

Spheres of Authority

The Great Depression of the Thirties robbed people of their jobs, their savings and their well being. Thousands of men rode in box cars west to Vancouver looking for work and, finding none, rode back again. A joke was told in Saskatoon about a man who fell into the Saskatchewan River and five men, leaning over the bridge, shouting questions to him concerning his name and place of employment. As soon as they got the information, they raced off in an attempt to get his job, leaving the poor fellow to drown. A morbid joke. Yet it accurately described the misery and discouragement so many felt. Governments responded by accepting the collective responsibility for the well being of their citizens. Governments developed an activist-centralist-corporate view of the state. The state began to provide services to meet the needs of individuals and families. Family allowances, medi-care, unemployment insurance, pensions and welfare, which together form our social safety net, were introduced.

The booklet, *Social Security in Canada*, published by Human Resources in Canada in 1993, professed its faith in the success of the welfare state:

Canadians have built a social safety net over the past fifty years that has become an essential part of our national identity. It has helped individuals cope with change and ensured a basic quality of life that makes Canada one of the most desirable places to live in the world. It has contributed to the economic strength in the form of an educated population, trained workers and a secure social environment.

The rise of the welfare state coincided with the decline of Christianity in public life. The march towards privatization of the faith had begun. Christians retreated into the fortresses of home and church. A narrow view of Christian life with the safe compartmentalization of the sacred and the secular was adopted.

Advocates of the welfare state have an optimistic view of man. The evils of society are due to lack of knowledge, which thwarted human beings from realizing their potential. Man is basically good and perfectible. If only all citizens can be provided with education, positive legislation and a healthy environment, we will have a just and fair society. The Biblical view of salvation has been reduced to salvation through economics and technology. Technology and human autonomy have become deified. Salvation means, according to Alvin Toffler, "the safe transmission to a decent civilization".

Who funds the welfare state? Its citizens! Taxes are more than a source of revenue for the government. They reveal the philosophy of the government in power. Taxes become an instrument of social policy, welfare and economic management. In his book, *War Against the Family*, William Gairdner asserts that government taxation policies work against the family. He observes, "It is not an exaggeration to say that the family haven has been invaded more by the long arm of tax policy than by any other factor of in our times." and he sites case after case to prove his point.

The Canadian welfare has managed its fiscal affairs badly. For the last thirty years successive governments spent money as if citizens had unlimited ability to pay taxes. They forgot that history suggests that the reason for national decline is, as a rule, that the State sought to do too much, not too little.

But the welfare state is now in crisis. The recessions, the constant deficit spending to finance the increasing dependency upon the state for social assistance led to a financial crisis. The Liberal government had to re-examine its policies outlined in its red book. The budget tabled by the government in February (1996) informed the nation that the universal cradle-to-grave social security system is no longer affordable. Programs will have to be reevaluated. Paul Martin even said that "if the government doesn't need to run something, it shouldn't."

Did the Liberals change their political colours? Not at all! They were forced into cutbacks because of the horrendous national debt, and the public concern about the effectiveness of the welfare state. Many are now wondering what the "nanny" state is doing to the emotional and spiritual health of the nation.

The Liberals still believe in a centralist corporate government. Their hands are still into everything. Lloyd Axworthy, the federal Human Resources Development minister, told a feminist lobby group that his department maintained the funding for women's programs existing levels. He even promised to promote and protect them. Axworthy also revealed that the government "felt it absolutely crucial" to supply more than \$ 4 million to women's groups for "intervenor funding" in high profile Charter of Freedoms and Rights challenges. Day-care is still in the Liberal agenda waiting for implementation. Liberal senator Phillippe Deane Gigantes, special assistant to the former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, pleads for affordable day-care for women with small children. He believes that otherwise they are prisoners of their motherhood. If this is not social engineering, I don't know what else it could be!

But we must do more than be moan Liberal policies. The Christian Heritage Party must clearly state its political philosophy. Let me be explicit. Over against the liberal democratic-corporate-paternalistic view of the state, we advocate a normative democracy based on principles derived from God's Word. The government is God's servant with a limited mandate. It must stay within the public domain. This means that the government has no right to interfere with the family, church, school, the arts the shining of our culture.

Everything exists for God, is dependant on Him and comes under His authority. We are on earth to serve God whether in church, state, or school. Our service to God manifests itself in different spheres. Each sphere has its own order, nature and task. In each sphere of activity we recognize that God is sovereign, who rules over all things through Christ. As Creator and Provider, each sphere of life does not exist by the grace of the state but by the grace of God.

This is how it works in practice. For example, the church - as a faith community- has a different sphere of activity than the state. Although the Gospel the pastor preaches applies to all of life, he may not tell the state what to do. This is beyond his sphere of duty. And the state has no right to interfere with the affairs or the message of the Church. Another example is the family. The family is God-ordained. Children do not belong to the state. The state has no business imposing its secular humanist values upon the youth of our land. Parents have been entrusted with the responsibility to educate their children in fear of the Lord. Therefore, parents should have the right to send their children to a school of their choice without being financially penalized for it. The only task the government has is to ensure that schools function properly and get financial support for their operational budget. The state has no authority as far as the philosophy of education is informed. The CHP, therefore, supports the right of the parents to choose a school that conforms to their faith commitment.

The task of the government is limited to servanthood. As servant of God the government has the duty to safeguard its citizens, to maintain rules which make society possible, and to carry out public justice. And we must make it abundantly clear that the Biblical concept of justice is more than law and order enforcement. The CHP must promote Jesus' passion for justice. The Gospel of the Cross has an ethical impact. If we do not share in the compassion and the justice of Jesus, we fall short of the demands of the Gospel. Those in government are also mandated to keep the first and second great commandments. Love God. Love your neighbour. In need for our deficit cutting and balanced budgets, we may not neglect to do justice to the weak and the poor (Isaiah 32:1, 7; Matt.6:33; Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:4). In the public domain the government must exercise justice.

Because so many are cynical about "traditional" politicians and question their platforms and promises, the CHP has a God-given opportunity to provide the nation with a viable and workable alternative.

Johan D. Tangalder
September, 1996