

Reaction To Dr. Timothy Monsma

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE: BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. CHURCH VS. STATE *AND* POLITICS VS. RELIGION

The first thing about Dr. Monsma's lecture that I want to comment on is an area it leaves in confusion – that is the difference between Church vs. State and Politics vs. Religion. Church and State can be separated but politics and religion cannot be separated. A cursory glance at the news will see religion playing an important role in most major political arenas such as : Israel, ethnic conflict in Bosnia, the peace in Ireland, the Wahabi sect and Al-Qaeda terrorism, the Christian-Muslim conflicts in the Sudan, the tensions between India and Pakistan, the persecution of the Falun-Gong or the trail of Aum-Shriniko sect in Japan or the German courts bans against Scientology. Religion is so involved in politics, even here in the Philippines, that all aspiring politicians should study at ATS!

2. Therefore since religion and politics are inextricably and permanently related and evangelical Christians have a clear vantage point on religious issues they are also, almost by default involved in the political issues that flow from that stance. The Evangelical Alliance in England has taken some excellent issues by issue stands on Christian principles over the years.
3. On the other hand Church and State can be separated as institutions. Separation of the Church and State as institutions is a wise idea as a functional division. I would not want most clergy in government or most politicians in pulpits. The jobs require different skills and mindsets most of the time. Yet the politicians should still be guided by God, (but generally speaking they should not be selected from the clergy).

THE NEED FOR WISDOM & DISCERNMENT

4. We need great wisdom and discernment in evaluating a proper evangelical response to political institutions in the Philippines and in forming a godly, yet pragmatically useful Christian activism.
5. We cannot just apply American categories of response and American political theology to the complex situations here. Even the basic terms – God, state, politics, and Church have very different connotations in the Philippines. God is seen as less transcendent, more immanent and more involved in the mix of life rather than aloof from it and priest and politicians are mingled here in a way that is quite different from the USA.
6. So, as usual, we have to go to the Scriptures to see the wide variety of Church-State relationships recorded there.
7. Firstly there are three kinds of ministry to the State – that of prophet, priest and King. The prophet calls the State to account and to the law and the covenant, the priest or pastor prays for leaders, mentors them and disciplines them, the king – joins the administration in a high office and seeks to live out godly principles. Each of us tends to be mainly called to one of these three styles of ministry to the government and all believers are called to pray for it. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
8. Even within a single role there can be varieties of response:
We find Jesus responding with:
 1. Defiance to the ecclesiastical court of the Sanhedrin,
 2. But with utter silence to the dangerous King Herod,
 3. With respectful dialogue with Pontius Pilate
 4. And with forgiveness to the soldiers who simply had a job to do as instruments of the State.

- 9.** In the rest of the Bible we find Joseph and Daniel working as “kings” in high political offices, we find Nathan the prophet calling David to account, and we find Abiathar the high priest offering succor and counsel to David.
- 10.** The range of responses is diverse indeed:
 Moses called down plagues and slew the first-born, then drowned the armies of Egypt.
 Elijah, killed the prophets of Baal and arranged the overthrow of Jezebel.
 And Daniel after working peaceably with a few regimes eventually gives up on the corrupt Babylonian government of Balthazar and cries Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.
- 11.** Not all governments are reasonable and good or safe to deal with. When the government is violent, cruel, unreasonable and unsafe then submission is not the biblical response and we may be called upon to throw Jezebel from the Tower. Let me quickly add that I do not think such action is necessary at the moment in the Philippines. But it was necessary under Ferdinand Marcos, and it was necessary even in America under King George III.
- 12.** Christians should see revolution as an absolute last response that is only justified when seven conditions are met. The government must be 1. violent (dangerous to the people), 2. corrupt (unable to be deeply convicted of righteousness) and 3. intransigent (completely unreasonable, not listening to the people) 4. the other social institutions must also be so degraded that they cannot bring the government to account by normal means. 5. The Christian revolution must stand a reasonable chance of success and not just be a futile gesture. (Otherwise those who die, die in vain) 6. the Christian response must be carried out wisely. 7. The Christian revolution must be as limited as practically possible to minimize damage to that nation, its structures and its people.
 The Philippines is a non-violent and reasonable democracy with functioning and balanced institutions so revolution is not justified at the moment.

SO WHERE TO FROM HERE?

So how should the evangelical church in the Philippines respond to Dr. Timothy Monsma’s call to be “salt and light?”

- 13.** Firstly each Christian should act according to their calling as prophet, priest or king.
- 14.** Secondly we should recognize that the Philippines is the classic case of the wheat and the tares – that is it is a very complex mix of good and evil. We need to pray for wisdom and discernment on which issues to tackle and how to go about it.
- 15.** Thirdly because of this mixture we cannot label any one person or party as being in possession of all the truth or all the virtue, or even all the corruption. I would advocate an approach similar to that of the Evangelical Alliance in Australia or the UK which is issue by issue reflection and comment. In these countries Christians are not aligned with particular parties but with particular biblical stances.
- 16.** Fourthly the Church must be both holy and wise. The Church is not to lose its unique saltiness and holiness in participation in politics, and neither should it be so holy that it goes on bizarre crusades with a lack of understanding of political timing
- 17.** This leads to my recommendation that Christians study the Wisdom literature (especially Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) with its emphasis on correct political method and a right time and process for events.

In this vein I will address what precisely and exactly should be doing right now? I think the evangelical church should be tackling three main issues:

18. Poverty and unjust economics.

19. Muslim-Christian peace-making and contributing to the current framework for national reconciliation.

20. Voter education prior to the May 2004 elections.

I will tackle this last issue first as it is by far the easiest to implement.

I have devised a simple mnemonic for Christian voter education called the 4 C's for Candidates.

Character – are they of good character, moral, upright and honest.

Competence – are they able to govern, are they intelligent, discerning and wise.

Connections – who are they connected to and obligated to. Are they bought already?

Content – do they have a clear and workable set of policies that will help the nation.

If every church pastor taught these for C's and every church photocopier was used to send the message to each barangay in the nation, then we may be able to help the Filipino people vote in a government that can lead it into both prosperity and revival.

21. The four C's are interdenominational and apolitical – you are not telling anyone to vote for candidate X because he once led a bible study. Rather you are giving people the tools with which to make their own wise, adult and reasoned decisions in political matters.

22. The 2004 elections are critical, some of the candidates for President are so bad that the consequences of their election would be six years of plundering the nation. The Church and the nation would suffer grievously. So rather than waiting for the catastrophe to happen, we as the people of God can do something to prevent it. We can help the electorate to help themselves. We can help them to become intelligent, mature voters acting out of the image of god within them. We can bring out the best in the Filipino and move the nation towards becoming a wise and discerning democracy.

23. The issues of poverty and peace-making are also vital and the specialists among us can help frame national policies in these areas. We need to be a vital part of such debates. But all of us in this room can lead, and teach and help with voter education. All of us can bring dignity and wisdom to the voting in this nation. And that is where I think we should start. To quote someone else:

24. We cannot do everything, but we can each do something, and what we can do, we should do and what we should do, we ought to do.

Answers to questions from the floor:

Should there be a Christian candidate for President in the May 2004 elections?

Only if a strong candidate can be found, (who possesses the "four C's" above), has the political machinery and funding and is resilient enough to fight both a political battle and a spiritual battle (because the Devil would strongly oppose such a candidate). The practicalities of such a campaign are daunting. It is getting very late in the day to organize such a candidate.

What about the National Framework For Reconciliation?

There is an enormous amount of literature about principled reconciliation and peace-making from an evangelical perspective especially from the Mennonite Central Committee and InterDev. Evangelicals can and should make a contribution to the National Framework for Reconciliation. The parable of the Good Samaritan addresses the question of who should we love and who should we hate and gives us the answer that even irreconcilable political and religious differences (between Jews and Samaritans) do not justify "leaving people by the side of the road") – eg in poverty, ill-health etc and that love should be extended to all our neighbors. ***Thus Jesus taught that ideology never justifies neglect, hatred and killing.*** We need to get this central concept across to all sectors of Filipino society and then ask people how we can move from our oppositional positions to "neighborly" positions of accepting unity in diversity as good neighbors.

Can you explain a bit more about "prophet, priest and King" in the marketplace?

Each Christian has a certain political calling as either a "prophet, a priest or a king" and Christians are most effective when they are aware of how they are called.. I am using these terms very generally and am not implying that they are literal prophets writing the word of God or that they are literal priest or kings with crowns.

"Prophets" denounce sin and call the nation back to God, they read their bibles, then their newspapers and feel strongly about certain social issues. They tend to be "issues-based" politicians crusading about poverty, injustice, abortion etc. They are often confrontational in personal style. Biblical example: Nathan.

Priests have a pastoral style and tackle the person rather than the issue. "Priests" pray for politicians, act as chaplains, disciple leaders, and offer counsel mentoring from a Christian perspective, they sometimes get "too close" to the leaders and the prophet needs to come in to correct the situation. Biblical example: Abiathar the high priest who befriended and helped David. "Kings" do not literally wear a crown but they do occupy high positions in government eg. Daniel, Joseph, Mordecai, and Nehemiah. They use this position to establish a godly social order e.g Nehemiah forbidding Sabbath-trading in Jerusalem. "kings" become governors, politicians or administrators of hospitals or CEOs of companies and act from a Christian world-view bringing a godly social order to the area in their charge.

For effective social and political action Christians should be aware of their political calling as prophet, priest or king, and also of the dynamics of the actual situation so that the best match between their gifts and the needs of the moment can be attained and mistakes avoided.