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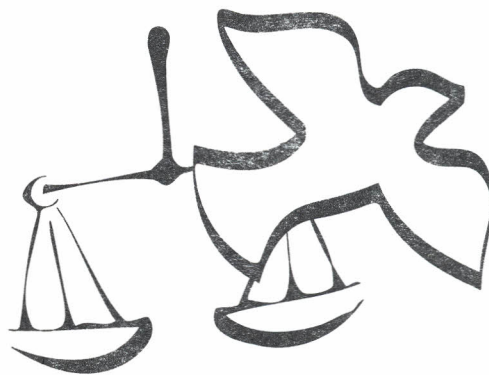
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Searching for Peace and Justice: An Introduction

GARY HOLLOWAY

The events of September 11, 2001 cause us to focus on the work of God in our world. How is God at work to bring in his kingdom of peace and justice? How can we continue to trust the justice of God under such horrific circumstances? What role do Christians individually and the church corporately have in cooperating with God's work of peace and justice? To what extent should Christians participate in politics for the sake of God and the good of our neighbors?

This issue of *Leaven* will examine these questions from several perspectives. Mark Black will introduce us to the biblical material on Christianity and politics. Earl Lavender will explore the positions held by early Christians. The heart of this issue is the articles and dialogue of members of the Center for International Peace and Justice at Lipscomb University. Five of the fellows of the Center—Neal Allison, Lee Camp, Richard Goode, Guy Vanderpool, and Don Cole—will each present a particular approach to peace and justice. Then they will share what they have learned from one another as they have wrestled with these difficult questions.



PEACE AND JUSTICE, YES! POLITICS, NO!

David Lipscomb (1831–1917), the founder of the university where most of the contributors for this issue of *Leaven* teach, greatly influenced Churches of Christ by his clear answer to the question of whether or not Christians should be politically active.

In the year spanning 1866–1867, Lipscomb published a series of articles on Christians and politics in his journal *Gospel Advocate*. Later these were placed in book form under the title *Civil Government*.

Lipscomb's view is radical. Human government is a result of sin and is in itself rebellion against God (p. 9). God ordains government as a punishment for sin (p. 11). No government is truly "for the people." In Lipscomb's words:

Every human government uses the substance, the time, the service of the subjects to enrich, gratify the appetites and lusts, and promote the grandeur and glory of the rulers. And it is not true that in democratic or any other type of governments the people themselves are rulers. They choose the rulers, at the instigation of a few interested leaders, then these rulers rule for their own selfish good and glory as other rulers do. (p. 23)

If human government is evil, can't God do anything to remedy that evil? According to Lipscomb, he has. "But Christ came to destroy human government by calling man back from sin to the rule and service of God" (p. 52).

So why does human government still exist? Because sin still exists. Ultimately both sin and government will be destroyed, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus as Lord; but for now government exists to punish sin. This is Lipscomb's explanation of Romans 13. The sole divine function of government is to punish wrongdoing. The admonition of Romans 13 demands submission to the government, but not active participation.

Lipscomb even makes a comparison between the government and hell. "It is right hell should exist so long as sin is in the universe to punish sinners and deter from sin. But it is wrong for the servants of God to enter into, become subjects and managers of the institution of hell" (p. 52).

As with hell, so the government. "A man cannot be a follower of Christ and a ruler of the governments of the earth" (p. 138). Besides forbidding running for office, Lipscomb's position has other implications. One must be a complete pacifist not only by refusing to fight in a war but even by voting for candidates that bring in or perpetuate a war (p. 139). Indeed all voting is prohibited. Jury duty should be refused. Taxes must be paid because the Bible clearly says to do so. Christians can teach in public schools because "teaching school is no part of the administration of the government" (p. 142).

What are we to think about Lipscomb's position? It's easy to dismiss it since he wrote in the Reconstruction South immediately after the Civil War. Under those circumstances, how could he consider the government anything but evil? However, his consistent pacifism has similarities (but no direct connection) to the thought of his contemporary Leo Tolstoy and to later theologians, such as John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. It is not as easy to dismiss their arguments.

Is Lipscomb right? Is it impossible to be a Christian and run for office, campaign for a political party, or even vote? This position appeals to the cynic in us. It seems at times that the political system is utterly corrupt and that government officials are only out to gratify their own appetites and lusts. The radicals among us want to make the same comparison Lipscomb did and say, "To hell with the government."

But is this answer too easy? What if by voting, campaigning, or running for office one could prevent a war, save a life, or feed a child? Under those circumstances, wouldn't involvement with the government be part of love for the neighbor and for God? To be fair to Lipscomb, he both personally and through the church helped the poor, sick, and downtrodden. But couldn't political power do more to help those least able to help themselves? Is Lipscomb's answer too easy?

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

Although few if any today would completely agree with Lipscomb's position, it has had great influence in Churches of Christ, leading us to a general withdrawal from politics in the first half of the twentieth century. That withdrawal gradually turned into a thoughtless acceptance of the political, social, and economic status quo in the last half of the century.

Now in a new century, the church must responsibly face its role in working with God for peace and justice. Church leaders must not mindlessly accept the status quo, nor should they ignore injustice because the church is concerned only with "spiritual" things. There is nothing more spiritual, nothing closer to the heart of God than the well being of all his creation. He is particularly concerned with victims of injustice throughout his world. The church can do no less than its master.

But how? How can we promote peace and justice in God's name? That is the crucial issue this volume of *Leaven* addresses.

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