

POWER in biblical perspective

Is there any justification within the Christian faith for a more aggressive and powerful involvement in politics?

By William H. Elder, III

Is the word "power" in the frequently used phrase "power politics" redundant? Is politics simply another way of saying "power plays"? With all the talk about special interests, "fat cats," image makers, and lucrative lobbyists, it would seem hard to argue otherwise.

As Christian citizens we have a responsibility to be involved in shaping public policy—a responsibility which comes from a biblical understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. However, inevitably a moral dilemma develops at the point of power. We know that to be effective politically we must develop and use power. But, somehow to even consider doing so smacks of manipulation, coercion, and threat, which are certainly inconsistent with the essence of the Christian Gospel.

Consequently, some Christians opt to separate totally discipleship from politics. Most within this group further choose to forego any political involvement at all, thereby avoiding exposure to the pollutants which always seem to accompany power politics. The rest of these separationists simply abide by Christian norms in the sacred precincts of family and church and adapt totally to the traditional amoral and immoral procedures, doing as Romans do, in the secular realm of politics. In both cases the much needed application of Christian principles to the political process is entirely thwarted.

Another option is to express the convictions which grow out of Christian commitment to the policy makers with the hope that they will be persuaded by the moral evidence and simply do what's right. Sometimes that happens, but unfortunately, not too often. This approach, however, does allow the Christian to voice his commitment with a minimum of involvement and accommodation to the secular power process. His hands remain almost spotless. This is a comparatively passive kind of political action, and its efficacy is seriously limited because it is a fact of political life that the vast majority of decisions are made under combat conditions.

Is there another possibility, or must Christians be content to either say nothing or say it weakly? Is there any justification within the Christian faith for a more aggressive and powerful involvement in politics? The key to answering that question lies in examining the concept of power in the light of the Christian gospel. So what we really need is a biblical theology of power. What follows is, hopefully, a small step in that direction.

In the Old Testament, the primary word for "power" is *koach*. It occurs forty-six times, is scattered through all three canonical divisions, and appears in a wide variety of literary categories. When its passages are exegeted an amazingly consistent image

Power is God's creative and fulfilling energy which is activated in the life of a believer, and through the believer to his societal situation, whenever he commits himself by personal risk to carrying out God's intentions for him and his world. Now, let's examine this definition more fully.

Interestingly, in the vast majority of references, power in the Old Testament is pictured functionally as belonging solely to God; it is a real extension of His very being. Thus, power is not a morally neutral concept, but a totally positive one. The word never appears alone. There is always a power source, and that source is consistently and normatively God, not man. In fact when the idea of man's energy and ability is the focus, *chazek* or "strength" not *koach* is used so as to make a point of the distinction (2 Chron. 26:16).¹ Man innately possesses strength, but not power. This distinction is carried out even in reference to God, who has both power and strength (2 Chron. 20:6; Isa. 40:26), with God's

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strength often being metaphorically represented by the image of His "right hand" (Exod. 15:6, 32:11).

Strength then is a morally neutral concept in that it can be of God or of man and used for weal or woe. However, when human strength is devoted to the creative fulfilling cause for which God's power exists, then strength becomes super abundant. It was said of good King Uzziah in a passage highlighting the power of God—"he had become very strong indeed" and "owed his strength to a help nothing short of miraculous" (2 Chron. 26:8, 15). Thus human strength appears to be the mechanism through which God's power is intended to flow.

The nature of power is biblically clear. It is the energy of God which intends to creatively fulfill the person or the situation in which it is active. Power was the stimulus in the creation of the world (Jer. 10:12). God's power was also brilliantly revealed in helping a motley group of slaves realize their potential as the chosen people, Israel (Deut. 4:37). In addition to being creative and fulfilling energy, it is significant that God's power is always portrayed in an active, aggressive and most often combative context. It is shown constantly in opposition to the forces which retard, enslave, and destroy, in whatever shape these forces are incarnated, whether in the Egyptians, the Babylonians, or Israel herself (Exod. 32:11; Jer. 27:1-10).

With regard to the matter of how power is activated, it appears that power flows wherever and whenever people risk themselves in the struggles for fulfillment which most often fit into one of two ethical categories—striving for justice and meeting human need (Jer. 22:15-16; 2 Chron. 26:4-8). Another essential ingredient in activating power is personal and corporate yieldedness to and reliance upon God. This is the crucial lesson the Israelites were supposed to learn from the wilderness experience (Deut. 8:11-20). Thus, by risking one's own security in order to be God's instrument of fulfillment greater security and fulfillment are experienced, the source of which is God's power. The prophets continually made this point in relation to suffering and servanthood (Isa. 40:26-29; Mic. 3:8).

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All of these factors for activating God's power are part and parcel of what it really means to be "faithful." In contrast, the Old Testament shows that being faithless is working against fulfillment, being proud and self-reliant (Jer. 32:17), and refusing the role of servant (2 Chron. 26:16-19). Such actions result in powerlessness.

Moses is one of many good examples of how the power of God works. Before going into exile in Midian he sought, by his own strength, to relieve the oppression of the Hebrew slaves. And the experience was an abysmal failure. But, after encountering God while in a secure setting in Midian and after finally committing himself to a risky confrontation with the strength of Egypt, Moses experienced the impact of God's power which was sufficient to accomplish the incredible feat of liberating the captives. The clear motif throughout the Moses traditions is that, as impossible as it sounded, God's power was totally adequate for the victory. All that was needed was for Moses to be willing to let God use him.

When we turn to the New Testament the word which continues the heritage of the Old Testament concept of power is *dunamis*. Again, the idea of power as God's fulfilling energy and presence

appears in the vast majority of its seventy-seven occurrences. As would be anticipated, the New Testament refines and expands the concept largely in light of the demonstration of power in the life, death, and ultimately, the resurrection of Jesus.

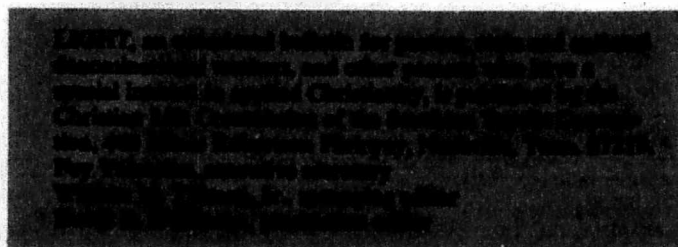
Consistent with its heritage, power is synonymous with the presence and essence of God. In his trial before the Sanhedrin Jesus said, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power" (Matt. 26:64, Mark 14:62). Power and glory were closely associated in the Old Testament, and the same is true for the New, though the concept of holiness has developed more concretely in the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen as the source of God's power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Indeed, a good functional definition of the Holy Spirit is God's creative and fulfilling energy.

"... the nature of power is active, aggressive, and often combative. In a very real sense, we will find His power only to the extent to which we are willing to be His warriors."

Power is still active, aggressive, and often combative. In light of Jesus' emphases on the individual and the internal dimension of faith, the combative dimension of power is frequently seen in the struggle against the forces of evil, whose energy is oppressive and destructive, and therefore a kind of anti-power (Acts 10:38).

The New Testament seems to address more fully the matter of activating God's power. Knowing how to catalyze God's power was one of the most essential concerns of the early church. It is clear that the early Christians understood that God's power could be unleashed in their lives and their communities only when they risked themselves publicly in some fulfilling activity. For them, in matters of commitment, the private and the public are inseparable. At Pentecost the power comes not at an arbitrary moment but at the moment in which the timorous disciples admit to their calling to form a new Israel, demonstrated by the completing of the circle of twelve with Matthias and further underlined by their bold proclamation in the midst of a nationalistic celebration. That was quite a risk. They made themselves vulnerable. But it appears that risk-taking and vulnerability for the cause of Christ is the essential meaning of faith (Rom. 1:16, 18, 24).

Another image for the same experience is "cross-living" (2 Cor. 4:7) for real discipleship frequently stimulates opposition and persecution. But even that has beneficial meaning in that by responding to persecution with love one is involved in diminishing the amount of evil and injustice in the world. The vulnerable disciple easily learns to rely on God, which is the key to catalyzing His power (Phil. 3:10), as opposed to egocentricity which stifles this fulfilling energy (Acts 8:10; 1 Cor. 4:19). Consequently, seeming weakness is transformed into empowered strength. In this context Paul's statement makes perfect sense—"When I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:10).



Most significantly, the New Testament points out the essential quality of God's power. It is essential for personal fulfillment. But it is also indispensable to the fulfillment of the church. By demonstrating God's power in the world, the early church profited both in deepening the quality of their fellowship and by increasing the respect with which they were regarded by the populace (Acts 4:33). Finally, Hebrews points out that God's power is absolutely necessary for sustaining the universe (Heb. 1:3), and Revelation completes the picture by stressing that a Christian's willingness to "faith-out" his commitment in the midst of conflict with evil makes it possible for God to win the battle over chaos (Rev. 4:11; 5:12; 7:12; 19:1).

Paul states in 2 Thess. 1:11, "by His power fulfill all your desires for goodness and complete all that you have been doing through faith." Here all of the essential dimensions are brought together, and the result is a functional definition of power.

Now, what can we legitimately conclude about Christian citizenship and politics in light of this brief sketch of the biblical view of power? To begin, let's return to our initial question and answer it. In the biblical sense "power" as in "power politics" is not redundant at all. In fact, in light of the chaotic nature of so many political events, it seems that the real problem is that there is far too little genuine power in politics rather than too much. Strength, however, is another matter. If we understand strength as the vehicle through which energy of one kind or another flows, then we would have to conclude that the political process abounds with strength. Voting, lobbying, campaigning, petitioning, and the rest of the gamut of political activism are certainly examples of political strength mechanisms.

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These mechanisms exist in order to be energized. The major question is—whose energy will flow? Will it be God's creative and fulfilling energy, which the Bible calls power, or will it be the energy which stems from egocentricity, a kind of ego-energy which has the effect of frustrating true potential? The biblical directive is unequivocal. Strength without God's power directly and fulfilling it becomes vulnerable to misuse. Strength can be a great liability. Our nation has great strength mechanisms politically, militarily, economically, and in so many other ways. Unfortunately, it appears all too evident that ego-energy rather than God's power has been dominant in these mechanisms.

The Bible indicates that the primary way in which God's power is activated is through people who are committed enough to His leadership to be willing to risk themselves in the struggles for personal and societal fulfillment. Thus, it is altogether appropriate and

essential for us to be deeply involved with power so as to be the means through which God's fulfilling energy radiates to and through the secular structures of strength.

In making that legitimate search for power, we need to remember the biblical lesson that the nature of power is active, aggressive, and often combative. Fulfillment of anything appears to be possible only where the debilitating forces of disintegration are defeated and vanquished. And even though the apocalyptic message is that victory is ultimately assured, that victory is never presented as coming easily. In a very real sense, we will find His power only to the extent to which we are willing to be His warriors. Warriors are needed for the battles with oppression, injustice, war, hunger, racism, etc., which do, in fact, rage all too often with very little opposition. In this kind of conceptual context, Jesus said, "It is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

The Bible clearly indicates that we must "fight" for "peace" (wholeness, *shalom*), as contradictory as that might sound. To fail to recognize this reality, to choose not to become involved because conflict is repulsive to us smacks of a strange hybrid of Pharisaism and Pontius Pilate-ism. Conflict and forcefulness are not necessarily inconsistent with Christian love. Sometimes they are natural concomitants.

Obviously, entering a battle is not a pleasant thought. The soldier is always vulnerable. There is always high risk. He must depend upon guidance, support, and strength in addition to his own. This description is strangely similar to the dimensions of living-out one's faith. Discipleship requires vulnerability, risk, servanthood, and ultimate reliance upon God. In that sense, it is on the battlefield of human fulfillment that faith is authenticated and empowered.

So Christian citizens have not only a right by the Constitution, but an imperative according to the Bible to develop and channel God's power into the realm of public policy which inevitably includes the strength mechanisms of politics and government. It will also be necessary for us to develop new strength mechanisms of our own. But through it all we must ensure that our use of strength correlates with the nature of God's power as fulfilling energy. Paul said it this way—"grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power. Put God's armor on . . ." (Eph. 6:10, 11). That armor comes in many models and fits all sizes as long as it is worn for fighting the right battle, or perhaps better said, the battle for the "right."

As Christian citizens we ought to be deeply involved in the political process. If we take the biblical mandate seriously, we will begin to risk ourselves in the competitive arena of public policy. We will be forced out of our comfortable analytical detachment. We will organize. We will take positions. We will raise our voices and consequently become vulnerable to attack and misrepresentation. But, according to the Bible, as we begin to step out, the meaning and excitement of experiencing God's power will be ours in a very special way. Indeed, if we develop our strength out of a personal awareness of God's creative and fulfilling energy, then we can become in the political process, and through that process, in the world, His redemptive "power brokers."

¹All Scripture references are from the *Jerusalem Bible*, copyrighted 1966.



Elder is director of Christian citizenship development for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Christian Citizenship Corps... a vehicle for concerted action

The Christian Life Commission, with this issue of *LIGHT*, is introducing a new emphasis in its Christian citizenship development program assignment. This new emphasis is called the Christian Citizenship Corps. It is designed to be a network of Southern Baptist citizens who are interested in what government is doing locally, state-wide, and nationally, and who are willing to make their voices heard in those arenas at the appropriate times and in appropriate ways. In other words, the Christian Citizenship Corps is a loosely-knit organization of Southern Baptist citizens who are informed on the issues and the political process and who are willing to get involved in that process in order to promote public righteousness and because they believe that Christian citizenship requires that kind of involvement. The following questions will help communicate what the Christian Citizenship Corps is.

• What is the Christian Citizenship Corps trying to accomplish?

It seeks to voice in appropriate and effective ways the conviction that principles and values derived from the Christian Gospel apply to the crucial moral issues with which government deals daily. The Christian Citizenship Corps recognizes and defends the long-cherished doctrine of the Separation of Church and State as the basic foundation of religious liberty in America, but it rejects the misinterpretation of that doctrine which suggests that Christians and Christian principles should not be actively present in the political process. The formation of the Christian Citizenship Corps is based on the conviction that both American citizenship and Christian discipleship demand such involvement. Christian Citizenship Corps members believe that the Christian Gospel has many significant insights for dealing with contemporary moral problems, and they are willing to help apply those insights for the benefit of all.

• Who is organizing and sponsoring the Christian Citizenship Corps?

The Christian Life Commission is the agency charged by the Southern Baptist Convention with the assignment of providing leadership for its thirteen million members in the area of citizenship. As the social concerns and social action agency, appropriate political action is an essential ingredient in the work of the Christian Life Commission. The Christian Citizenship Corps is a natural development of the program the Christian Life Commission has been carrying out all along.

• How will the Christian Life Commission facilitate the work of the Christian Citizenship Corps?

In three specific ways:

(1) The Christian Life Commission will coordinate and facilitate communication between Christian Citizenship Corps members and government. To accomplish this the Christian Life Commission will collect and organize pertinent political information, knowledge of which is essential to effective communication and responsible use of influence.

(2) The Commission will also seek to keep Christian Citizenship Corps members informed on

legislative issues and their ethical implications. The Christian Life Commission will utilize its resources in the field of Christian ethics to communicate ways in which the Christian Gospel relates to various political issues.

To obtain this kind of essential information two types of publications are useful. One type provides a general look at the national legislative issues. Its characteristic strengths are breadth and depth. The other type may be prepared and distributed quickly, thus providing more immediate and less formal information. Its strengths are quickness, detail, and informality. With these two types of information pieces, both the general and specific dimensions of the legislative picture can be grasped. Both perspectives are necessary for effective political involvement.

With regard to the more general piece, Christian Citizenship Corps members may subscribe to *IMPACT*. *IMPACT* is published by a Washington-based organization of the same name which analyzes selected legislative issues in light of religious and moral convictions and provides this information to subscribers who are committed to

applying religious principles in the political process. Other options for securing this kind of general information are available, and the Christian Life Commission will provide alternative recommendations on request. The more specific information piece will originate directly from the Christian Life Commission. It will be a newsletter entitled "Moral Alert," and will be released when issues of special importance to Southern Baptists arise and when fast action is called for.

(3) The Christian Life Commission will also work to stimulate and facilitate appropriate political activity. It will do this not only through "Moral Alert" but also through citizenship conferences, direct contacts with Christian Citizenship Corps members, and direct contacts with government representatives.

• As a member of the Christian Citizenship Corps, what will I be asked to do?

You will decide for yourself, based in part upon the issue information you receive, what it is that your understanding of

Christian citizenship requires you to do. Political issues are complex and often emotionally charged. They are never perceived by Baptists in exactly the same way. Southern Baptists are diverse people, and one of our greatest strengths is being able to maintain unity and cooperation even in the midst of such diversity. It will not be the Christian Life Commission's general policy to ask you to take a specific position. The "Moral Alert" will attempt briefly to identify both sides of an issue and list the basic arguments. The position of the Christian Life Commission or its staff may sometimes be stated on a given issue with the suggestion that if you agree with that position you might consider appropriate expressions of support. Your own evaluation will be encouraged and respected.

You will also be asked to help build the Christian Citizenship Corps' reservoir of basic political information related to moral issues. Perhaps you are personally acquainted with a legislator, or you may have a good friend who has special access to government. You may have worked in a campaign. Perhaps you have already taken a position on a particular subject with your representatives. That kind of information is of tremendous value in building an effective and efficient citizenship network.

• How much does it cost to join the Christian Citizenship Corps?

Christian Citizenship Corps members are asked to subscribe to "Moral Alert." The subscription charge, to help defray the costs of printing and mailing is \$5 a year to be paid to the Christian Life Commission. Christian Citizenship Corps members will not be solicited by the Christian Life Commission for contributions over and above the subscription charge. Unlike many other cause-oriented organizations, the Christian Life Commission is funded not by its own fund-raising efforts but by the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Information on *IMPACT* subscriptions can be obtained directly from the *IMPACT* office at 110 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002. The subscription cost is \$5 or \$10, depending on the state in which one lives. In thirteen states *IMPACT* publishes newsletters which focus upon state legislative concerns in addition to the national newsletters which deal primarily with issues which develop from Washington. For persons in states in which *IMPACT* produces both state and national materials, a subscription costs \$10. Those states are: Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

• How can I join the Christian Citizenship Corps?

Membership forms are available from William H. Elder, III, Christian Life Commission, 460 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, Tennessee 37219.

Christian Citizenship is putting feet to our prayers.



Putting feet to prayers

By Fay Valentine
Executive Secretary

It has been said that while saints are engaged in pious introspection, busy sinners run the world.

Christians must reject the temptation to spend too much time in pious introspection; and we must not leave the running of the world up to the wisdom of unbelievers. We are obligated to pray and then to employ our citizenship to put feet to our prayers.

Many people still seem to think that prayer and politics do not mix. It is true that the gears of the church ought not to engage the cogs of the state, and vice versa. Separation of church and state is guaranteed in the first sixteen words of the Constitution's Bill of Rights, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

We clearly do not need today a massive violation of this First Amendment guarantee of religious liberty and its profoundly important corollary, separation of church and state.

Rather, what is needed is a conscientious mixing of prayer and politics according to a recipe that enables religion to be faithful to God while enabling politics to achieve its finest potential for justice, peace, and public righteousness. Mixing religion and politics is a job for mature, responsible Christians who take seriously the call of Christ to take up the cross of self-sacrifice, daily, to follow him. Mixing prayer and politics is one way of "putting feet" to our prayers.

What more is needed for Christians to "put feet" to our prayers in Christian citizenship? We need an understanding of the issues, personal political involvement, diligent work with special interest groups sharing a common commitment to public righteousness, a willingness to run for public office or to support trustworthy persons who do, an informed vote at every opportunity, and the faithful maintenance of our ultimate loyalty to God.

Worthy goals can be achieved through responsible political involvement and action. Christian citizenship is putting feet to our prayers.

Christians and the contemporary use of power

By Larry McSwain

Christians will never change the world until they are willing to use the power available to them. Whether the change we seek to effect is the transformation of persons by the living Christ, the alteration of social structures for a more just distribution of resources, the development of a social policy based upon moral principles, or the alteration of social values—power is required. All change requires the use of some form of power.

Historically Christians have often minimized the fact of their power or influence in society. They have used power while denying they had any to use. Abuse and injustice perpetuated church history. This blemished history plus a mistaken interpretation of scripture have sidelined many believers in Christ into a role of noninvolvement in moral, social, and political concerns. After all, are not Christians supposed to be meek and unselfish? Were not James and John rebuked by Jesus himself for their aspirations to stature and position (Mark 10:35-45)? Is it not more Christian to reject all power and influence for a quiet role of prayerful concern for our world than to become involved in ambiguous social, economic, and political issues? Positive responses to these questions misinterpret how power can be used by Christians.

The Nature of Power

Power is the ability to effect change. A more formal definition of power proposed by D. Glenn Saul, suggests power is "... the possession of the ability to wield coercive force, permissive authority, or substantial influence to produce an intended result or effect."¹

There are three fundamental aspects in the exercise of power—*influence*, *authority*, *decision making*. *Influence* is access to the resources needed for a given change to take place. Persons of status and wealth may not possess the power to make specific decisions which would result in change. Yet they have enormous influence over decision makers who make the power decisions which result in change because of the resources they possess. *Authority* is the right, freedom, and responsibility to make decisions which affect the lives of others. In our democratic society authority has been granted by the people of the nation through constitutional processes to legislative groups to make laws, to judicial bodies to interpret them and to administrative sectors to implement them. Authority is granted by the Southern Baptist Convention to its agencies to have the power to make certain decisions affecting the denomination.

In a biblical sense, all authority (*exousia*) belongs to God (Matthew 28:18). The authority to use power (*dunamis*) is delegated by God to humanity and its institutions (Romans 13:1). When authority is used consistently with God's purposes, God

blesses in human history. When authority is used inconsistently with God's purposes, God judges through the actions of men as they relate to each other. Thus, in an ultimate sense in every exercise of power one is accountable to God as well as to those who have granted the human authority to act.

Revolution is the historical rejection of another's authority to rule. When persons and institutions misuse the authority of their decision making powers they will be rejected by those harmed by their decisions and ultimately by God. So it is that the leaders of the American Revolution claimed their actions as right before God.² In this same sense the right to vote is a right of perpetual revolution for it grants to the citizen the final authority of choosing who will have power over him or her. Thus, even revolutionary power belongs to God for the ultimate authority for every human action has been delegated by him.

The third aspect of power is *decision making*. Power has been used when one has made a decision either to act or to refuse to act in such a way as to effect change. The ability to prevent change is as much an exercise of power as the ability to cause it.³ Many Christians commit the error of believing that by remaining uninvolved in complex societal issues they will not bear the stains of wrong, injustice, and sin. Nothing could be further from the truth. Uninvolvement requires a decision. That is an exercise of power. The decision not to decide lends support to whatever is decided by others, whether right or wrong. Lord Acton's famous dictum, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely" overlooks the fact that a refusal to use power is an exercise of power. Seifert and Clinebell suggest with equal truth, "Power corrupts, but so do weakness, apathy, and irresponsibility."⁴ One is using power in personal decisions, economic decisions, social decisions, political decisions, and ethical decisions.

The values which inform the decisions which are made by individuals and socio-political-economic structures determine whether a decision is moral, amoral, or immoral. The exercise of power is itself a moral act. God has created man with the ability to reason and make moral judgments. Whenever a person acts he is using power, hence one is doing that which God empowers in creation.

The Christian Use of Power

While the ability to use power is rooted in the nature and character of God, not every act of power by man is moral. The goal of the Christian citizen ought to be to use one's economic, political, social, and spiritual influence by communicating individual and group support for those decisions most consistent with the kingdom of God to those with the authority to decide.

This means Christians who would use power must do two things. First, they must diligently study, analyze, and become knowledgeable about the decisions which are being made in the light of biblical and ethical principles. The first responsibility of Christians is to develop what James M. Gustafson calls a "community of moral discourse."⁴ Biblical insights, historical church teachings, and an awareness of contemporary reality must be integrated into a set of intentions and purposes to be implemented in the world. The Christian who would use power must know the gospel.

Second, the Christian must act to make the gospel known by word and deed through persons and structures. It is not enough that the Christian community know that the kingdom of God demands justice, mercy, and equality. Our vision of this reality is to be translated into laws, corporate policies, administrative rulings, and judicial decisions. If such is to happen the moral exercise of power must begin with church groups, for decisions must be made by denominational agencies, local congregations, and state conventions with moral force. From the church our action should pervade every level of society with an exercise of power that attempts to glorify God.

Implications for the Christian Use of Power

Obviously, there are practical results of the Christian use of power. What are they?

First, Christians ought to aspire to the highest positions of influence and authority within religious, social, economic, and political structures. The motivation of such aspirations is not status and privilege but service and responsibility. True Christian meekness is not a rejection of power but of pride. The roles of politician, corporate president, and power broker can be honorable Christian vocations.

Second, Christians ought to use their influence and authority to persuade others to support power decisions which further the goals of the Christian vision of life. Letter writing, lobby efforts, media campaigns, personal visits, and organizing efforts to effect change are necessary forms of Christian action.

Third, there are no perfect institutions nor decisions. Whenever the Christian acts it is with the awareness that the kingdom of God is yet to come and any change is but a provisional improvement. The Christian who uses power must be willing to collaborate, negotiate, and compromise in order to achieve the best possible decision within the limits of the possible. Perhaps the best way to understand this is to view the Christian who uses power as a "prophetic politician." That person is prophetic in that he or she is committed to God who is above every social system and political process. The Christian must bring the judgment of God to bear upon the world. However, his prophetic insights become concrete

in a sinful world. He is political because he recognizes that prophecy apart from politics is utopian. Precisely because prophecy implemented affects more people than prophecy verbalized, it is willing to compromise and trade with the structures of power it encounters in order to achieve part of the prophetically inspired goals of human redemption.

Finally, the Christian who would use power must persevere. There will never be a time in human history when the forces of evil will not challenge the forces of good. With the increasing secularism of American society, the widespread distrust of the political process, and growing economic pressure the tendency is to withdraw from power structures and political decisions. Apathy can have only harmful consequences. The more complex the issues which we face become, the more is needed a responsible citizenry willing to become informed and to act as Christians obedient to the kingdom of God. Seifert and Clinebell challenge us with the truth, "Good people easily get tired of being good before bad people get tired of being bad."⁶

Footnotes

¹ Doyle Glenn Saul, "An Analysis of Selected Models For the Christian Use of Power to Effect Social Change." (Unpublished Doctor of Theology dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, July 1972), p. 4.

² Cf. Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in a Time of Trial* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 27-30.

³ Lytle E. Schaller, "The Use of Power and Social Change," *Review and Expositor* LXVIII:330-31, (Summer 1971).

⁴ Harvey Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Personal Growth and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 197.

⁵ Cf. his essay on "Two Requisites for the American Church: Moral Discourse and Institutional Power." *The Church as Moral Decision-Maker* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), pp. 151-163.

⁶ Seifert and Clinebell, p. 213.



McSwain is associate professor of church and community at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

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Have you read...?

By Healee H. Barnett

In addition to the Holy Bible, the following are some of the works in Christian ethics that have contributed significantly to my ethical posture and social concerns.

Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*. His central thesis is that the will of God is the basis and norm of the good. And the good is simply doing what God wills we should do. Hence, the Christian ethic is distinguished from all philosophical-ethical systems and theories of the good. Christian ethics is existential: human behavior as it is determined by Divine behavior.

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and The Social Crisis*. From this volume came my first real social awakening. It is an analysis of the moral teachings of Hebrew prophets, the social goals of Jesus, and the loss of the vision of the kingdom of God in the long history of the church. Though Rauschenbusch is overly optimistic about the realization of the kingdom of God in history, he recovered a central place for the kingdom in Christian theology.

Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. The realism of this author in terms of the sinfulness of man and the need for justice in social structures is a corrective to Rauschenbusch's overly optimistic view of the possibility of the kingdom of God in history. Niebuhr views love as an "impossible possibility" but it stands in judgment on all individuals and institutions. Hence, the kingdom of God will come in power beyond history.

H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. In this volume, he deals with the persistent problem of the relationship of the church to the world. His five typologies—Christ against, of, above, in paradox, and as transformer of culture—help one to find his or her own theological stance on the enduring issue of the Christian vis-a-vis culture.

Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice*. The author seeks to clarify ambiguities which characterize love, power, and justice by penetrating to their ontological meaning and relating them to personal and social issues.

Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in A Christian Context*. His concept of *koinonia* ethics, that is, moral decision-making within the matrix of the redeemed congregation and the context of faith, provides

a theological basis for conduct. Finding out what God is doing in the world and participating with Him to make human life human in terms of maturity measured by the stature of Jesus Christ is the goal of Christian ethics.

Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. The author presents a methodology in moral decision-making with agape as the one intrinsic criterion of conduct. He calls attention to a much neglected dimension in ethics namely, the situation in which decisions are made.

While I do not accept all of the views of any of the above thinkers, certain basic thoughts have contributed to my own ethical outlook. Brunner provides the idea of the will of God as existence in love and as the criterion of conduct; Rauschenbusch reveals the biblical roots of Christian action with an idealistic and optimistic view of the kingdom of God on earth; Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism provided a needed corrective to Rauschenbusch's idealism and the realization of the kingdom of God in this world; Tillich shows that power becomes evil only when it is divorced from love and justice; H. R. Niebuhr helps to clarify the relationship of the church to the world; Lehmann contributes his insightful view of making ethical decisions within the fellowship of committed Christians; and Fletcher adds to the ongoing enterprise of Christian ethics by stressing the role of the situation in making moral decisions.



Barnett, retired professor of Christian ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is clinical professor, department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, University of Louisville School of Medicine.



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Of The Southern Baptist Convention

466 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37219

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HISTORICAL COMM
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