

Church and State

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The Church Does Not *Need* the State...

- Christianity is fundamentally *not* geopolitical
 - Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world, and we have a heavenly citizenship - Jn 18:36; Phil 3:20
 - Jesus supersedes the Temple - Jn 2:19-21; 4:20-26
 - The true Israel is the people of God who come to him through the Son by the Spirit, it is not the nation-state
 - Cf. Some forms of dispensationalism
 - Christ's Kingdom is everywhere and nowhere until the eschaton
- The Church has often existed - and even thrived - without state support
 - eg. Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 8:4, 12, 13, 38; 9:18, 31, 42; 10:48; 11:21, 24; 12:24; 13:49; 14:1, 21; 16:5, 15, 33; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:8; 19:5.
 - eg. Rome, China
- Building the church is a higher priority for God than building the state - eg. Mt 16:18
- Making disciples is a higher priority for the church than building the state - eg. Mt 28:18-20

... Although the Church May *Want* the State

- For the sake of others: Creates opportunities for evangelism - eg. 1 Cor 10:31-11:1
- For the common good: Enables us to live in peace - eg. Romans 12:18
- For our own sake - Affords us special privileges - taxation laws, anglo-privilege, etc...

The State *Needs* the Church...

- The legal codification of Christian morality is the foundation of secure and prosperous societies
- Christian care ministries are critical for the poor and needy
- Christian culture and heritage are rich
- Plus, the state needs the gospel, even if it doesn't recognise it!

... Although the State May Not *Want* the Church

- And it is not obliged to have a relationship with the church, either legally or historically
 - Australia was not founded as a Christian nation - Christianity was forced on the first inhabitants
 - White people brought God's message, but not always by God's means

Speaking for Those Who Have No Voice

- Christians must advocate for the world's needy - eg. Is 1:17; Heb 13:2-3; Js 1:27
 - Asylum seekers, the unborn, minors, people in other nations who are impacted by our actions
 - But while we must speak, we should not presume to have a special hearing

The Critical Doctrine of Human Freedom

- Freedom of choice is God-given from Creation
 - The first words that God speaks to the first man - Gen 2:16
 - Bad choices have disastrous consequences, but choice is not curtailed - Gen 2:17
- God allows people to accept or reject him and his ways - he does not force their response
 - NB. This does not undercut the doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, but complements it
- God looks at the heart, not just external compliance to rules - eg. Is 29:13; Mk 7:2-23
 - While it is important to restrict evil, you cannot effectively legislate for holiness
 - This is the gospel story!

Case Study: Homosexuality and Romans 1-2

- Is homosexual activity the worst of all sins?
 - No. Rom 1:18-23 has the worst as suppressing the truth about God, not honouring or thanking him
 - Cf. The first commandment of all - eg. Mk 12:28-30
- How did God deal with those who rejected him?
 - He "gave them up" to impure lust, degrading passions and a debased mind (1:24, 26, 28)
 - NB. He did not prevent them from indulging in their sinfulness
- What is the end result?
 - God will judge sinners on "the day of wrath", but not necessarily in this life (2:3, 5)
 - Repentance is still the goal (2:4)
 - God does not retract human freedom
- The passage teaches about *consequences for* choices, but not *limitation of* choices

Conclusions

- We must remember that moral transformation is the manifestation of saving grace
 - Our priority should be evangelism, not forcing Christian morals on unbelievers
 - People will be judged for their response to Jesus, not for the laws of their country
- In a changing world, we must be lovers, not catastrophisers
 - Loving a society that does not share our values is mainstream Christianity
- We need to self examine
 - Ask why we are so concerned about homosexuality, but not, say, cohabitation or porn?
 - Are we purely driven by love for God and neighbour, or have pride, fear and selfishness crept in too?

Excerpt from *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 1st-2nd C.

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law. Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. They are attacked by the Jews as aliens, they are persecuted by the Greeks, yet no one can explain the reason for this hatred.

To speak in general terms, we may say that the Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. The body hates the soul and wars against it, not because of any injury the soul has done it, but because of the restriction the soul places on its pleasures. Similarly, the world hates the Christians, not because they have done it any wrong, but because they are opposed to its enjoyments.

Christians love those who hate them just as the soul loves the body and all its members despite the body's hatred. It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world is held together. The soul, though immortal, has a mortal dwelling place; and Christians also live for a time amidst perishable things, while awaiting the freedom from change and decay that will be theirs in heaven. As the soul benefits from the deprivation of food and drink, so Christians flourish under persecution. Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.