

Christian Truth: How does it Function in Politics?

"I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." Christians in every nation and state confess this truth. But how does it function in national and international politics? The Christian doctrine of creation requires respect for God's earth. Man does not own the land upon which he walks. "The earth is the Lord's," says the psalmist (Ps. 24:1). God has entrusted the earth to man's care. Man is God's steward. The land which God gave to His covenant people remained "the Lord's land" (Josh. 22:19: cf. Ps. 85:1) God retains the "title deed" to the land. The law of Jubilee was founded on this fact. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). We are held accountable to God for what we do with His land. This is the perspective from which Christians approach the hot topic whether each nation has the right to its own state. As David Atkinson points out: "Before there is any talk about...national sovereign territory ... the first conviction that needs to be re-emphasized is that the 'earth is the Lord's', and the human task is primarily one of stewardship."

God is also supreme and absolutely sovereign. His rule is exercised over the whole of creation and over all mankind. His rule is not confined to Christians only. It covers also those who rebel against Him. "Dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:28). All nations are subject to His ordinances. He alone has power and might none can withstand (2 Chron. 20:6). All nations and states are subordinate to God. "By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth" (Prov. 8:15f.).

Since the Creator is the sole sovereign over all of creation, a Christian's allegiance to a particular nation, nationality or state, can never be absolute or unconditional because his highest loyalty is to God alone (Ex. 20:3; Acts. 5:29). Nationalism turns into poison when it becomes an end to itself. The slogan "my country, right or wrong," is not a Biblical concept. No Christian can passively subject himself to any state. He acknowledges that the authority of the state is derived from God (Rom. 13:1f.). Civil governments are accountable to the law of God, the justice of God, and the authority of God. If governments resort to tyranny and fail to be impartial in judgment, they are betrayers of a sacred trust and breakers of the divine law. "Do not show partiality in judging," said Moses to the judges he appointed, "hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man. For judgment belongs to God" (Deut. 1:17).

God created man in His image. And out of this one man Adam, God "made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Act 17:26). Whether we live in China or in Canada, we share a common humanity. What unites us is greater than what divides us as nations.

The table of nations (Gen. 10) shows the unity of the human race as an historic reality. All nations trace their ancestry to Noah. The diversity of nations has its origin in God's intervention in Babel. The building of the tower was a project of pride, cultural prejudice,

and rebellion. The people in Babel wanted to cluster together as one nation. God intervened, confused their language so that they could not understand each other. God's norm is diversity in language, culture and nations. (Gen. 11) Genesis 10 and 11 teach us to be critical over against nationalism and to abhor racism. They show that a globalism, which denies cultural and national diversity, is also wrong. National diversity within the humanity of mankind is assumed in Scripture. There is no indication that the diversity of nations ought to be replaced by a unified international order. Revelation 13 suggests that if a new one world order would arise, it could be the most monstrous force for persecution, evil, and denial of liberty that history has ever seen.

The State, the territory in which nations live, is not part of God's creation order. God ordained the state to make life possible in a fallen world. It is God's instrument to bring justice and harmony to the affairs of men.

We believe that because of the depravity of the human race our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil officers. He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies so that human lawlessness may be restrained and that everything may be conducted in good order among human beings (Belgic Confession, Art. 36).

If the state ceases to do this and gives itself over to evil, it becomes a tyrant and subject to God's judgment. The state has a clear-cut role. And to keep the state to its original mandate is the responsibility of every Christian.

Scripture emphatically teaches God's sovereignty over all of His creation, and that man is universally sinful. Sinful man disobeys the Word of God, brings conflict among nations and states. He afflicts the world with chaos and death. Our daily newspapers testify to man's fallen nature. They report on crime, internal conflict, international warfare, corruption and injustice. Yet the tower of Babel builders have never given up hope. Despite the history of vice and corruption man still believes in the possibility of a new world order. Until the outbreak of World War I in 1914 he believed that it would come through international treaties, international labour unions, and socialism. But the war that was supposed to end all wars was only an introduction to the evils which would engulf all of mankind during World War II. Yet man remains optimistic about human nature despite all the evidence that points to the contrary. Man is easily tempted to use his talents for self-advancement and personal gain. The historian Samuel Rawson Gardiner warned that "Too much power is never good for man or nation."

Christians have a dual citizenship, both earthly and heavenly. They are not only Americans, Canadians, or whatever. They also belong to the "holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9), the church of Jesus Christ, "elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth." The church transcends nations and territorial boundaries. Its members come from every tribe and race. I recall a worship service I attended at an international church in Los Angeles. Christians from a variety of cultures and racial backgrounds were united in fellowship and adoration of their God. In worship our differences fell away. But how often do we transcend loyalty to an earthly country? I agree with Dr. Wolterstorff's observation, "... in the modern world, loyalty to nation has bitten so deeply into the life of

the church that most Christians in America feel themselves less united as members of one holy dedicated nation with those in Russia, in Vietnam, in Germany, or in El Salvador than they feel themselves divided from them as Americans in distinction from Russians, from Vietnamese, from Germans, from Salvadorans." During the "turbot war" with Spain, Canadians were also struck by a nationalist fever.

The Bible also teaches the unity of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom cannot be divided into states. This kingdom has been established by Christ because He already possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). All who place their trust and confidence in God and expect everything from Him shall inherit the Kingdom. This "Gospel of the Kingdom" must be preached to all nations. The nations must also be taught "the structured righteousness of the kingdom of God." Kingdom citizens come from every tribe and nation. Their identities will not be erased when Christ returns.

The apostle John saw before him "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).

With Christ's second coming all states will perish. Then "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). When we live by the Bible we will not be idolatrous nationalists, internationalists or globalists. God ordained states as a means to restrain sin and to bring the world to a higher level of development. A new world order will not come until Christ returns. It is vain and even sinful to try to achieve it by our own efforts. On the new earth, diversity will remain. There will be a great mosaic of nations each expressing in their own way the greatness and riches of God's creation.

Generally speaking, it may be said that we have the state we deserve. In our peribus days Christians must acknowledge, therefore, their responsibility for the state in which they reside. Yet their first loyalty is to their heavenly country, "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).