

## Dialogue II

### **A Rock in the Whirlwind: A Changeless God in A Changing World A Response to “Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God’s Immutability and Human Integrity” by Richard Chewning**

Yvonne S. Smith  
Biola University

“May you live in interesting times” says the ancient Chinese curse. We do indeed live in interesting times. Technology, particularly the Internet, is driving a paradigm change in our society that is so profound that a new economy has sprung up seemingly overnight. Futurists tell us there is likely to be more social change in the next ten years than there has been in the last century (Bell & Gray, 1997). In the context of this whirlwind of transformation, it is a jerk into reality to be reminded that God is immutable, that He does not change.

In his paper “Hermeneutics and Biblical Ethics: God’s Immutability and Human Integrity,” Dr. Chewning has ably set out the key issues and arguments involved in the doctrine of the unchangeableness of God. He has shown how this

attribute is important to God’s character and to our personal salvation. He has also discussed how personal faithfulness and integrity should be an outcome of a proper understanding of God’s immutability. This application has immediate salience to Christians in business because human resource professionals note that integrity and trustworthiness are key ingredients of long-term success in the new economy (Allred, Snow, & Miles, 1996). Because our God is faithful, Christians are encouraged to develop their personal faithfulness.

However, the article did not discuss what may be one of the most important reasons that business practitioners and scholars find the doctrine of immutability worth studying: change. The change in the business world is so rapid that the

turbulence seems as fierce and destructive as a whirlwind. In response to forces unleashed by the Internet, companies and industries are reinventing themselves. People are losing the benefits of stability. The rules for individual success are reversing. These chaotic alterations affect both business practitioners and professors. We need to understand how God is our unchangeable Rock so that we can gain courage and stable footing in the face of the whirlwind.

In the next few pages, I will briefly outline three consequences, not necessarily related, of the technological and social revolution we are living through. Because many of my readers are academics, I will give examples of these changes in the university industry. In response to Chewing's discussion on immutability, I will show how the unchangeableness of God matters in times like these.

***God is a Rock when the rules for success change.*** One of the most dramatic shifts in the business arena in the past five years is the change in rules for individual success in a firm. As recently as 1996, it was highly desirable for employees to have experience and expertise in an industry. Firms paid well for

those qualities. Since experience is accumulated through time, age had a certain value to a company. Many supervisory positions were held by people in their 40s and older.

However, in industries affected by the Internet, almost overnight age and experience became liabilities. Old ways of doing business are suddenly anachronistic. The traits needed in the new economy are innovation and flexibility (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999). Many employers feel that experience and stability are barriers to change and creativity. "If the economy is new, who needs experience" is the latest watchword (Munk, 1999, p. 50). Years of experience are not only irrelevant, they are actually negative.

In the next few years, many people over 40 who think they are reaching the pinnacle of their career will find that a 28-year-old is getting the promotions and bonuses they assumed would be theirs. This sea-change is a direct result of the whirlwind speed with which new technologies are emerging. The younger generation has embraced the new technologies; the older generation, in general, has not. Companies that want to succeed

in the new economy tend to woo the younger employee.

Even higher education is not immune to these influences. With students demanding training for the new economy and distance education booming, universities also look for people who are innovative and flexible (Becker, 1999). The rules of personal success, even in academe, are changing. Many professors, including me, are over 40 and full of experience and expertise. As much as we may dislike the necessity, if we want to teach successfully we can no longer teach in the old ways. Students can find information easily; the role of the professor has changed from information provider to resource guide. To teach students in the new economy, we must be flexible and embrace new methods and attitudes or we, too, may become obsolete.

In such circumstances it is not merely a nice doctrine to understand that God is immutable; it is an absolute necessity. When the rules for success that we have lived by for years start reversing, it is a joy and relaxation to know that our God is an unchangeable Rock, that He will not reverse Himself. From that sure point, we can begin to learn the necessary new

skills. If God is our foundational Rock, we can cope with and adjust more easily to the new rules for success, whether our job is teaching business or doing it.

***God is the Rock for people that embrace change.*** The older generation may face a change in the rules, but our students face a world without rules. According to the business press, people that work in the new economy must be able to embrace turbulence, reinvent themselves constantly as free agents, and be willing to move from company to company without looking back.<sup>1</sup> To some, this sounds exhilarating and liberating—and it can be.

However, there is a dark side to the unremitting pressure for change. Some scholars argue that if people move incessantly from one shape to another, they will ultimately have lives without substance or stability (Rifkin, 1995; Sennett, 1998). Those that embrace the whirlwind can be caught in a mindset where being quiet for a few moments is perceived as dropping out of the loop, losing the edge (Bunting, 1998). They can become constantly active automotons, pursuing pleasure or riches without pause. The embrace of turbulence contributes to the relentless busyness and lack of

peace so prevalent even in our churches.

If younger Christians do not learn to properly understand the immutability of God, they will have difficulty developing into whole people, rather than restless pursuers of elusive “hipness.” However, if their life core rests in an unchanging God and their identity is in Him, they can change their activities as necessary to thrive in the new economy but keep a center of peace from which to build personal stability and wholeness.

I have some idea of the pressures that constant change engenders. For example, I moved 17 times before I was 21. However, I found the ability to thrive on change because a center of stability was given to me by the immutable God and the people who consistently loved me. Because God does not change, we who desire to become like Him are able to find our rest in Him. This allows us to cope with constant surface change. Our students can do the same.

***God is the Rock during industry change.*** Many of the changes in the new economy are occurring because the economics of physical things is being uncoupled from the economics of information.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the

traditional link between information and the physical way it is delivered—the book, the broadcast, the professor—is being loosened (Evans & Wurster, 2000). Digital networks have created a world where proprietary information is difficult to hold on to and anyone who searches the Internet can find expert knowledge.

Uncoupling information from its physical delivery systems is forcing dramatic changes in the ways knowledge is created and transmitted to the next generation (Dunn, 1994; Becker, 1999). It is not only the rules for personal success that are changing in higher education; the entire industry is transforming. For example, seamless and instantaneous communication has created a demand for instruction delivered directly to the student. In response, by this fall (2000) tens of thousands of accredited courses from major universities will have been placed on the Internet (Symonds, 2000). General education classes are becoming commodities (Dunn, 1994). Traditional classrooms are being replaced by learning communities (Bunting, 1998; Lin et al., 1996). After 200 years of industry stability, the forces of the whirlwind are requiring even the

most bureaucratic university to change form and structure.

Like many CBFA members, I teach in a university that has a mission linked to the immutable God. In my university, the purpose is formulated as “Biblically-centered education, scholarship and service—equipping men and women in mind and character to impact the world for the Lord Jesus Christ” (www.biola.edu/info/mission). It is comforting to know that as my industry and university transforms, its purpose need not. In five years, our teaching venues and organizational structure may be very different, but because God is the same, our mission will remain the same.

Business people, professors, and students need to deeply understand the immutability of God so that they can cope with the new world. “Interesting times” can be good when they force us to remember Who we serve. We do not primarily serve the university that is changing form after centuries of stability. We do not serve our careers, whatever strange directions they may take. We do not even primarily serve our students, though they will have to balance in the whirlwind. As Christian professionals, our allegiance is to

God, the Creator, the Sustainer of all things, Who is the Rock. In a world faced with whirlwind change, He is unchangeable. It is a comfort and joy to remember that.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 See any issue of *Fast Company*.
- 2 For further thinking in this area, see Paul M. Romer, 1993. Idea gaps and object gaps in economic development, *Journal of Monetary Economics* (32), 543-573.

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