

Nationalism and War

by S.G. Smith

A Brief Review

After the Fall of man, the story of social deterioration begins with Cain and Abel. After Cain departs from the presence of the Lord in Genesis 4, his progeny alter the patterns for work, marriage, and community harmony which God intended before the Fall. As this degeneration continued (apparently exacerbated by angelic misconduct), God ultimately felt the need to destroy the whole of mankind except for Noah's family. After the Flood, God made a new covenant with Noah including critical changes in His pre-Fall contract with Adam.

One of the important features of the Noahic covenant, that changed human history, is the universal mandate of capital punishment for murder. The declaration of this new institution is found in Gen. 9:6 quoted below.

"whosoever sheddeth man's blood,
by man shall his blood be shed, for
in the image of God made He man."

Man clearly has the responsibility to put murderers to death. It seems apparent that in the context of Genesis 4-9 murder is the *unauthorized* killing of human life as opposed to the *authorized* killing of animals or murderers. Authorization, of course, when considering judicial punishment, must come from God alone. Many scholars, therefore, recognize this passage as the seminal origin of universal human government. Although the original executive form of this institution was undoubtedly patriarchal, variations soon developed.

After some time in this new world beyond the Flood, people apparently decided to seek their own blessing and protection. Although God had told men to spread abroad upon the face of the whole earth, some people wanted to stay together. Their plan was to build a city and a tower for security. Aside from many interesting particulars about the developing culture and initial efforts at Babel, these people were actively opposing the will of God.

Finally, God decides to thwart their building project by confounding their language. When their communication link broke down, confusion and frustration quickly resulted, and their organizational efforts ground to a halt. Ultimately, the people stopped construction and spread abroad the face of the earth, accomplishing God's intentions in spite of themselves.

Eventually each language group departing from early Babylon had to develop its own form of political culture to maintain a social order to judge and restrain murder. These new ethnic divisions, or nations, were based on linguistic differences and not race as some evolutionary perspectives suggest. Although isolated gene pools from geographical distribution resulted in genetic distinctions, man was always man wherever he went. Furthermore, despite the various executive and judicial forms which would eventually develop, capital punishment for murder was to be the central feature for every form of government.

Reflections on Government

As an American trained to believe in the supremacy of republican democracy, I have struggled with why God did not express a detailed preferential system of universal government early on. Why didn't the Lord make His opinions clear about constitutional democracies as opposed to monarchs, oligarchs or tyrants? Of course, an elaborate form of government would have been potentially confusing and impractical for Noah. On the other hand, I finally realized that without restraint or protection from

murder, as in the antediluvian world, any form of government is a failure. Despite the various platforms of political advocates, capital punishment for murder must remain the central organizing principle for universal human government.

If restraint of murder is not maintained within a society, the society will ultimately destroy itself. Other political questions or concerns become irrelevant when the threat of death looms around every corner. Even today, when a society degenerates to the point of (murderous) anarchy, another form of government, via martial law or foreign invader, will curtail such madness to restore civil order. Despite a people's disposition to any new form of government, God will use it to suppress such anarchy.

The Nations of the World

In considering the stated purpose of government, one immediately thinks of a judge evaluating an individual who murders another person. However, what happens when the murderer is no longer simply an individual? What if the agent of such killing is a group - a *large* group? Even in local cities or towns, we begin to use the term *war* when we think of organized crime or gangs. Expressions such as *war* on crime or *gang warfare* depict urban confrontations as more literal than metaphorical. These become real wars despite the causes which generated them.

What about nations? What happens when conflicts reach national levels? What if a national government begins to assault and murder another people? What if a government begins to murder its own people? We can cite pragmatic causes for external or civil war, of course, but the Christian must concern himself with God's perspective in the matter. Our question now concerns itself with the *legitimacy* or *authorization* for war in general.

When nations, as well as individuals, are guilty of murder before God, they may be corporately subject to conditions of Gen. 9:6. Historically, it may be demonstrated that one cause for war is rooted in a cultures' commitment to the slaughter of the innocent. In other words when a society continues to allow or

require an unwarranted slaughter of people, foreign or domestic, wars have resulted. Although nations have started wars for other reasons, the slaughter of the innocent has been a primary cause for *authorized* warfare ("holy" war, so-called). Specifically, it is the one condition consistent with God's judgment of nations revealed in the Scriptures. In reference to the Genesis mandates, legitimate warfare is the outworking of capital punishment (from the fourth divine institution, Gen. 9:5-6), operating upon fifth divine institution entities, Gen. 11:8-9. (See pamphlet entitled "Origins of Our Destiny")

The Jesus Factor

A popular impression for the Christian ideal regarding war and conflict is that of pacifism and non-violence. Indeed, with respect to the selfish nature of man and his lust for power, the Scriptures are filled with exhortations toward reconciliation, peacemaking, warnings against violence, and compliance with God ordained authorities. The mark of a Christian is one of love, joy, and peace, not vengeance, hate, and discord. How can any other conclusion other than pacifism and non-violence be derived regarding a Christian response to violence?

Despite resounding objections, our Lord Jesus Christ left a legacy which seems to exclude simple pacifism, or even non-violence. An obvious case in point was His driving the moneychangers from the temple. On careful examination of the Scriptures, it is recorded that He did this at least twice - near the beginning and close of His earthly ministry. Furthermore, several statements made by Christ seem to exempt pietistic indifference toward socio-political concerns.

"..... I came not to send peace, but a sword."
Mat. 10:34

".....and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."
Luk. 22:36

"And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled, for all these things *must* take place...."
Mat. 24:6

Although arbitrary or brute action could never be derived from these or comparable passages, we are nevertheless faced with considering the reality of what Jesus meant. An attempt to spiritualize, or rather neutralize, the substance of these or similar passages is unwarranted by the context

Onward Christian Soldier ?

The sword is ever with us, but what is the ultimate significance of the sword in Scripture? The sword is the arm of executive authority and the root of this authority is capital punishment as expressed in Gen. 9:5-6. Government is nothing without the power to execute its judgment.

Although a literal sword has been largely replaced by a gun and bayonet, the essential meaning remains the same. The gun is a symbol and instrument of capital punishment. As there are variations within the structure of governments, what is inferred when citizens as well as governmental agencies are legally armed? Does this not suggest that citizens are to have an executive role in governing society? In America, was that not what was intended by the framers of our constitution in the second amendment?

Despite debates concerning our rights or restraints, the Christian must concern himself with his *responsibilities* before God. Admittedly, the Christian is hard pressed to ever defend his *personal* rights when considering any issue. The Bible makes clear that we are to relinquish our rights in considering others as better than ourselves. However, can the Christian dismiss his *public* responsibilities? What about a Christian policeman, a Christian soldier, or a Christian politician? Can a Christian hold such offices or are these terms oxymoronic?

Many in the church today believe that Christians should not be involved in politics or any form of political activism. They believe the *exclusive* role of the church should be world evangelism. Although evangelism is a unique and privileged ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ, it is too narrow to serve as the gauge through which *every* Christian

effort is to be measured. Such a notion, however, has become the affection of a twentieth century Platonic pietism which impacts the church.

Furthermore, while some have advocated that Christians should not run for public office or even vote, others have suggested that a Christian policeman or Christian soldier should never use his weapons (if he could even remain in such public service). Historically, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an interesting case in point. Bonhoeffer clearly states his difference with the early reformers as to any distinction between personal rights and public duties. In The Cost of Discipleship, Bonhoeffer cannot reconcile the two and essentially chooses non-violent action as the only possible Christian position. Ironically, two years after the publication of his premier work, Bonhoeffer was found to be in league with those planning to assassinate Adolph Hitler. In the face of Gen. 9:5-6 (and the reality of Nazism), it seems that Bonhoeffer himself was prompted to respond to the murderous atrocities perpetrated by the Fuehrer.

A Final Note

All killing is not murder, but all murderers are assigned to be killed since the Noahic covenant. Regardless of our feelings, capital punishment for murder was ordained by God to be carried out by man from local jails to international conflicts. Tragically, when designated officials within a society fail to exercise their duties and execute justice, either vigilante action or foreign agencies eventually arise to correct this failure, particularly when the slaughter of the innocent is involved.

As destabilizing influences fragment society we are finding it impossible for God to "crown our good (?) with brotherhood". Furthermore, as the slaughter of unborn children continues unchecked in America and murderers are tried and set free, the pressure is rising to eventually explode with a greater impact than perhaps that of the Civil War. How will our culture meet these challenges - resignation, revolution, or repentance? It's getting late.