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THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS
(Second in a Series)

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Is The "Independent" Superior To The "Party Man"?

By Daniel R. Grant
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One of the most widely accepted beliefs in American political mythology is the idea that the "independent" is morally and intellectually superior to the "party man." It must be admitted that it is a persuasive myth.

It is alleged that the independent voters are the only logical, rational, wise voters, and that they really hold the balance of power and decide elections between the more partisan types. The idealized, fictional image of the independent voter is one of a calm, rational, well-informed citizen who coolly surveys the issues and candidates and makes his choice without regard to party.

There is a smug self-satisfaction in saying, "I vote for the best man and not for the party." Yet, studies of governmental decision-making suggest this is a bad case of self-delusion. The independent is probably weaker politically as a result of his aloofness from both major parties.

The independent is politically weaker, overall, than the party man for several reasons. In the first place, he has cut himself off from a rôle in much of the real decision making of government. His "independent choice" is really only the right to say yes or no to the decisions already made for him by other less independent types in party primaries, conventions, and smaller meetings. Furthermore, independence usually goes hand in hand with inexperience and a resulting lack of knowledge of the practical realities of political action.

I must disagree with Professor T. B. Maston, whose judgment and position on questions of social ethics I always respect and usually accept. In a Baptist Press feature series, he recently lent support to the idea of greater respectability for the independent:

"My personal opinion is that the vast majority of Christians should be politically independent. In this way, they can let the man running for office or the issues rather than the party label determine how they vote...When a person voluntarily accepts a label he tends to limit himself in his search for truth. The only restraint that a child of God should want should be the restraint of truth itself."

This position is simply a half-truth which fails to deal with the realities of decision making in politics. Studies have revealed that most independent citizens tend to be non-participating citizens who have already missed the boat in helping formulate specific public policies, choose delegates to conventions, or nominate the candidates the independents must later elect.

The independent is no more morally or intellectually superior to the party man than the non-denominational Christian is to the denominational Christian, or than the non-church-member Christian is to the church-member Christian. The "independent citizen" is much like the "independent Christian" who smugly prides himself on being "above" any ties to a local church or to denominational labels.

To defend political party affiliation, participation, and loyalty is not to suggest a blind commitment permanently to all party decisions. But it is unrealistic to expect to be influential within a political party if one shifts back and forth between parties.

The time may come when one must change his party, but this certainly should not be done lightly, and it is doubtful if more than one or two changes in a lifetime can be made without serious loss of political influence. Similarly, it would be unrealistic to expect a person to be influential in the decisions of a religious denomination or local church if he changes his affiliation frequently.

For the Christian to have an effective role in helping shape governmental policies and programs, it is imperative that he come to terms with the realities of the organizational structure of political life, not the least of which are political parties.

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THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS
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Just How "Dirty" Is Politics?

By Daniel R. Grant
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The commonly held notion by Christians and non-Christians alike that "politics is dirty" is as persistent and universal as the existence of government itself. Simply to mention politics is to cause visions of corrupt payoffs, dishonesty, and evil scheming in a smoke-filled room. There seems to be no need to prove that politics is dirty because everyone simply accepts it as a starting assumption; they know politics is dirty.

For the jokester it is always open season on the politician, with probably more jokes about the dishonest politician than any other single category in the joke books of the world. What politician has not been reminded, for example, that an honest politician is one who, when bought, stays bought.

If politics is dirty, why do we never hear it said that "democracy is dirty?" In twenty years of teaching about government and politics, I have not heard a single person make the statement that democracy is dirty, even though politics is the process by which people rule themselves in a democracy. Why, then, is there such paradoxical agreement that politics is dirty?

Actually, this notion could be accepted if one means by it that mankind is dirty, or sinful, and that therefore all human institutions are "dirty" in this sense. But an honest observer would have to report that people predominantly reserve this label for politics and politicians.

Why is this the case? Why should the public and the press, when a business man gives a television set or a free trip to Bermuda to a governmental official, cry "dirty politics" but not "dirty business"? It was the businessman who offered the bribe, but only the politician receives the stigma.

There are at least two explanations for this puzzling public image of politics. One is simply that the work of politicians and governmental officials is far more visible to the public than that of most other occupation groups. City councils, state legislatures, the Congress, and various commission meetings are usually required to be open to the curious gaze of the public, including prospective opponents at the next election.

Meetings of bank boards, labor unions, college faculties, or of church deacons, to name only a few, usually are not open to public scrutiny. It does not take much imagination to know what the news media might do if they had regular access to such meetings. It would be especially interesting if a newspaper's own editorial policy meetings were regularly reported in full by a competitor newspaper or perhaps by a television newscast. It is "operation goldfish bowl" for the government, but not for most other segments of society, and this would seem to explain at least part of the unfavorable image for politics.

A second explanation lies in a double standard of morality which we Americans have for persons in and out of government--one which condemns in politicians and governmental officials behavior which we take for granted in everyone else.

When the son of a business executive is brought into the business, given a healthy head start, and pushed gently but inevitably upward toward the top of his father's business, we expect this, and few eyebrows are raised, if any. But if a government official should do this for his son in his particular division of the government, it is a "nepotism scandal" appropriate for front page news, rather than acceptable family loyalty.

Why are gifts from suppliers to business purchasing agents accepted business practice, justified as "developing good will," while gifts to government purchasing agents are considered corruption and bribery?

The burden of proof is on the one who thinks that the politics of running government is any more dirty or dishonest than the politics of running a bank, labor union, trucking company, college, or even a church.

Because of its life in a goldfish bowl, the governmental process may actually be a bit more clean and honest than the process of running most other social institutions.

August 23, 1968

THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS
(Fourth in a Series)

Suggested Release Date, Sept. 26

The Politics Of Loving One's Neighbor

By Daniel R. Grant
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It is at the point of loving one's neighbor in an increasingly urban and industrial world that many Christians, if not most, have a serious "hang-up," to borrow a term from the younger generation. What really does it mean to love one's neighbor in the kind of world we have today?

Even though Jesus taught that we should feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, and minister to the sick, isn't it a little ridiculous to expect each Christian to apply this to 200 million Americans or to 3 billion Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, and Europeans?

It does seem so, but the teaching remains, and, if a heart of compassion remains, the Christian will constantly be seeking ways to help illiterates learn to read and write, the sick to become well and the well not to become sick, the physically handicapped to learn how to earn a living, the hungry to have food, the racially discriminated against to find open doors, children to grow up somewhere other than in slums, and all people to be free from the ravages of war.

In many ways one's love of neighbor is still manifest as individual to individual in familiar acts of compassion such as we find in the story of the Good Samaritan, or through the joint action of a church congregation, such as operating a home for the aged.

But the physical ills of the world have become so complex because of the new "giantism" in urban and industrial life that this particular image of loving one's neighbor is sadly out of date. Many of the causes of human suffering--disease, war, slums, and racial discrimination--are under full scale attack by government at all levels.

The Christian who is not actively involved in helping formulate these governmental policies and programs can hardly be said to be on the major firing line in the battle against human suffering.

It should be increasingly clear that governmental action, involving a total urban community, an entire state, a geographic region, or even the whole nation, has become in many cases the only practical way to work for the accomplishment of certain of the ethical teachings of Christ.

Personal visitation of the sick is certainly not obsolete nor will it ever be. But why should not the Christian also support with all of his political skills the taxes and laws necessary for a massive program of research in preventive medicine with the objective of eliminating certain kinds of disease altogether?

Presumably there will always be a place for giving alms to the poor or the Christmas basket of food for the hungry. But why not support serious economic research and reform efforts aimed at making our economic system work better for those willing and able to work?

Certainly it is a Christian act of mercy to send relief to hurricane victims. But is it any less appropriate for Christian citizens to take necessary political action to support increased taxes and laws for an expanded governmental program for weather research, better warning systems, and even weather control techniques?

It will always be in order for individuals and churches to send used clothing and surplus food to missionaries in underdeveloped countries for distribution to the poor. But does not the same Christian imperative call for political action to support a far more massive foreign-aid program of research and "county-agent" type agricultural assistance to farmers overseas aimed at doubling or tripling food production?

Loving one's neighbor has not gone out of style simply because the most effective way to minister to our neighbor's need is often through joint action by the total community, which we call "governmental" action.

The non-Christians in the community may or may not support such programs from a spirit of love or compassion for those in need; their support may be exclusively motivated by self-interest or it may be rooted in a morality only indirectly related to Christianity. The Christian is responsible only for his own motives, however, and for the degree of compassion in his political action or inaction.

BAPTIST PRESS

August 23, 1968

Maryland Board Recommends
Sale of College Property

LUTHERVILLE, Md. (BP)--The State Mission Board of the Baptist Convention of Maryland approved a committee report here recommending the sale of the property of the Maryland Baptist College at Walkersville, Md., "as quickly as feasible, obtaining the best possible price."

The board also voted to call for a special session of the Baptist Convention of Maryland to act on the report and slated the special session for Sept. 20, 1968, at Temple Baptist Church, Baltimore.

The board approved the recommendations of a special committee of seven appointed by the convention president at the request of the convention to take the necessary steps to dispose of the college property, or decide how to use it.

Committee Chairman Cecil C. Anderson, pastor of Viers Mill Baptist Church of Silver Spring, Md., said that if the committee "when it first met had taken a vote, I can pretty well assure you, the vote would have been to hold on to the property."

Anderson explained that the committee decided to recommend selling the property by the process of elimination. "We concluded there is nothing else we could do but recommend the sale of the property," he said.

The committee felt there were three possibilities for disposition of the college property: convert it to a Baptist teaching center or assembly, retain it to see what developments would come in Baptist and national life, or sell it as quickly as feasible.

The cost of developing a training center or assembly, even for minimum facilities was prohibitive in the face of present indebtedness, the committee said. A minimum of \$272,000 would have to be expended immediately to provide facilities for 192 people, the committee said after a study of other Baptist assemblies. Subsidy from the convention for operations plus amortization of an estimated \$850,000 debt would require a minimum of \$130,000 annually, "a figure not feasible for the convention," said the committee.

Cost of holding the property was set at \$54,831 annually, including taxes, insurance, interest on borrowed money, utilities, maintenance, and a caretaker; but this figure has risen to \$62,500 since July 1 because the college property, once tax exempt as an educational institution, has now been placed on tax rolls.

In an editorial in The Maryland Baptist, Editor R. G. Puckett wrote that the committee recommendation "is the only feasible alternative for the college property at this time," and added that the decision could be "validated by the facts surrounding the entire project."

"Actually, the (special) convention has only one thing to decide; it must say yes or no to the sale of the property," the editorial said. "It's that simple and there is no reason to make the matter more complex."

"How the land is sold, to whom and the price must be decided by a smaller body of Baptists," wrote Puckett. "As the report states, it will not be '...wise or possible to negotiate with a prospective buyer at the convention level.'"

"The decision made last November 15 to terminate the college project was the death of a dream for many who had invested much time and money in what they hoped would be a great asset to Maryland Baptists," the editorial observed. "It was a bitter and painful moment for many, but in the years ahead that decision and whatever loss there is attached to it will prove to have been right. As tragic as it all seems a clear decision now will avoid greater problems and loss in the future."



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