

Christian Government

by Conrad Murrell

Some time ago I wrote a series of articles on some movements in the Christian community that presented themselves to be spiritual awakening, that were in fact hindrances to true spiritual awakening. These were: Prophecy, Revivalism, Keswick/Deeper Life, Neopentecostalism and Intellectual Calvinism.

I now want to take up a series of emphases that are consuming great quantities of energy, time, devotion and attention of the Christian community, robbing the church of its true spiritual life and diverting its evangelistic thrust. The first of these will be a host of activities which we will group under the one heading of "Christian" Government.

Christian Government can properly be applied to only one thing: Church government, government among a body of people that are distinctly Christian. That is, a theocracy which is administered by Christ Himself through the agency of the Holy Spirit and gifted elders. It is government of a covenant written not on paper or engraved in stones, but in the hearts of the governed (2 Corinthians 3:3, Hebrews 10:16).

A general erosion and deterioration in moral standards everywhere has opened the gate for a flood of unjust, corrupt and outright immoral laws and judicial decisions. To name a few, decisions and statutes upholding such things as abortion (infanticide), homosexuality (sodomy), Equal Rights Amendment (confounding the natural and divine order of the sexes), interference in family and benevolent activities involving children, robbing parents of their rights to educate their children properly, etc. These have all precipitated a storm of protest from Christians and others who hold Biblical moral values. Also of serious concern to Christian patriots has been the Federal Government's soft and retreating position in respect to foreign policy ever since Roosevelt betrayed us at Potsdam and Harry Truman fired McArthur for trying to win the Korean war.

It is not surprising, then, when the August 1979 Conservative Digest carries a front cover picture of Jerry Falwell along with the lead line "Mobilizing the Moral Majority." The article goes on to list a number of Christian preachers and Christian organizations which are preaching and mobilizing for action to bring pressure for the implementation of Christian principles in government. Some of the preachers: Falwell, Lester Roloff, Pat Robertson, James Robison, Bob Billings and Charles Stanley. Some of the organizations are National Christian Action Coalition, The Moral Majority, Christian Voice and American Christian Cause.

While I am in whole-hearted sympathy with the objectives of these men and these organizations, I feel that it must be realized that these are moral objectives and not exclusively Christian. Others who have no Christian persuasion whatever desire them with an equal fervor. The scriptures expressly forbid believers to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14) for any cause whatever. Also, all this activity under the heading of Christian presents an altogether distorted picture of what Christianity is. I hope to demonstrate that not only is "Christian" State government impossible, but that it is undesirable. I will go yet further and show that it would be a disaster to implement exclusively Christian principles in the process of human government.

Christianity brings no new morality into the world. No only did Judaism have a perfect moral code delivered by the one true God, but most major religions of the world through the centuries have had the

same moral code in some form as is spelled out in the Mosaic Law. Also, it is true that men in any degree of civilization everywhere make laws strikingly close to the moral principles that we embrace as Christians. So far as Christian doctrine is concerned, we only have two things that we can call exclusively Christian: Grace and Liberty. The first thing the believer experiences upon trusting Christ as a guilty sinner condemned by the holy Law of God is mercy, the grace of God in the forgiveness of his transgressions. The next thing he experiences is complete liberty. He is free from every law, principality and power except Christ alone. Becoming Christ's exclusive possession, he is free from the claims, demands and intimidations by any other power in the universe. In that sense Christians are peculiar and different from all other persons on the face of the earth.

Because the Christian has free mercy and pardon, has been granted reprieve from God's justice and retribution, the guiding principles of the Christian community is the same. Jesus gives them in the Sermon on the Mount. We are to love our enemies, bless them who curse us, do good to those who would abuse us, to take no vengeance, to give to the borrower, asking nothing in return, to forgive unceasingly those who unceasingly offend us. There is no place in the Christian economy for punishment or revenge. That has all been undertaken by God alone in the person of Christ. Such is the nature of Christianity and of such are all principles that are uniquely Christian.

These kinds of principles can obviously work *only* in and among those who *are* Christians, born again people. Only spiritually renewed persons can turn the other cheek when struck, can lovingly bestow a gift upon the person who has just deprived him of his own property. And it is obvious that these rules were given to bring truth to bear upon only those who are teachable, Christians themselves. Otherwise, a man would quickly lose all he had and would become so downtrodden as to be incapacitated to serve God at all. We are not to give that which is holy to the dogs or to cast our pearls before swine.

Human government, on the other hand, is based upon entirely different principles. It is defined soundly by law, constitutions, and statutes written and recorded by which men's actions are to be governed. While Christians have no law but Christ, non-Christians recognize no law in Christ at all and must be controlled by men's laws and corresponding penalties. Christian principles are based upon the premise that those governed will do right, and if they do *not* do right, they testify that they are not Christians and are excluded from the company of believers (Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:11,***). Principles of human government, on the other hand, are based upon the premise that men will always do wrong and must be forced to do right. Legal contracts, affidavits, penalties threatened, all testify to the fact that men cannot trust one another and expect to be lied to, cheated, stolen from and defrauded. Human experience has taught them that such is the case.

It should be immediately evident that the principles of government forbidden in the Christian community are absolutely necessary in the non-Christian. To treat moral outlaws, liars, thieves, cheats, as Holy Spirit-led men is to invite economic and social chaos. Let us consider a few aspects of human government as they would appear were the term Christian rightly applied to them.

Christian Nation. The United States of America has been often referred to as a Christian Nation. Let us be reminded that this nation was born in a rebellion. A rebellion that is expressly forbidden in Romans 13:1-7. Our fathers rebelled against the "tribute" and "custom" that is explicitly enjoined in verse 7. Make no mistake about it, religious liberty was not the issue. It was money, tax dollars, profit. They wanted to be free to govern themselves politically and economically to their own advantage. And whatever virtue this might have as a moral issue among men, or however desirous it might have been, it cannot be called Christian to rebel to obtain it.

The dissenting Puritans who set up the civil governments in New England were no more tolerant of those who did not embrace their views than were the Anglicans whose tyranny they fled. And while their rigid and stern enforcement of punitive justice contained much we should emulate in civil government today, it was drawn from Old Testament law, not New Testament Christianity.

This nation never has been Christian. It was once far more moral than it now is because it was governed by principles laid down in God's laws for human government. No nation or government can survive long without them. It embraced those laws, not because of fear or respect to God, but because it recognized that they were the best rules upon which to found a human society.

Christian Laws. It must be evident by now that laws which are passed to regulate a human society must not be Christian. While Christianity sanctions the right to gain and own property and forbids stealing, it allows no penalty for the one who does steal. While it expressly forbids any kind of sexual impurity, the Christian cannot stone the adulterer or execute the homosexual and rapist. Human history has demonstrated that civilized order among men cannot long be maintained when capital punishment is not threatened and used. Yet Christ tells us that if we are not ourselves sinless, we cannot condemn the murderer as a greater sinner. No one is holy enough to cast the first stone.

Think about this before we begin to cry for Christian laws. Do we really want to abolish all punitive justice? Would we have the state put away the sword of justice and leave mobs to pillage, rape, plunder at their own whims?

It has been just this sort of confusion of so-called principles of grace and mercy corrupted into a sort of soft humanistic sentiment that has so watered down our civil and criminal codes now that we no longer have penal institutions where outlaws pay a penalty for their crimes, but "departments of corrections" where depraved men vainly hope to correct depraved men. The responsibility of Christian government among Christians is to correct one another . . . God chastens (teaches) His children, but it is the responsibility of human government to *punish* criminals, not correct them.

We must have moral laws, laws in accordance with a strict code of justice. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If men find the price of crime too high, they will abandon it. And if men find that their crimes are too great for them to pay the price, there is a Saviour for them, and they can enter into the mercy and grace found in the Christian community.

Christian Foreign Policy. Now, what should our Foreign Policy be like if it were Christian? Christianity demands honesty, openness, unqualified integrity, and forbids lying, secrecy, deception, fraudulent promotion and publicity. And indeed, the church must conduct its affairs in this way. One of the most odious reproaches upon the church today is that it has adopted the world's philosophy, "the end justifies the means," vainly imagining that clever, deceitful advertising and promotion produces spiritual converts.

Yet governments, especially in relations with hostile governments, *must* employ secrecy and deceit if it is to survive. Can you imagine a nation so naïve as to believe all that other governments told them about themselves, their intentions and their activities, a nation who thought they could survive without a secret intelligence gathering agency, without spies, without propaganda, without putting up a front of doing one thing while in fact doing something else? Before you become too shocked at my suggestion that this is a moral and legitimate activity of human governments, I suggest that you review some of the security measures, the strategies and tactics of Joshua, the Judges and the Kings of Judah and Israel in their

struggles with their adversaries. May God deliver us from a Christian Central Intelligence Agency, Christian spies, and a Christian FBI. The more cleverly deceitful, the better the lies, the more successfully fraudulently they perform their jobs, the more secure our nation.

And what shall we say of war itself? No matter how loud the flag-waving patriots may shout it, there is no way you can wage a Christian war. If Christ forbids the stoning of a guilty offender, how can we bomb and gun down law-abiding persons who may even be our brethren in Christ? Yet the state has the right to bear the sword. Romans 13:4 tells us that it not only has the God-ordained responsibility to bear it, but that God sees to it that it will not be borne in vain.

Let believers be conscientious objectors, let them be exempted from combat service; they have such a right. But let us not protest against the moral right and God-ordained responsibility for the non-Christian state to bear arms. Does this seem like a double standard? It most certainly is. There is a standard for the governments and the people of this world, and there is a standard for the government and the people of Christ. We are to render to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's. You must make a double standard somewhere. If it is right for the Christian to go to war and kill, it is right for him to take vengeance on his enemy, but Christ expressly forbids that. Yet if we have a Christian government, it must be a "pacifist" government which will not defend itself, and that government will quickly become the prey of an aggressive nation. War and national security are a necessary evil for this life. The dead must be buried. Let the dead to it.

Now, someone will say that this puts the Christians in the role of freeloaders. They will not fight, but are willing to reap the fruits won by the blood of others. Let me answer that charge. It is not the Christian's fight. Spiritual life, the gospel, are not the issue. The issues of men's wars are politics, power, economics, wealth, pride and prejudice. The true gospel is hated just as much in a democracy as in a totalitarian state. It may have more outward privileges and peace in one than in the other, but that does not mean it may prosper more. In fact, it usually thrives better under oppression than otherwise. The other answer that I would give those who would charge that Christians are freeloaders, is that Christians are *ever* at war. The whole world of unbelievers freeload upon Christians. They are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are all that keep truth, a true moral standard, upheld. It is their influence which restrains moral and civil chaos at all times. Hospitals, schools, orphanages and all other truly benevolent institutions all have Christians roots. Christians have an altogether moral right to partake in the benefits of society without engaging in the bloody carnages of war. If men heeded the gospel message of true Christianity, there would be no more war. Wars are not the Christian's business.

Christian Magistrates. May men charged with the responsibility of enforcing and executing civil and criminal law perform their jobs in a Christian manner? We should certainly hope not! The same conflict in the realm of honesty, openness versus deception and secrecy applies in dealing with criminals as it does with alien governments. Can you imagine the vice squad giving public notice of its intention to raid such and such a night club, whore house, or drug distribution center at such and such a time? Can you imagine a policeman turning the other cheek when a felon resists arrest? Who would advocate a judge who, when faced with a proven criminal, always forgives him and turns him loose?

Law enforcement always requires undercover work, secret investigations, feints to divert the attention of the criminal, lies and fraudulent misrepresentation of agents. It often requires use of swift, violent and sometimes brutal force in overcoming and apprehending dangerous criminals. Such actions cannot properly be called Christian, but they are most certainly moral and absolutely essential in human government.

I will not be misunderstood about this. We are not suggesting that detectives and undercover agents be liars, cheats, masters of deception, professional con artists. Nor are we suggesting that judges should be hard-nosed merciless tyrants, or that policemen should be cruel sadists looking for excuses to maim and kill. These men can and ought to be men of the highest integrity, given to merciful considerations, strong but gentle men. But in the end, their employment demands that they must sometimes use unchristian means to reach the end their jobs require.

Christian Politicians. But should not Christians become involved in politics? Should we not encourage born-again men to candidate for public office. The concept sounds good on the surface, but let us examine some of the ramifications. Upon what platform is the Christian candidate going to run? The Christian's affections and desires are as different from those of the world as light is from darkness. He has an entirely different set of values. And even when his moral values corresponds to some of those in the world, those who agree with him will surely be a small minority, certainly not enough to get him elected. It is the custom of politicians to make a survey and find out how the voting public feels about certain issues, and then come out for those issues. Is this not deception and dishonesty? How can a Christian do it? It is well known that the name of the game in politics is compromise. You give and take what is necessary to secure what you want done. You cannot support or oppose things solely on their merit or demerit, but on political expediency. There is no other way you can survive politically.

What politician, when elected to office performed and delivered all he promised in his campaign? If a man ran on the basis of what he could actually do when elected, few, indeed, would vote for him. He must promise more than he can deliver in order to seduce people to vote for him.

A classic demonstration of the fallacy of Christian politicians may be seen in the case of the present President of the United States. He has denied the Biblical position of husband and wife in his persistent promotion of ERA. He has not appointed a single conservative Christian to a high government post. Instead, he has appointed radical, loud-mouthed, anti-home, pro-abortion activists like Patricia Wald, Sarah Weddington and Bella Abzug. While giving lip service to Christianity and human rights, he has turned his back on the pro-Christian governments of Taiwan and Rhodesia in favor of communists and outlaw terrorists. He gives away the Panama Canal, and now wants the Senate to ratify a treaty with Russia, that every military and foreign relations man in the country who is *free to speak* tells us will be fatally detrimental to our nation's defenses. I am not pointing out these things in order to attack President Carter. I am only demonstrating that perhaps it would have been better to have had an admitted heathen President who had a little more governmental wisdom and a lot more backbone.

Christian Blocs. Christian denominations are ever making resolutions, threatening voter clout, supporting lobbyists in an effort to effect or change legislation and court decisions concerning religion and moral issues. All this at the same time many of them are loudly preaching separation of church and state. Is this good? Is it wise? Is it consistent? Is it the best use we can make of our time, money and energies with which the Lord has entrusted us? Let me make a few observations and offer some warnings.

We ought to be careful who we join with on any issue. It has already been noted that the Lord forbids us to yoke up with unbelievers. Also, a man to whom we give our support may "buy" our support with one desirable act of legislation, but prove to be a painful embarrassment to us on a host of others. We ought to be careful lest we bring reproach upon the gospel of Christ and His church by identifying a particular politician or a particular political issue with us. If we support a man or a particular position, let us do it as a citizen, not as a Christian, a representative of the Church. If a Christian runs for public office, and

imagines that he can maintain his integrity in doing so, let him do it as a politician with political alliances, not as a Christian, representative of the Christian faith. Let Christian magistrates prosecute the duties of their office as public servants, carrying out the wishes of the people and executing the laws of the land in a clear conscience with mercy, kindness, yet firm resolve and integrity. We do not have Christian policemen, Christian judges, Christian congressmen, Christian board and jurymen. We have policemen, judges, congressmen, board and jurymen, some of whom are Christian. There is a great difference.

Let me also say a word about the crusades to “Turn America back to God” and Save America.” I say this, loving my country no less than the hottest-hearted patriot: It may not be God’s purpose to “save” America. Some of the worst false prophets in the Old Testament were the yes-men of the king’s court who steadfastly proclaimed that God would come and fight for the city of Jerusalem and would never allow it to fall. Also recorded is God’s warning that only those who surrendered to the armies of Babylon would survive and receive the blessing of the Lord. Those who resisted would be destroyed. It was fulfilled exactly as God promised.

Nor is it necessary to prophesy that “God is going to judge America.” Ruth Graham’s logic that “If God does not judge America, He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah,” may be good human logic, but it is not very theologically sound. Divine retribution occurs in only two places: At the Cross of Christ where believers were judged, and at the Lake of Fire where unbelievers will be judged. He has *reserved* the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished (1 Peter 2:9). The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a one-time historical event to teach us God’s displeasure with homosexuality. It was given as an *example* unto those who should after live ungodly (2 Peter 2:6), not as divine retribution as a consistent effect and cause. Such temporal destructions serve a didactic purpose to teach of coming eternal judgment; they are no punitive. God *may* destroy America, but He is not morally obliged to. Such thinking betrays the idea that God’s blessings on America are also deserved and owed because of our supposed goodness.

Finally, let me say that moral corruption in government, insane and illogical court decisions, betrayal of the trust and will of the people, anti-biblical legislations of all kinds involving the family, education, economics and general public good . . . these all provide the easiest and most attractive target for polemic preaching and writing. I could easily fill two Gateposts a week with outrageous things the government is currently doing. I could fill every sermon with inflammatory examples of what is currently happening. And I would be blessed and praised, lauded and admired from every Fundamental Christian sector. Hargis and McIntire have demonstrated how easily and quickly funds can be raised by such preaching . . . But . . . I would be *out* of the ministry. That is *not* the gospel message. It stirs up nothing but hate, suspicion and rebellion. It neither brings men to Christ nor edifies the Christian. We are in this world but not of it. *Our* true government, our kingdom, is of another realm. And the success of our ministry does not depend upon the relative condition of the governments of this world. It depends upon the attendant blessings of our dear Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit on the preaching of the word of God, not current social and political conditions.

- C. M.