521. Italics in original.