

# Sovereign God / Sovereign Nation?

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In response to one of our Peninsula Bible Church (PBC) web site visitors, I have been asked to explain what I think my Christian responsibility is towards government in general and our nation's politics in particular. This is not the last word on the subject by any means but how it looks from my perspective as a member of the *Far Above* party.

As usual, we have to ask the right kind of questions. These are not the kind of queries that can be answered with a few of those moldy old heresies that usually pass for explanations of Jesus' politics. Our nation's theological leadership has been focused on regulating society's bedazzling carnival for so long that what emerges as teaching about state and church amounts either to naked ambition or a few ignorantly chosen Bible verses and a bunch of, "I'm-against-its." A kind of Bible-quoting fast talk uttered out of the side of the mouth, "Keep your eye on the pea son, your eye on the shell. Stand back boy. Yes sir, Keep your eye on the shell...and oh yea, "render unto Caesars."

In these days of multimedia, the Church has a whole new point of view to deal with: the whole world is watching.

Christians who are concerned enough about our government to get involved certainly intend to do good in their political pursuits. They are aware of the crusades, inquisitions and witch hunts of the past. They believe, along with our critics, that those events do not represent the interests of Christ and they have no intention of repeating them. I wonder though, if our scarlet lettered forefathers saw themselves just as rightly motivated? Personally, I have my doubts about the world's view of the Christian Chronicle.

Most Christians don't question what popular history has to say about religion and rulers, namely that more atrocities are committed in God's name than acts of godliness. Is this really true? If so, is it because there are more evil people in the world than good people? On the other hand, perhaps there are good people and good deeds that go unattended. Maybe they even out-number the evil ones.

God knows. He perceives what motivates our hearts. We need not wait for His opinion. Merely by His coming He has and is individually judging the conduct of each one of us. Oh yes, He certainly knows what's good and He is surprisingly cool about it. He doesn't ask for much at all when it comes to good things to do. Jesus said, "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you he shall not lose his reward." (Mat 10:42 )

That doesn't sound hard to do. It won't get your name in print or garner the admiration of your fellow Christians, but God will notice and reward you. He must desire more of this kind of behavior or there wouldn't be a reward given.

This is a quote I came across. It might explain why history ignores the genesis of this kind of good fruit and many other things that produce and reproduce a harvest of kindness:

"History celebrates the battle-fields whereon we meet our death, but scorns to speak of the ploughed fields whereby we thrive; it knows the names of the kings' bastards, but cannot tell you the origin of wheat." (J.H. Fabre, French. 19th century entomologist).

Incidentally, wheat mutated into an edible, palatable plant at the same time man stopped his hunting and gathering, thereby creating the first have/ have-not situation. This probably produced the first war which some

scholars believe was on the plains of Megiddo. That would place Armageddon as the battleground for the first and last war. It would be just like God to bring it full circle.

As far as politically active Christians are concerned, I don't want to cast the proverbial first stone of aspersion at anyone's efforts in God's name, lest I be found guilty of judging their worship. I know a man, a retired Army General, who bears on his body the scars of having laid down his life on my behalf. I didn't ask him to do that. In fact, I vigorously opposed the war in Viet Nam. Yet my opinion of that war does not make the laying down of his life for me any less of a loving act. Yes, loving! It is hard to see any action in war as loving but I can not argue with his scars. He believes that his job, given to him by our living God, is laying down his life to protect me and mine. I have no doubt of his tested sincere faith (owing to those scars). He has and will continue to defend me against enemies that are unknown to me.

Sometimes Christians take note of the existence of humble acts of kindness. Not often. The Church has been pretty focused on the media for a long time. After all, who was the first to use the new medium of movable type? Do you know what the next hot thing was after printing the Bible? It was looking for your own name in print. What do you want to bet?

In this age, as in ages past, some Christian men and women believe they should involve themselves in the process of government in order to do good works in the work place of politics. They believe that they should actively involve themselves in the nation's government as well as in any local version of the "elders in the city gates". Once they are there, they hope to sustain and uphold Christian virtues for the sake of nothing less than the future of our nation and God's continued blessing of it.

Most thinking and praying Christians know that we are not and have never been a "Christian Nation". Israel is still the only nation that has a covenant with God. For Christians involved in the body politic it doesn't end there. In much the same way that Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom and "righteous Lot", they see themselves in an intercessory roll. "Then he said, "Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it on account of the ten." (Genesis 18:32 )

Some politically active Christians want to insure that there will be at least ten righteous folks in our nation in order to stave off the wrath of God. I can't argue with that. I'm a lot like Lot. I even like Los Angeles. Rather than changing the world, I want God to give me joy while I'm here and to get me out before the faith hits the fire. I would also like Him to bring along as many others as I can persuade to call upon His name. I just have a hard time finding the time for what generally sound like good political causes.

I have another problem with being a Christian and being politically active. I was in the midst of an intense political rebellion at the time that God called me. I used to feel utterly powerless before what President Eisenhower, dubbed the "Military Industrial Complex". I don't feel powerless anymore because I'm part of the secret government of the world. I possess divine power. Not the power of kings, invading and conquering, but the power to change the very character of my foes through the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified. I think Jesus has made politics obsolete in my life. Maybe this is not true for everyone but it is for me.

There is another issue that bothers me. In our form of government we use the media a lot. A big lot. That means public relations, sound bites, comments, spin control and God knows what else. Yes indeed, God does know what else. And so do a lot of people. That's because in politics, one's good deeds become public and one needs to be known to be voted in. A lot of press coverage goes in to that.

So this is what I think. I don't want to lose my heavenly treasure by getting all that street-cornerish reward down here now (in the form of electoral attention). "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (Mat 6:1 )

I want to experience what God says He will do. He sees in secret and rewards in the open. I want to hear Jesus say, "Come in good and faithful servant and sit down right here with me". In fact I think I hear Him now. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus," (Eph 2:4-6)

It is an "elected" position, being a member of the "far above" party. But not to worry, the vote is in. We are already in that very high place, "which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come." (Eph 1:20-21)

That's it. That's where I am politically speaking. Not right. Not left. But "far above" (it sounds a little wacky but it's theologically correct. Politically speaking, it sounds nutty). Oh well, so I can't rule the world. What can I do?

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." (Rom 12:1)

A good place to start. Lots of people say they would gladly die for God but what He actually is asking for is your body as a "living and holy sacrifice". In the ancient world offering a dead anything was viewed as pretty much unclean. In all the great pagan religions of our forbears the hot thing was "live" sacrifices, the virgin down the old volcano rift. That was what our ancestors believed was a sure fire way to please the gods. Dying for God Is O.K. but there literally is no future in it. At least not here on Earth.

I know that this does not explain why our merciful God allows us to have kings that we deserve instead of those who are more like Abe Lincoln. But I do know that we, the Church, His body, are truly a lot more powerful and effective than we generally suppose. We are the power behind the throne, we are what protects the world and our own nation from the most frightening thing of all: the wrath of God.

"For we know Him who said, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'the Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:30-31)

This being the state of the union, it would seem to me that we can do more outside of the usual political channels than being bogged down in its bureaucracy. With Christ, and Christ alone, we have the power to change people who in turn change all of the world's governments. To be sure, there are brothers and sisters in any government who are laying down their lives for our sake. Most of those, I'm sure, prefer their reward in secret so we don't hear much about them. History records the notorious, not the righteous.

Certainly in circumstances where immediate action is needed, problems can be addressed from obscurity more effectively than from government office. My friend the general, after retiring from the army, has spent his time smuggling Bibles into countries that forbade them. To him it is the same war he always fought. Now he uses different weapons.

What about a Christian's position on the popular political issues of the day? How about this? "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Just how valuable to a worldly cause is a person who is "dead". Not much I imagine. We answer to the highest power that anyone could possibly commit one's self to. Our commitment must be complete. Anything less is just that, less. Other causes seek a commitment from me that I no longer have to give.

"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him, a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all."

(Colossians 3:1-11)

I'm not aware of anything Jesus has left undone that we could fix with a political movement. I'm more concerned with how fast everything is going to hell! The ship of state needs to launch the lifeboats.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." (Rom 1:18-25)

To those Christians who live where we live near San Francisco, these verses scare the bee-jee-bees out of us because we have been watching the effects of being "given over" for more than twenty years. I'm not kidding, man the lifeboats, throw out a line, people are perishing. Political action is way too slow. If you care about your nation, evangelize. It's faster and more effective than anything else you could do. And, contrary to popular Christian TV, it doesn't cost anything (well, maybe your life, but after that, it's free)

I don't recall ever hearing a political speech or song that measured up to this passage.

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you with all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:16-17)

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[Back to Ted Wise's Index Page](#)