

Kingdoms in Conflict

A Review

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Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from
Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*,
William Morrow and Zondervan, 1987

This book is probably best viewed as a conversation starter – it is definitely not the definitive, debate-ending resource and work it seems the author intended. *Kingdoms in Conflict*, of course, suffers from the difficulties that plague all discussions of God’s kingdom – just how does one grapple with so vast and deep a subject and not fail somewhere? Augustine made the attempt in his *City of God* (written c. 420 A.D. with just under 1200 pages in paperback form) and he failed in certain ways and to a certain degree, so let us at least give Chuck Colson credit for his attempt even as many specific criticisms must be leveled against this book.

Perhaps the most wearing difficulty on the reader is its length (just under 400 pages) – though it must be admitted that addressing both the vastness of God’s kingdom and the ignorance, especially historical, of the modern “church” are two daunting subjects to tackle in any number of books, let alone one! – as the seemingly endless historical episodes (fascinating though some are, especially the stories of Wilberforce and the Clapham sect’s abolitionist activities in Britain and Parliament, Chap. 8, p. 95, the Filipino “February Revolution,” Chap 23, p. 313, and the personal reconciliations of Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Chap. 25, p. 343) do not even begin to resolve into any clear picture of God’s kingdom until one is halfway through the book but rather seem to be a disconnected series of historical vignettes.

Then the book gets mired in Colson’s incomplete understandings of “church” versus kingdom – the 30 books he studied for this work that were filtered down to 6 primary authors (p. 373) does not even fully embrace all that the New Testament has to say about the kingdom of God. There are some key Scriptural insights about God’s kingdom that are entirely absent (which will be discussed later in this review) that would have greatly deepened the work. It certainly seems that Colson, perhaps because he is a political expert believes that qualifies him to speak of the kingdom of God or else he is guilty of just presuming that the Bible is on his side so he can speak authoritatively about the kingdom of God – an accusation he makes against those who, in spite of being woefully uninformed, make political statements in the name of their “church.” (p. 288)

As it is, the length, the somewhat off-target feel and the shallowness about God’s kingdom mars this book to such an extent that neither the well written historical episodes nor the thoughtful discussions of if, when and how a believer should practice civil disobedience against governmental evil and excess nor Colson’s own insights as a DC political insider can fully bring about the clarity and resolution the subject of God’s kingdom demands.

Yet still further damaging to the book is that Colson completely avoids any discussion of the third kingdom that is at work – the realm of Satan and his fallen angels and demons – just as he never once mentions the correlation between relativism and lawlessness (Greek, anomia, [458],

best rendered as doing what is right in one's own eyes because one has no king – Jdgs. 21:25 – this too will be covered later in this review). Though Satan and the demonic is mentioned a few times, no useful insight into Satan's very real strategies is offered and it becomes painfully obvious that this deficiency is because Colson himself labors under some of their deceptions and this is what keep his understandings of "church" versus kingdom so shallow.

It is as if Colson's idea of "church" is that it is only God's expression or presence of His kingdom in the world and there is no competing or counterfeit "church" to express Satan's evil intentions whatsoever – just as there is no Satanic kingdom competing against God's kingdom. Colson never specifically addresses this question but it seems that in his mind anyone who merely claims to be a Christian or who goes to "church" is automatically assumed to be a "citizen of the Kingdom" and must therefore be a "white hat" "good guy" for God's kingdom no matter how much they disobey or even betray the King as did Judas Iscariot.

Key Insights About God's Kingdom

To be clear – and fair – it is not that Colson is entirely wrong about God's kingdom. It is just that he has not always linked his rightful conclusions to the few defining verses about what God's kingdom is and then he fails to see where God's kingdom vastly differs from modern churchianity. How Colson can write a book about the kingdom of God and fail to reference the two times Paul clearly said, "The kingdom of God is..." is a real mystery.

An insight many people have lost sight of because of the many and deep political changes since the reign of kings is that to be a king requires obedience. That is, a king without an obedient realm is, at best, a king in name only. As such we can confidently say God's kingdom exists on earth only where people obey Him. Jesus made this exact connection when He said, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt. 6:10)

Colson does acknowledge the importance of obedience – "God intends His people to [obey the Kingdom of God's unique moral imperatives that can cause men and women to rise above their natural egoism to serve the greater good]; furthermore, He commands them to influence the world through their obedience to Him, not by taking over the world through the corridors of power." (p. 236) – but nowhere does he indicate the direct connection that obedience is within Jesus' core definition of God's kingdom.

In another clear explanation of God's kingdom, Paul wrote, "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." (1 Cor. 4:20) If we step back and take an honest appraisal of modern churchianity, we must recognize that "church" is primarily characterized by talk – even the "worship" is done in words and not primarily in actions. This alone should tell us that the "church" has, by and large, departed from the place reserved for the people of Christ in the kingdom of God.

But, some will protest, there must at least be preaching! Didn't Paul say, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14) Yes, there is such a thing as a genuine New Testament preacher. Modern churchianity, however, has primarily

defined “preacher” for us as the person who stands behind a pulpit on a platform in a “church” building and delivers a prepared Aristotelian sermon (often three points from a Bible story with jokes and anecdotes) down to a passive, seated audience who looks up to this person as a source of superior spiritual or religious knowledge and expertise because this person holds an educational degree from some seminary (a religious university usually approved by the sect – denomination – to which that particular “church” belongs.) This definition of “preacher” is very different from what Paul had in mind when he originally wrote the word – so different, in fact, that Paul (as does God) would consider this modern “church” practice to be more like the Jewish Pharisees and Sadducees than being anything much like how Paul and the other apostles traveled and preached the gospel of the kingdom. (Acts 14:22, etc.) It is instructive to simply recognize that “church” buildings, pulpits, platforms, fleshly knowledge and sectarianism, the primary central components of the modern “church,” are either completely absent from or condemned by the New Testament.

It is not wrong to speak words – the gospel, sound doctrine, truth, etc. are conveyed in words – but if our message is only words of the Bible and not the power of God, we are not sharing the gospel of the kingdom but rather the gospel of the counterfeit “church.” Peter wrote, “As each one has received a gift, serve one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone serves, let him do it with the strength which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion (sovereignty) forever and ever.” (1 Pet. 4:10-11) We see here the same mixture of speaking and serving in the power of God that Paul said defined the kingdom of God.

Colson has clearly recognized the difference between those who talk and those who do:

To accomplish works of mercy and justice, however, Christians do not rely on government, but on their own penetration of society as “salt and light.” This too is in obedience to a command of God that orders them to be “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” – the great cultural commission of the Kingdom. In Hebrew times salt was rubbed into meat to prevent it from spoiling. In the same way the citizen of the Kingdom is “rubbed in” to society as its preservative.

The Great Commission is Jesus’ command to *preach the gospel*. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19). The cultural commission, as I’ve called it, is to *do the gospel*. That is, to be salt and light, letting “your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt. 5:16 – p. 238.)

However, Colson does not seem to realize that those who are actually pursuing his “cultural commission” through obedience to Christ are precisely those who have entered God’s kingdom whereas those who settle for mere talk about such things are the counterfeit “church” that will finally and fully devolve into the apostasy, the falling away from the faith that occurs before the return of Christ. (2 Ths. 2:3) Apostasy does not mean that people necessarily stop going to “church” – it only means that they depart from the faith, something that is already quite easy to

do within the context of many, perhaps even most “churches” today by simply being a hearer only of the word and not a doer. (Jas. 1:22)

Paul also wrote, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17) The “church” has too often focused on food and drink. Catholics and Protestants divided, some even violently, over the doctrine of transubstantiation – mere words about whether the bread and the wine, food and drink, really becomes the body and blood of Christ – and many denominations (sects) enforce rules (or at least argue about) caffeine, alcohol and tobacco but the “church” still remains the visible expression of God’s kingdom for Colson.

Of course, Colson considers righteousness, peace and joy as part of the Christian experience but seems to have failed to recognize that these are said in the New Testament to be defining elements of the kingdom of God. Why this element of God’s kingdom goes entirely unmentioned by Colson is hard to understand.

Another aspect that goes unmentioned, probably because, in Colson’s mind, the gospel of the kingdom is the same as the gospel of the “church,” is that Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Mt. 24:14) Because the gospel of the “church” is tainted with errors and corrupted teachings and practices, it must be replaced by the gospel of God’s kingdom. This will be a restoration of the original message as preached by the apostles and it will be hinged on the command to “Go and make disciples...” (Mt. 28:19) – as Colson does with his “cultural commission” (p. 238) – and it will jettison the “church” gospel that says, “Come, hear our guy or gal preach, come back whenever you want, do how much you want and give as much as you want.” When what the “church” arrogantly refers to as laypeople begin to preach the good news that the kingdom of God is again at hand and the “church” is recognized and avoided as only a place of deception and scams, the end will be very near.

Satan’s Kingdom

C.S. Lewis wrote that “the demon inherent in every [political] party is at all times ready enough to disguise himself as the Holy Ghost.” (C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970, 198.) Colson commandeered this quote for politics (as is shown by the brackets around “political” – p. 309) but it is equally applicable to every religious sect of modern churchianity. And though he uses this quote, Colson still says nothing of Satan’s kingdom throughout his entire book in spite of how Paul says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 6:12)

Jesus said, “[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (Jn. 8:44) We must recognize that deception is Satan’s kingdom’s “natural resources” and these are used to maximum effect. Yet throughout Colson’s book, little if any mention is made of how Satan and his hordes work behind the scenes and in the hearts of men and women to influence and manipulate the people, communities, countries and

governments of each century. And completely absent is the notion that Satan is able to deceive the people of the “church” or of God’s kingdom.

Paul wrote, “And you...were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” (Eph. 2:1-2) Colson wrote:

Power is like saltwater; the more you drink the thirstier you get.

The lure of power can separate the most resolute of Christians from the true nature of Christian leadership, which is service to others. It’s difficult to stand on a pedestal and wash the feet of those below.

It was this very temptation to power that led to the first sin. Eve was tempted to eat from the tree of knowledge to be like God and acquire power reserved for Him. “The sin of the Garden was the sin of power,” says Quaker writer Richard Foster. (Richard J. Foster, *Money, Sex and Power*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985)

Power has been one of Satan’s most effective tools from the beginning, perhaps because he lusts for it so himself. (p. 272)

Colson would not likely disagree that “the course of this world” is primarily the way of power. Yet he does not even mention the spiritual prince of the power of air who works in those who disobey God nor suggest that deceiving worldly office holders, including clergy (not even the four Catholic clergy positioned in the Sandinista government! – p. 200), to wield power destructively is a major strategy of Satan’s kingdom. Nor does he recognize that taking power, what Jesus called “lording over,” was clearly denounced by Christ. (Mt. 20:25-26, etc.) The “church” is built with power structures that Christ said would not be appropriate among His followers as many denominations consider themselves a theocracy that is best illustrated with a top-down pyramid, a symbol used extensively among those who exalt the devil and/or false gods. Evidently that too is not a problem in Colson’s view.

Paul also described the world in which believers would find themselves as “a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [they would] shine as lights in the world.” (Phlp. 2:15) Satan’s kingdom is dark, crooked and perverse and we are born again as children of light into this war against Satan’s darkness. Most of us were lured into a counterfeit “nursery” that does more to cripple, maim and even kill us than it does to prepare us for this war but Colson has nothing to say about this particular scheme of the enemy because he simply sees nothing wrong with “church.”

The Kingdom of God versus the “Church”

Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) rightly observed, “Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church.” He was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic “church” for this and some other infractions. Yet this truth is a powerful key to understanding what happened to the way of following Christ since the apostles passed from this life.

Colson writes, “John Naisbitt observed in *Megatrends* that significant movements begin from the bottom up, not the top down.” (p. 265) Paul wrote, “[Christ Jesus], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.” (Phlp. 2:6-7) The kingdom of God, at least as it is manifested on this earth, is the most significant movement in the history of mankind, and it very much began “from the bottom up” with fishermen, tax-collectors, prostitutes and various political riffraff. The “church,” on the other hand, especially the Catholic “church” and most denominational “churches” are organized from the top down – yet Colson does not even seem to see this distinction let alone consider it as a critically important difference.

Colson also wrote, “The belief that government is autonomous, the ultimate repository of power, the solution to all of society’s ills, is the greatest imposter of the twentieth century. ...Christians and the church have no higher calling than to expose it by every legitimate means.” (p. 332) Human government certainly is not the solution to society’s ills – in fact, it is an exacerbator if not the cause of many of them – but it is not the greatest imposter. The “church” is. The “church” is the counterfeit that imitates, robs, usurps and otherwise prevents the ekklesia (the original Greek word poorly translated as “church” – we will discuss this more in a moment) from being a true and powerful representative of the kingdom of God in this world.

Colson also wrote:

Politics is not the church’s first calling. Evangelism, administering the sacraments, providing discipleship, fellowship, teaching of the Word, and exhorting its members to holy living are the heartbeat of the church. When it addresses political issues, the church must not do so at the risk of weakening its primary mission. As mainline churches discovered in the sixties, the faster they churned out partisan statements, the faster they emptied their pews.

And while the Christian citizens can afford to be as partisan as they wish, Christian pastors cannot. If they are, they may soon discover they have compromised both their own witness and that of their own church. (p. 290)

Colson’s inconsistency here – that “Christians and the church have no higher calling than to expose” government as “the greatest imposter” (p. 332) while also saying “Politics is not the church’s first calling” (p. 290) – is precisely the kind of confusion the “church” paradigm produces in those who do not have spiritual eyes and ears to grasp the truth and who have not clung to Him who alone is truth. Colson has indeed discovered many truths in the Scriptures but it is evident that he was not led into all truth by the Spirit of truth. (Jn. 16:13) This is what makes the “church” paradigm so incredibly deceptive and dangerous. One can cling to many right dogmas and doctrines and fail to abide in Him who is the King of truth.

We have already considered that a kingdom is a realm obedient to a king but what does it mean to be a “church”? It is most helpful to look to the basic definition of a word to find out its real meaning. To help in that regard, for the remainder of this review one convention will be followed by this author (though Colson’s quotes will not be so changed) – ekklesia (the original Greek word used in the New Testament) will be used to refer to the original and/or true intention of God for assembly and congregating as is shown in the New Testament and “church” will be

used to refer to any ecclesiastical tradition, practice or teaching added after the teachings of the New Testament were complete.

One reason this works well is because “church” is an English word, never once used by Jesus. The English language came into its first real existence (what is now called Middle English) about a millennia after the Crucifixion – there simply is no possibility that Jesus, during His 33 years of life in Israel, ever used the English word “church.” When we look into an English dictionary, we find “church” has four primary Christian meanings:

1. building,
2. religion,
3. clergy and
4. people.

When we examine the English texts of the New Testament, we find that of the 115 or so (depending on which version is being examined) times “church” is used, if we go back to the original Greek text, we find that “church,” in all but one occasion, translates the Greek word “ekklesia,” from which the “church” has derived such “theological” terms as “ecclesiology” and “ecclesiastical.” Ekklesia does not have four definitions – it has only one. People. Three parts have been added to the one original part. One part truth with three parts of distorted and corrupted truth mingled with deception has been the historical recipe for constructing today’s modern “church.”

When we examine a Greek New Testament dictionary, we find that ekklesia ([1577]) refers to “called out people.” In Greek democracy, the people were the citizens who were called out of their routine to attend to the business, needs and affairs of their city. In the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint), ekklesia was used to refer to the community, assembly or congregation of Hebrews who followed Moses, David, etc.

Argument can be made that Jesus, a Hebrew Rabbi who declared, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Mt. 15:24) and who seemed to need an interpreter when some Greeks sought Him out (Jn. 12:20-21), never used the word ekklesia either. He more likely would have used the Aramaic or Hebrew words that the Septuagint translated to ekklesia. (see Psa. 89:7 for example – interestingly, this Psalm uses all of the important words of Mt. 16:18.) Most likely, Matthew, writing some 30 years after the Resurrection and writing primarily to Greek speaking people, relied on the Septuagint’s renderings of the Old Testament passages he believed Jesus was quoting, paraphrasing, referring or inferring to. As it is, Matthew only inserted the Greek word “ekklesia” into Jesus’ teachings three times in two verses (Mt. 16:18, 18:17) – not exactly a major theme for Jesus! Ekklesia does not occur again until Luke (who did not use ekklesia at all in his gospel) uses it to speak of the people the Lord added to their number daily. (Acts 2:47) Interestingly, this usage of ekklesia begins to occur only after Jesus had told the disciples it was not for them to know the times or seasons when the Father would restore the kingdom. (Acts 1:6-7) As Loisy observed, Jesus indeed proclaimed the kingdom but it was the ekklesia, rightly best translated as assembly or congregation, and later mistranslated “church,” that did come into pre-eminence.

In the New Testament, the ekklesia, the called out people, were also known as saints. Paul wrote to three categories of believers in Philippi: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” (Phlp. 1:1 NKJV) The idea that “saints” were exceptional, miracle working super-specimens of Christianity is a later “church” addition to the Word of God. Originally, there were saints, servants and elders. In the more descriptive words of John, children, young men and fathers. (1 Jn. 2:12-14) These saints were born again (Jn. 3:3, 5, 1 Pet. 1:23) and ekklesia was the assembly of saints which, when used in this sense, included the servants and elders. Only later “church” teachings added divisive terms of clergy and laity, granting superior authority to the increasingly complicated layers of clergy and consigning the laity to the place of silence at the foot of the man who stood behind the ambo (English “pulpit”) that had been transplanted from the pagan Greek and Roman temples into the “Christian” temple that later became known as the “church” building.

Simultaneously “church” devolved into a pyramid scheme of “offices” of “fathers” (pastors, priests, cardinals, elders, popes, etc.) and ultimately became, as in Colson’s view, an “institution.” The primary definition of “offices” is that of “a special duty, charge, or position conferred by an exercise of governmental authority and for a public purpose: a position of authority to exercise a public function and to receive whatever emoluments may belong to it; a position of responsibility or some degree of executive authority.” (Merriam-Webster) Embedded in this definition is the idea of delegated authority and superior positioning – precisely what Jesus said was not to be among His followers! (Mt. 20:25-26, etc.) And we find, especially in Paul’s first letter to Timothy, that the King James version inserted the word “office” (1 Tim. 3:1, 10, 13) to help along King James’ reliance upon “divine” authority for the Anglican “church” that supported the throne upon which he sat. The New King James version, published almost 400 years later, has removed the word “office” but did retain (in one verse) the word “position.”

Jesus clearly said, “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.” (Mt. 23:9) But even where a sect (denomination) forbids the calling of the man “father,” he is expected to be treated as an exalted father! The duplicity of this pyramid scheme is evident to all except those who participate in it. The “pastor” is devolved from the office of the bishop (Greek episcopas, inspector, overseer). Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” (Acts 20:30) This is precisely what happened in “church” history. From the elders (which originally included both presbuteros [4245] and episcopas [1985]) arose the bishops who taught their various ideas, emphases or even errors and drew followers after themselves. As a result, “church” history is cluttered with the names of the various bishops who left their peculiar brand of theology behind them with varying degrees of accuracy and influence. The Reformation simply continued this tradition.

The word “institution” is not at all to be found in the New Testament so why Colson is so convinced it has a place in the kingdom of God is a real mystery. As it is, because the “church” arose to be an institution of offices, it will likely remain unknown just what the ekklesia built by Christ Himself in tune with God’s Spirit might have accomplished. Many times, Colson’s historical vignettes actually serve to show God’s kingdom shining through in spite of the “church’s” interference or spiritual ineptness or even enmity but this is not brought out because Colson’s understanding of “church” is only one-sided.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers.” (Eph. 4:7, 11) When we compare this with Jesus’ words that “whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” (Mt. 20:26), we can see that a genuine leader in the body of Christ is to dispense the grace (mercy, favor and power) of God so that the younger or weaker member is built up and strengthened so that every part of the body of Christ will do its share of the work of ministry. (Eph. 4:12, 16) Leadership, in Christ’s ekklesia, is not a position or office of top-down authority from which edicts and commands are to be issued and punishments for disobedience decreed. It is a place of frontline servanthood that must result in the betterment and equipping of others or else the position of leadership is being misused.

Relativism is Lawlessness

Another important contrast that Colson fails to address well is that of relativism being the secular term for what the New Testament calls lawlessness. Colson does a great job in calling out “relativism” throughout the book (p. 226, 244, etc. as he also does in his later book *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages.*) But he has not made the connection to the idea of lawlessness, which he doesn’t even mention.

On judgment day, Jesus will dismiss those who, in spite of the many things done in His name, were only workers of lawlessness. (Mt. 7:23) This is a most serious issue but it is one that requires understanding. The Greek word is anomia [458] and it literally means “without law.” Since Christ removed the curse, the requirements and the power of the law and since even Paul wrote, “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21), why is it such a terrible thing to be “without law”? John further tells us that sin is lawlessness. (1 Jn. 3:4) Paul also tells us that lawlessness has no fellowship with righteousness. (2 Cor. 6:14) What we are looking at here is something deeper.

We get the best description of lawlessness from the Old Testament: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdgs. 21:25) We get the first glimpse of it, however, in the Garden of Eden. There is nothing particularly wrong with eating from a tree – except that God said not to do it. The serpent was not entirely wrong – Adam and Eve would gain knowledge of good and evil by eating of the forbidden tree. What he didn’t tell them was that they would also gain guilt and shame. The action of Adam and Eve was not particularly evil but it was what was right and good in their own eyes. It was lawlessness. As a result, God would station angels and a flaming sword around the Tree of Life to keep fallen mankind from attaining to eternal life in their fallen state. (see Gen. 3:1-7, 24) Lawlessness is the original sin of mankind and it is the sin which Satan tries most to lure people into practicing because it is not particularly evil but it is only what is right and good in our own eyes, a self-righteousness of our own making, and it is in direct contradiction to God’s righteousness. This is why Jesus said, “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:20)

In contrast, God's kingdom is built on obedience to Him which results in His righteousness, peace and joy being displayed in us. We do not seek to obey laws but whoever is led by the Spirit of God will not be led to violate any of God's laws just as those who bear the fruit of the Spirit will not violate any rightful law. We do not seek to be found with a righteousness of our own but we seek to be clothed in His righteousness so that we will arrive at the wedding supper of the Lamb properly attired.

Patriotism

One of the strengths of Colson's book is that of presenting the idea that the "church" (even in his tainted understanding of it as an institution rather than in the spiritual purity it might attain to as genuine, unpolluted ekklesia) is meant to counterbalance the power of the state. This is particularly apparent in historical America.

As Tocqueville observed, "Religion in America takes no direct part in the government or society but it must, nevertheless, be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country." (Quoted in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972, 386 – p. 273)

Colson goes on to say:

When the state forgets or denies those [transcendent] values that were original conditions of the [social] contract, in essence it abrogates its contract with its citizens. It is then that the church must take the initiative and call the state to account, for as Richard Neuhaus writes, the church is "the particular society within society that bears institutional witness to the transcendent purpose to which the society is held accountable." (Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984)

This is the point at which the conflict between the two kingdoms often becomes the greatest. Government by nature seeks power and will always attempt to generate its own moral legitimacy for its decisions. Inevitably, it resents any group that attempts to act as its conscience.

But as history demonstrates, and as we have already discussed, the result of government attempting to impose its own moral vision upon society or acting without the restraint of an independent conscience is tyranny. Contrary to today's popular illusion, the job of propagating moral vision belongs not to government but to other institutions of society, most notably the church. When the state oversteps the bounds of its authority, the church becomes, as we have seen in Poland, the one effective source of moral resistance. The church does this not for its own ends as an earthly institution, but for the common good.

This may well be the area most perplexing to Christians and secularists alike, for both sides are frequently confused about the right, and indeed in some cases the duty, of the church, as well as individuals within the church, to confront the state. (p. 241)

In order for the “church” to function well as the conscience of both government and society at large, it must first fend off the deceptive attacks of Satan. Today’s “church” is almost dead from having ingested multitudes of lies from Satan. When the “church” cannot muster enough unity to stand up against fraudulent mask and vaccine mandates, as we have just witnessed in the past two years, there is not much hope that it will be able to stand up when the government comes to take away our guns, freedom of assembly and the right to speak and live as a Christian.

Speaking primarily from his experience as an American, Colson rightly points out the two extremes of patriotism as it is most often expressed:

But Christians, at least in the United States, have all too often been confused about their biblical mandates and have therefore always had trouble with the concept of patriotism. They have vacillated between two extremes – the God-and-country, wrap-the-flag-around-the-cross mentality and the simply-passing-through mindset.

The former was illustrated a century ago by the president of Amherst College who said that the nation had achieved the “true American union, that sort of union which makes every patriot a Christian and every Christian a patriot.” This form of civil religion has endured as a peculiar American phenomenon supported by politicians who welcome it as a prop for the state and by Christians who see it enshrining the fulfillment of the vision of the early pilgrims.

The passing-through mindset is represented by those who believe they are simply sojourners with loyalties only in the Kingdom beyond. Patriotism has become a dirty word to them, particularly in the wake of Vietnam, and they believe it their real duty to oppose the United States in just about every endeavor on just about every front – from nuclear power to Nicaraguan policy to welfare for the homeless. (p. 246)

Neither of these two extremes are completely wrong, however, as they, at least for the genuine follower of Christ, must be weighed against how much the government is under the influence of the kingdom of Satan. As Colson noted, “Before Constantine’s Christianizing of the Roman empire, all Christians were advised to avoid civil office because of the idolatrous emperor worship it demanded.” (p. 286) Under Hitler, it became impossible for a believer to hold a position in the German government – similar circumstances have existed in Communist countries. In such circumstances, it is almost a virtual necessity to move toward the just-passing-through mindset as there is little one can do to change the nation except to faithfully obey Christ as King and Lord, even if that means at the cost of one’s own life.

Even in the best of so-called “Christian” nations, one must still be on guard against being lured into compromise. While one can stand for liberty, it is easy to be pulled into standing for lawlessness as well. The current trend toward the partnership of politicians and homosexuals (not referring to the rabid LGBTQ zealots who insist that Christians partake in their sin but to those who believe in a more reasonable live and let live approach) is just such an issue. One must guard their liberty while still standing in love

against their sin – it is not always an easy balance to maintain and slipping into compromise is incredibly easy to do.

It is certainly true that patriotism will never be a substitute for a genuine born again experience and the genuine believer must weigh just how evil the government has become to determine whether he or she should participate in government as well as to what degree he or she should resist it. “The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*) The same is true of America’s government.

The more every individual responds obediently to the King Christ Jesus, the more there will be a beneficial influence upon both government and society. A morally devolving society or an increasingly corrupt government is only a clear symptom that the people who claim to belong to Christ are not winning their fight against the kingdom of Satan and are becoming more “church” than ekklesia, more deceived than standing in the truth, more carnal than spiritual, more unrighteous or self-righteous than righteous. This is the true reality of the kingdoms in conflict.

Let he who has ears hear.

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