

An awareness of the meaning of Christ's lordship and the complexity of the realm of "Caesar" can free us for greater usefulness.

The Things That Are Caesar's

PART III

by John Howard Yoder

In our first installment we asked whether, and why, the Christian can, and in fact should, give thought to the standards which apply to the state's exercise of its authority. The Christian must do this not merely because he must know where lie the limits of his duty to obey the state—this in itself already forces us to think about the state's duty—but rather because it is a part of the proclamation of God's sovereignty over all history, or, to speak the Bible's language, a part of the lordship of Christ when we tell the state, its policy makers, and its executive agents where they and their function fit into God's plan.

In the second article we saw that the standards which the Christian uses in speaking to the "powers that be" will be drawn from his knowledge of Christ, even though it is clearly the case that the state and statesmen do not seek to base their action on the foundations of repentance and faith which make Christian discipleship possible. These Christian standards will be rephrased, diluted, and otherwise modified in the processes of application, but it is still Christ's standards and not those drawn from pagan idealism or from the Old Testament by which the state must be judged.

To the examples of Christian critique of the social order already listed (the testimonies for human welfare and against nationalism, war, and the protective tariff), we might add many others. Beginning with the Old Testament's teachings about the duties of the just judge, the Bible has always called men to a preferential concern for the underprivileged. The "widows and orphans" are constantly referred to as de-

serving special attention because of their inability to defend themselves. Thus one of the themes of the Christian witness to the authorities will be the defense of the defenseless. Racial minorities, the economically weak, the political outcasts, and the victims of miscarriage of justice need to find advocates before the courts of public opinion and of law. When concern for the mistreatment of the working classes is left to the Marxists, when the denunciation of imperialism is left to Gandhian Hindus, when the struggle against racial segregation in the United States is left largely to humanistic nonviolent groups, when, in general, the moral initiative is taken up by non-Christian groups, this is a sign of the church's infidelity, a judgment on her silence.

Yet it is not only disinherited individuals who need to be defended. In this divided world the cause of the "other side" never gets a fair hearing. Castro and Khrushchev, powerful as they are within their own realms, are open to attacks, distorted reporting, and defamation within the United States with no one to check the virulence of the abuse.

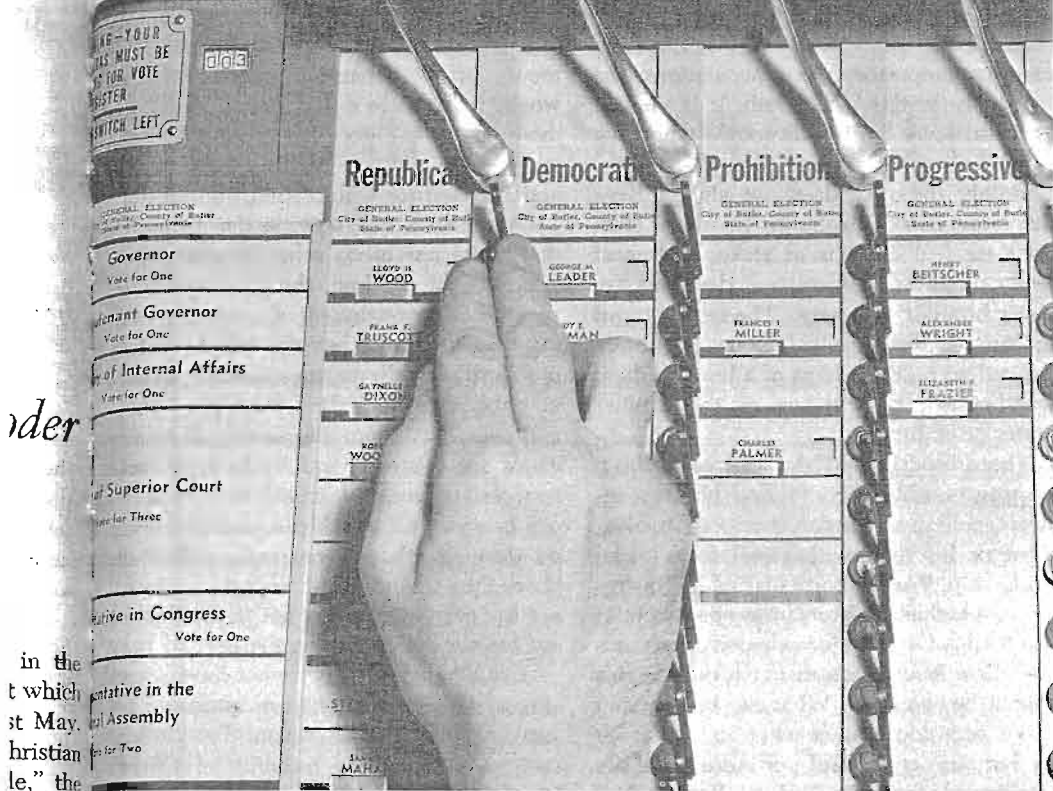
Without approving of Khrushchev's or Castro's methods, the Christian can at least remind his critics to compare his regime with its predecessor rather than with Anglo-Saxon traditions of democracy. He can ask whether the pressure tactics of United States diplomacy did not contribute to what such authoritarian rulers can get away with. Especially should this warning reminder be clear when "our side" has contributed in a blameworthy way to the augmentation of tensions and refuses to

accept the blame for doing so, as in the case of the espionage plane incident which destroyed the "summit talks" of last May.

In a sense, therefore, the Christian should always be "on the other side," the spokesman of the absent. This does not involve the claim that the "other side" is blameless or even less blameworthy than "our side," but it is simply a corrective in view of "our side's" constant tendency to selfish unfairness. Each nation assumes the validity of a "double standard" in its own favor. When American planes fly over Russia, this is explained as the Russians' fault for not permitting free movement of investigators, yet it is proclaimed to the world that the first Russian plane over North America will set off retaliatory missiles against Moscow. "We" build and arm air bases in Turkey and Pakistan, yet if the Russians send so much as a trade mission to Cuba, it is denounced as a threat to the peace of the whole Western Hemisphere.

In reality, the double standard should apply in the other way. If the West claims any allegiance to higher standards of morality, respect for law, and truthfulness, the sincerity of this claim will be tested by whether these standards are applied more critically and lived up to more fully on "our side." *Noblesse oblige*, the principle that he who claims greater moral worth thereby lays on himself greater obligations, is a general principle of moral insight which Christians should be especially concerned to apply.

Further analysis could elaborate still more guides for our witness to the authorities. We could note that each has a special duty to speak where his own peculiar



that such great changes make no difference in the spiritual significance of the state, so that teaching in a university or serving as a social worker is the same today as fighting in the Roman army in Jesus' time just because both are dependent on the state. Yet if the changes are so sweeping, is there then nothing left to guide us but a few vague generalities or the arbitrary whims of "conscience" or "common sense"?

Christians seem always to have tried to choose one of these extremes. Some have been so struck by the changes, especially by the coming of democracy, and by the acceptance of Christianity as a favored religion as to argue that the life of the New Testament church is of no help at all in our day. They think we should better be guided by secular views of "peace" and "justice" and keep our religion inside the individual. Others, with a strong confidence in the clarity and solidity of words, would be so sure that the "state" is always the "state" that they will speak in one breath of the United States President and the "avenger of blood" of the early Old Testament laws and include the righteousness of modern war (for the state) as part of Caesar's "not bearing the sword in vain."

Both of these extremes result from the failure to be critical about the meaning of the word "state," a word which the Bible does not use. The Bible speaks of "the authorities" or of "the sword," terms which point not to an organization with multiple functions, but to one particular function—the wielding of hurtful power in the interest of order. If this is what we mean by "state," and we watch our words carefully, then it is clear that there will always be a state and that its function is not one to which the Christian disciple is called. Yet let us not be hasty in concluding which services and activities in the modern agency, called "state" as well but immeasurably different from the definition just given, are also excluded.

Responsibility Within Government

This warning against hasty confusion of separate realities is especially needed when we approach the possibility of the Christian's involvement in social organization. Is the Christian doing his duty, or shirking it, when he fails to make use of the franchise, which today's "Caesar" offers as the one in Rome did not, to influence the choice of political leaders? On the one hand it is argued that voting is part and parcel of the state system, so that the

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Voting: "On the one hand it is argued that voting is a part and parcel of the state system, . . . Others will argue that the vote is a product of Christian influence on society over the years."

Christian witness is related to the issue. Being nonresistant, we speak to the state against war and the death penalty. Our own status in society should make a difference in our witness. As long as we are (or are thought to be) a largely rural people, we are not well placed to speak of especially urban issues, whereas our silence on moral problems in rural life is especially serious. It is especially serious, too, where we have developed some competence or prestige (as in the realm of material aid). We do not speak of general recipes for social betterment, nor do we elaborate a theory of the state. We speak when and where the situation, some felt need, or some striking abuse calls for it.

The State in Modern Times

One of the major difficulties met in attempting to apply to contemporary problems our understanding of the Christian witness to the state is the broad scope of difference in what states actually are and do. "Caesar" was practically a dictator. Today, however, the people govern themselves through constitutional and democratic means. Caesar's primary function, apart from keeping himself in power, was the maintenance of social order. The state in our day teaches school, supports the

poor, pays pensions to the aged, prepares for the destruction of the race with nuclear and bacterial weapons, carries the mail, builds dams, and sells electricity. In many parts of the world it builds the factories and markets the crops.

Caesar governed the known world. Today the world is divided into a hundred "sovereign nations," some bound together in "commonwealths," some subdivided into relatively independent "states," some just coming into being, and others centuries old. You could always tell who Caesar was and who were his authorized representatives. Today there may be two "states" claiming to govern the same populations. Examples of this are the puppet governments within Europe and the "governments in exile" during Hitler's time, the conflicting powers in a civil war, the conflict between state and federal demands in the integration issue, or the conflict between the UN and some of its member nations on human rights. Caesar persecuted the Christians, sometimes asking to be honored as a God. Governments today may call themselves Christian or, if officially neutral, at least respect the churches, sometimes subsidizing them. They even count Christians among their highest officials.

It would seem most unjustified to argue

voter is thereby morally involved in all the state does and by implication is bearing the sword. Others will argue that the vote is a product of the Christian influence on society over the years, and that to fail to assist in the choice of the most qualified and most honest leaders is to cast a passive vote for corruption.

Both of these views are confusing because they oversimplify. On the one hand, the "whole system" argument, whereby the soldier, the executive, the legislator, the office worker, and the voting citizen are all morally on the same level, is unreasonable when taken seriously. The non-combatant soldier is not the same as the combatant soldier. If the Christian conscientious objector refuses both kinds of military service, it is because both are objectionable, not because one is polluted by the other. If being "part of the system" were to mean unavoidably and indiscriminately the same degree of moral blame and effective harmfulness, then in a modern total war the taxpayer, the farmer, the schoolteacher, and the transportation worker are no less involved. To follow this view consistently would make of Jesus Himself a sinner, for He, too, was involved in sinful society, its economy, its division of labor, and its politics.

True enough, the state is a cohesive system, just as is the fallen world the realm of the "prince of the power of the air" as a whole. Yet Christ's victory enables us, victors in His train, to inhabit the world without being of the world. The "systems" and "structures" (modern terms which render what the Bible calls "principalities and powers") have been disarmed by the cross and deprived of their capacity to dominate. There is room for freedom in their midst, freedom to do and say the right here and now without fearing "guilt by involvement."

On the other hand, those who feel that the coming of democratic theories of government has changed the whole nature of the state oversimplify just as seriously. Theories have changed, but the fact that the many are governed by the few is the same. The vote may be a more direct way for the governed to express their preferences to the rulers, but every government, even a dictatorship, has ways of feeling and respecting the opinion of the people, and any government, even the most "democratic," has ways of ignoring the people's desires. Nor does the fact of electoral consultation necessarily mean that the voter is morally more responsible for the action

of the government. In some countries voting is viewed as a citizen's duty and in some cases is compulsory. In other nations and especially in the U.S. South, it is viewed as a privilege, limited to people who earn it by their patriotic service or class status. Certainly the vote does not always have the same moral meaning. In many elections no real issue is at stake, and most really significant government decisions are never brought to a vote. The recent trend to "summit diplomacy" has made us more dependent on the whims of a few top men, whether we be citizens of the United States or of Russia.

These observations should free us from a sense of obligation to find blanket answers, calling either for uncritical involvement or for total withdrawal from social leadership. We are participating in government, whether as voters or as nonvoters, as candidates for office or as passive bystanders whose inactivity someone is using. This cannot be changed. What can be changed is our consciousness of what we are doing so that our actions and our abstentions are intelligently guided. Realistically, we shall note that often the vote makes little difference, and that the difference between democracies and other forms of government is far less than we are often led to think.

Yet systematic abstention from voting, from holding office, or from other levels of contribution to the formation of opinion and the making of decisions is no more

desirable than it is theoretically possible. We shall avoid certain kinds of involvement, often because our contribution would make little difference and we have more important occupations. And sometimes we avoid involvement because the action called for would itself be harmful.

Our realism will include the awareness that there are often other means (moral education of children, the power of example, the costly testimony of a minority willing to suffer for its beliefs) which contribute more basically to the standards applied in public life than does the vote. But if and when we may be useful, if society needs and wants moral leadership, social services, or cultural creativity which we can provide and which can best be provided through what is currently called the state, then the fact that we are committed not to bear the sword is not in itself a reason for our not rendering the needed help.

A study such as this cannot have a conclusion. It can only point to questions unanswered and needs unmet. Yet perhaps an awareness of the meaning of Christ's lordship on one hand and of the complexity of the realm of "Caesar" on the other can free us for greater faithfulness. Freed from fear of "involvement," we may let ourselves be constrained by love. Freed from dogmas of "responsibility," we may be recommitted to a real nonconformity to this world and to a witness in word and work that our Lord reigneth.—THE END.

Vagrancy

BY WEBB DYCUS

If duty were not so strict a master,
This morning I would be out and away!
I know where a laughing brook runs faster
Than winds of March on a "lion" day!

I know where grapes hang thick, inviting,
And low enough for a long arm's reach;
Brown beechnuts, right for a jay's delighting—
And ah, the glow of an autumn beech!

Though duty is tall, his eye demanding,
And my hands pliable to his will,
My heart is a gypsy of long-standing—
It steals away to an amber hill!

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