

“MOM AND POP PAPERS” ON TWO-KINGDOMS – A CHRISTIAN, PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY FOR LIFE

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1. CHRISTIAN ENGAGEMENT OF THE WORLD – DYNAMIC DIFFERENTIATION

Again, Jesus’ words in Luke 20:25 guide us....Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what is God’s. The question for “public” engagement of issues and policies, is what does God desire of Caesar? And, what does God want His people to do in support of Caesar. In Romans 13, Paul writes....

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Give honor to the work, respect to those in authority but realize that their leadership can’t solve the big issues of life. Power can control bad folks to a degree. What is finally needed is a changed heart, and the Bible says that only the message of the Gospel in Jesus Christ can do that. So, when it comes to public engagement, Christians realize that we are to be “Dynamically engaged,” yes, but to realize that God works to bless in very different ways through His Two-Kingdom blessing. He curbs evil through government and taxes; He blesses the common good through people getting married, having children, and working hard to take care of one another, but His ultimate work is to bring salvation to all as a gift. Law and Gospel, Kingdom of the Left – Kingdom of the Right. We take them both seriously, but one is for a time, one is forever. Differentiating between the two is key!

In America, it gets even better since the constitution sets up the citizen, the disciplined, religious citizen as the “Caesar.” So Paul’s admonition brings more work for the 2 Kingdom citizen to do. We don’t just need to honor those elected officials, we too need to be honorable. We don’t merely submit to the laws of the land, we get to participate in creating those laws for the good of all. Even there, God gives us wisdom through His Word, but the wisdom of the Law can be seen in God’s created order too. To that end....be Dynamic....get involved, but realize what is ultimate, what is fundamental, and what is the best that sinners can do to keep the peace and which ones matter most!

IF THAT’S TRUE....AND WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS.....then it calls for Christians to be a unique kind of citizen no matter what country they are in....but in America, it gives us a wonderful way to exercise citizenship as free people for others.

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2. CHRISTIAN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT - REFORMATION RESTRAINT..... CAUTIOUS BECAUSE OF OUR CALLOUSNESS, SUSPICIOUS OF PURITAN, UTOPIAN ABSOLUTISM

Oh, there is so much to be angry about today it seems, right? Everyone thinks that they have the answers that will make everything better, or do we? When it comes to radical changes, a 2 Kingdom citizen probably will be hesitant at first. Why? Well, there's that teaching that God is at work in the world in the left-hand Kingdom, even through people who might not be believers in Him. Crazy right? Not really. When you understand what God is doing through His left hand Kingdom, you can understand how He can even use “sinful, unbelieving” people to keep things relatively peaceful and temporally just. There are people right now who are doing a “good” job in their vocations as politicians, police, entrepreneurs, business people, even fathers and mothers, whose “heart may not be totally in it,” but they know they need to do the right thing for others in their work. Is that optimal? No. But God can even work through that to keep a nation, a community, or even just a neighborhood from imploding.

In Romans 13, the Bible teaches a basic relationship to all authority that is honoring, holding it in respect. It is not “absolute,” for the Bible teaches that when such authority, which is under God's left-hand Kingdom rule, oversteps its boundaries or teaches something contrary to the fundamental teaches of the Bible (see Acts 5:29), the Apostle Peter teaches that “we must obey God rather than men.” But even here it is not with a rebellious heart, but a heart that wants what is best for others as well as oneself. Reformation Restraint...is the belief that God is at work in the world, and He is ultimately seeking the best for each person. Jesus himself tells us that “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given to Him. Restraint, even if it becomes proper resistance in time, eagerly waits to see what God is up to first. Count on it.

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3. SEPARATION OR INTERSECTION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

This fall, our nation is debating the aptitude and viability of a candidate for a life-long appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. The process has become vitriolic over the years as political partisanship has infected the examination process to the point where people want to know how you would vote” on this issue or that, rather than determining whether or not you are qualified for this position. Recently, even a person’s religious convictions have been on trial, as political appointees have been asked “religious litmus test” questions to determine their fitness for public service. One Senator even insinuated that believing in the uniqueness of Jesus as the world’s Savior is discriminatory, making one unfit for public service in America. Wow! Does it really? Actually, not at all. That’s one reason why the founders had no “religious test” for public service. So, where do we go from here?

First, one should be able to speak about the relationship of the Christian tradition to the constitutional liberties that we hold so dear. The very foundations of individual rights and responsibilities, the right to public property, the right to redress the government, the protection of the rule of law for all...these fundamental principles are rooted in a biblical worldview of culture. So much so that those who are alarmed by the idea of committed Christians being in influential, public positions miss the point. The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its emphasis on the rule of law and the dignity of the individual before the law, forms the foundation of the very liberties that our branches of government are sworn to protect. (See Adam MacLeod’s article, “Why Judge Kavanaugh’s Religion Should Be an Issue,” for a more detailed discussion of the biblical and cultural roots of the rule of law tradition.¹)

Why does all this matter? Well, in our culture, judges are supposed to be able to understand the law, respect the law, and, most importantly, not create the law. The

¹http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/07/22211/?utm_source=The+Witherspoon+Institute&utm_campaign=1fbbb61966-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_15ce6af37b-1fbbb61966-84114721

separation of the branches of government, which often frustrates the intentions of politicians, be they part of the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, or the Judiciary, was philosophically by design. The branches were meant to be limited in their sphere, even in competition with each other at times, so that the political, coercive power of the government would not coalesce in one place alone to the detriment of the citizen's individual freedom. The limiting of their sphere of influence and the clear differentiation of their work from one another are the safeguards of liberty for us all.

Ironically, the Christian tradition, with Christ's injunction to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's," undergirds this type of differentiation and limitation even further. Christians, especially devoted Christians, understand that their calling in the world is to be faithful within the vocations to which they are called. With the Christian tradition being the intellectual seedbed for many of the constitutional ideals that we enjoy and the judicial "rule of law" perspective that guards such freedoms, maybe it's time to really understand why Judge Kavanaugh's religion should be an issue. Or maybe it's better to stay with the perspective of the Founders who would emphasize that a Supreme Court justice needs to understand and respect the law, but not create the law, and leave it at that.

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4. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE POWER OF REFORMATION RESTRAINT!

There's power in restraint. I know that's not a popular, public position today but it is the position that our faith challenges of us as Christians. I realize that in many ways it also sounds counter intuitive. How can there be power in prayerfully gathering the facts, tempering one's emotions, and trying to see the whole context of an issue? Don't things get done when people passionately protest? Don't things change when people “have had enough” and are motivated to just “do something, anything” as long as they are committed to the cause? It's true, that kind of activity can change things. The only question is whether such change is ultimately for our good.

“Restraint seeking the truth” or what we at LCRL call “Reformation Restraint” realizes that God is already at work in the world to keep the peace through His rule of the world through His Left-Hand kingdom of Power. And, it recognizes that we as sinful people usually have a very limited perspective on how evil is truly kept in check and ultimately vanquished (Remember Peter literally rebuking Jesus when He talked about the cross in Matthew 16?). When Jesus tells us to “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's,” that doesn't sound right. What if Caesar is corrupt? What if the authorities are seemingly only in it for themselves? “Restraint seeking the truth” knows that God is in control to preserve the world even as He saves it. Such restraint lays on the believer the challenge to put liberty to work prayerfully, to think before one acts.

Keep that in mind especially when passions run deep. Honoring the vocations of elected officials, of officers, of parents and teachers, is not just a traditional nicety, it is an acknowledgment that God is at work in those vocations for the sake of the community and the common good sometimes even in spite of them. And it challenges us to seek the truth of a situation before we take our stand on what we believe is right for the community.

In St. Louis, back in August, 2014, the city erupted with the shooting of Michael Brown. In the middle of the chaos, the violent protests, and the general unrest, there was this pastor from the Wellspring Methodist Church, Pastor Willis Johnson who embodied a “restraint seeking the truth” attitude that provided a healthy way forward through the Ferguson unrest. His account was community focused, somewhat restrained because the facts were still unknown, sympathetic to both Brown and the officer, and focused on maintaining a dialogue between the police and the protestors, while seeking to maintain a civility that would serve the community. He said,

“I don't live to far from the Ferguson police station.... (I went to the police station) ...For about three hours, I stayed with young people who were obviously upset, frustrated, and angered. The group of young people wanted to get some answers, and they were really going to rush the police station. And I'm sure I was not the only person there that said, “Well, maybe that's not the best

of ideas.” (I further said to them). “I live here. I pastor the church down the street. Not that I’m important but I think maybe I can go into the police station...(I did). They (the police) buzzed me into the station because somebody at the front desk knew who I was. And I said, “Hey, I know this is a very, very tense situation and you all have a group of folk out here who are demanding answers. ...I know that you probably can’t talk to them. But is there any way I can talk to somebody here and explain the situation?”²

Pastor Johnson’s actions demonstrated Reformation Restraint in action...he was a person involved in the community, one who was known by the police and the leaders, one sympathetic to the members of the community, but also respecting God-given authorities and seeking to preserve the foundations for future restorative action. As you think of the issues in the community today that seem to demand our action, remember the purpose of the engagement. Remember that God is at work in many and various ways already, through moms and dads, police and political leaders, and the business owners and leaders as well. Keep that in mind as you seek to undergird their work and hold it accountable as well. And finally, remember this, keeping the temporal peace is ultimately for the sake of proclaiming the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, who is the only one who can change hearts and save lives eternally. That’s a liberty worth putting to work for the sake of the community and the Gospel.

² Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 21.

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5. “SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE” – A MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCH? WHO KNEW?

For the next two weeks, we are going to be talking about two articles that underscore the influence of a healthy, public relationship of the Church and the State in a free and freeing society. Today, we start with the realization that the “separation of the public authority of the Church and the State,” *is not a modern invention*, but a reflection of a unique Christian voice in the public square even today. In the article linked below, by Paul R. DeHart, titled, “The First Amendment Didn't Separate Church and State—Christianity Did,” the author argues persuasively that the American experiment is rooted in a healthy understanding of the differentiation of the public, adjudicatory spheres of religion/conscience (the Church) in tension with those of the realm of the State.

This “separation” is not some modern creation of an all-encompassing, secular State, privatizing all things religious. Therefore, any modern-day understanding of “separation” must deal with the fact that such separation reflects an ancient, Christian public square proclamation of two sovereigns, Caesar and Jesus Christ—each with its authority, one temporal, one eternal—presciently present already in the first three centuries after Christ. Also to be noted, the very roots of separation go deeper as Jesus himself differentiates these realms when He taught, “Give to Caesar what is Caesars and give to God what is God’s,” and when He instructed Roman Governor Pontius Pilates that “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11).

So, what’s the point? Uniquely, In America... this Constitutional, First Amendment perspective— this separation— was for the sake of the Church, the Citizen, and the rights of the individual to pursue life, liberty, and happiness as rights from God. If there is a separation, it is for the sake of the limitation of the coercive power of the State. And, the “limited” State’s role then is primarily to protect free people, driven by conscience and faith, to be a self-governing people of a more perfect union. The limiting of the “federal” reach of the State and the freeing of the individual, self-disciplined, religious citizen was a first amendment exercise that honored the rights of those created by God, already on God’s terms.

From the Bible’s perspective, this separation is more like “differentiation.” At the LCRL, we call it “**Dynamic Differentiation**,” that is, the Bible declares that God is at work (**dynamic**) in the world two distinct ways (**differentiated**), to bless and ultimately to save. God is at work through the vocations of fathers, mother,

business people, magistrates, law-enforcement etc. in His Left-Hand rule primarily to preserve not transform the world, curbing the vices and sinful ambitions of people through outward law

and order. That's why Jesus could even call His followers to give Caesar prayerful respect in that endeavor, though Caesar may not have deserved much else. Christians also understand God's public work of saving the world through His Son Jesus Christ, is to be offered as gift through His Right-Hand rule in His Church. Such a public proclamation/truth calls all people to faith, especially those who realize that even a "more perfect union" falls woefully short of God's ultimate intention for the world, eternal, abundant life with God as a gift.

Who knew that the genius of the separation/differentiation of Church and State was not a modern invention, but a very old idea rooted in God's two ways of working in the world? Who knew that separation was the first charge against the church in its public witness of Jesus in the Roman Empire? And who knew that such a healthy separation, such a proper respect for the public realms of God through Caesar and God through Jesus, would help produce a constitutional Republic that has evidenced some of the greatest temporal freedoms to humanity. And, that such constitutional protections, would at the same time allow for the proclamation that there is a greater freedom for those who believe in God's greatest work in Christ for all. Who knew? (next week, the "Concept of Vocation – a better way to be a "public" person in society!")

<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/04/21381/> (*A note to the reader - The link to the article does not necessarily imply full agreement with the article in its entirety)