

Dominionism's Fatal Flaw

The Depravity of Humanity

Having laid claim to possessing political clout in America over the last few decades, religious conservatives might be wondering whether or not, in light of losses in the recent federal elections (excepting the last 2014 mid-term election), they are watching their cause crash and burn. In the April 12, 2009, edition, the cover story on *Newsweek* magazine boldly read, "The Decline and Fall of Christian America." [1] *The Christian Science Monitor* too speculated about, "The Coming Evangelical Collapse." [2] The drift toward socialism in Washington, D.C., has no doubt fueled concerns about whether or not America has sold its birthright for a mess of soup (See Genesis 25:32-34.).

Despite the involvement of the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, the Family Forum and other Christian activist groups in America's political process over the last few decades--in 1976, a cover of *Newsweek* read, *Born Again*, and declared the year celebrating our 200th anniversary as a nation to be "the year of the evangelical"--the moral decline of this nation continues down a slippery slope into secularism. A woman's right to an abortion remains more important than a baby's life. Public opinion polls continue to determine right and wrong. The index of leading cultural indicators continues define this nation's moral decline, if not collapse. Financial scams have bilked thousands of elderly citizens out their retirement and life savings. Unabated and uncensored, the entertainment establishment continues to vomit moral filth and vermin upon the culture. Because little has changed, many who have fought the good fight against national corruption are understandably discouraged. One leader has even informed his constituency that, "attempts to restore morality 'through the political process have failed'."

About the religious right's failure to influence this nation's moral life, one thing needs to be said: Welcome to the school of the biblical prophets. Their warning of judgment and witness to God's Law could not prevent the moral meltdown which occurred in their era either (See Hosea 4:1-3; Jeremiah 9:2-6; Micah 7:1-6; Isaiah 1:4, 21-23.). Like Christian activists today, their prophetic voice also failed to affect significant moral change in ancient Israel yesterday. They were voices crying in the wilderness.

Any prophetic message calling for moral change does not resonate with America for the same reason that it did not in Israel. The reason is *sin*, the forgotten word not only in our culture, but also in the church. Pan-evangelicalism appears to have developed an "us-against-them" mentality. We're the righteous, they're the sinners. While concluding his argument regarding the universality of depravity amongst both the irreligious *and the religious*, and before stringing together a list of biblical quotations to prove his point, Paul addressed such an attitude. He first asked and then answered, "**What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin**" (Romans 3:9).

When looking at the mass of people in our culture--from Hollywood to skid row to Capitol Hill and in the church, and places in between--the lesson for all of us to understand is this: We are not better than them! Even if Christians were to gain control of our government's machinery and

our country's courts, depravity would continue to reside among us because it continues to reside in us (1 John 1:8, 10). To try and think of it any differently is as self-righteous as it is self-deluding. Remember the Pharisee? He "**stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican**" (Luke 18:11). Often, we exhibit far too similar an attitude. It's difficult to see the picture when we're inside the frame. It's difficult for us to be convinced that morals are down when the Dow is up. But maybe, just maybe, we shall come to understand that as Cassius told Brutus, it's "in ourselves that we are underlings." Do we get the picture?

So as a mass of Americans "pig out" on personal peace, pleasure, power, and prosperity, let us remember that if Paul's assessment is correct--and it is--then we evangelicals might not be so bold to look at ourselves as the solution to America's moral, social, and political ills. Dan Coates, himself an evangelical and former politician, once remarked that, "The political process is very limited in what it can do for *our spiritual and moral problems*." Discouraged members of the religious right must know that while our faith can define, and sometimes inspire people to do, right, our example and exhortations will not change our nation's heart. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can do that. First must come "vival" (i.e., *life*), and then perhaps *vival* will continue with revival.

When in England on July 4, 1653, during the era of British Puritanism, Oliver Cromwell convened the *Barebone Parliament*,

The little band of stern, impassioned men hand-picked by Cromwell . . . with the set purpose of so remaking England's constitution as to put into actual practice Mosaic law and the pristine principles of Jesus. On the Exchange, in the courts, in the markets, the Englishman was willy-nilly going to love his neighbor as himself. It was, says Lord Morely in his life of Cromwell, an attempt "to found a civil society on the literal words of Scripture . . . the high-water mark of the biblical politics of the time. [3]

But clashing with English property rights, the attempt of the *Barebone Parliament* was defeated, the eloquent and biblical oratory of Cromwell notwithstanding. The issue of private land ownership, perhaps even that of the Puritans themselves, forced recantation of the attempt to order English society after a biblical model. [4]

Does not the Puritans' failed attempt at governmental and moral reform sound a familiar ring? Sometimes those who espouse good laws are hesitant to embrace and practice the same, especially when they go against their vested self-interest, and in the cause of Christ hypocrisy is always self-indicting and self-defeating. As one critical historian notes, "The only trouble with Christian morality is that Christians on the whole, do not practice it." It's doubtful that efforts at a Christian reconstruction of and dominion over America would succeed. From the evident lifestyles of the mass of pan-evangelicals as revealed by surveys (*bornagains* exhibit behaviors no different from *non-bornagains*) and the well publicized moral failures of a few high-profile but now disgraced evangelical leaders, there is every appearance that would-be reformers desperately need reforming.

Good laws cannot change bad people. Only *The Gospel of God's Grace* can do that. The only end for wickedness is divine judgment. It was for Israel, and it will be for America. So beloved, don't be discouraged by political ill fortunes of the present. Press on. Keep the faith. Live the right. Speak the truth. Be good neighbors and loyal citizens. Vote truth, right and your conscience, all the while knowing that there will be no earthly utopia this side of God establishing His rule on earth, a kingdom **"wherein dwelleth righteousness"** (2 Peter 3:13). In the meantime, continue to pray, **"Father . . . Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven"** (Matthew 6:10).

ENDNOTES

[1] John Meacham, "The End of Christian America," *Newsweek*, April 13, 2009.

Online:<http://www.newsweek.com/id/192583>.

[2] Michael Spencer, "The Coming Evangelical Collapse," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 10, 2009. Online: <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0310/p09s01-coop.html>.

[3] Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour* (New York, NY: New York University, 1956): 140.

[4] Ibid: 141.