

## THE POLITICAL ORDER AND THE CHRISTIAN

In this sinful world God has ordained that people should obey civil authority as sinful children also obey sinful parents. It is His way of preserving a degree of order and temporal welfare. God preserves life in His creation through means, and most governments, even the worst of them, punish moral evil and reward good to some extent. God can use wicked rulers as a tool to punish wicked people and nations in this life. Political power derives from God, though God is not responsible for the evil they do. When God “laughs”, His laugh is not a cynical “What can you expect, anyhow?” but a laugh that mocks attempts of wicked people to ignore and oppose His rule, and He certainly will have the last “laugh” in the final judgment. God’s wrath always applies to human wickedness.

We should regard the structure of this present world like scaffolding around a new building. When the scaffolding is removed, the building stands out in its intended magnificence. The new building is the church, which will continue for ever. The purpose of civil authority is ultimately the outward welfare that enables people to live quiet and peaceable lives, and provides the conditions in which Christ rules and promotes His church in this world. Paul said that God has put all things, including all kinds of authority, even demonic authority under Christ’s feet, for the benefit of the church, which is His body, completely filled by Him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:22-23).

We have a right therefore to expect that people in authority fulfil their calling, by setting a good example, by aiding and protecting noble institutions, and by using the force at their disposal to ward off harmful influences.

When they do not, Christians should no merely be cynical, but remember that God uses evil in a corrective way. The kings of the Northern Kingdom, from Jeroboam displeased God. About a line of successive kings we are told that each one did more to make the Lord, the God of Israel, angry than all the kings who were before him. He is not a God who merely looks at evil without reacting to it in wrath or impinging on this world’s wickedness in punishment, even if His mill-wheels sometimes grind slowly, and even though His patience is great. He brought severe judgment on those royal families. Yet in all this, God had His seven thousand in Israel who did not worship Baal. For them, too, all things were working together for good for those who loved God, who were called according to His plan (Rm 8:28). God still disciplines those whom He loves, for their good.

The evil that is rampant in leadership both in the current world leadership and in current church leadership should not take Christian people by surprise. We know our own hearts well enough to recognise original sin at work in other people, too. However, evil around us should make us even more convinced that there is no heaven for us to expect on this earth. We look forward to the heavenly city, in which righteousness dwells. It is when the darkness is greatest that the light of a candle seems to shine most brightly. Christian people should be able to respond to suffering positively like Paul. He concentrated on the blessings that flow from justification through faith, peace, the state of grace in which Christians stand, and the hope of the glory to come. He even said the astonishing thing that He gloried in tribulations. We could express his thought as four segments of a circle. Hope begins by making us more persevering, and persevering develops a strong and tested character, and this in turn leads to more hope than ever. He continues, “And hope does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us” (Rm 5: 1-5).

We should avoid cynicism, therefore. There is a right spiritual dimension. When Christians see sin in all its awful colours, they affirm forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus’ redemption from sin. When they see decay and death, they affirm the resurrection from the dead that Jesus’ resurrection guarantees, and the future unfading inheritance with Him in glory. Christians answer all they see that is weak and evil in this world and in themselves with “Nevertheless...”

We should find our answer to all this in what we treasure in the church. If anyone was familiar with the course of evil in the world and with those who were supposed to be religious leaders, Paul was near the top of the list. Look at the optimism that he expresses. “However, we have this treasure in clay jars, with the result that this all-surpassing power comes from God, and not from us. In every way we are hard-pressed, but not crushed, we are perplexed, but not in despair; we are persecuted, but not forsaken; we are struck down, but not destroyed. We are always carrying around in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies. For we, who are alive, are always being given over into death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. Consequently, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”