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PLURALIST CHRISTENDOM AND THE CHRISTIAN CIVIL MAGISTRATE

ROBERT E. RODES, JR.*

I.

The problem with which this article deals¹ begins, like so many other problems, with the conversion of the emperor Constantine in 312 A.D. Before that time, the church was what might be called an eschatological community. Its primary emphasis was on the principle that Christ's Kingdom was not of this world. It rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's; as to the things that were not Caesar's, it obeyed God rather than men. It was concerned to order the moral and social lives of its own members, but took no notice of the moral and social lives of outsiders. It waited confidently for God to bring about the consummation of history, but felt no particular responsibility to help Him do so. I call it an eschatological community, because the role it assumed in the wider society was one of bearing witness to the coming Kingdom of God and recruiting members for that Kingdom, members who would thenceforth occupy only a passive position in the kingdoms of this world.

With its role thus defined, it had no agenda whatever for the wider society. Christian thinkers may have recognized that the *pax Romana* furnished a useful ambience in which Christianity could spread, but there is no indication that anyone tried to derive from the principles of Christianity any lessons as to how the Roman Empire should be run.

Another characteristic of the church as an eschatological community was that it had no peripheral or half-hearted members. While the early Christians understood, as well as we do, that Christ came into the world to call sinners, they tended to think of the church as a community of former sinners rather than of continuing ones. There was no clear difference between the sinner and the apostate. A person who could not or would not live up to the community's standards would drop out of his own accord or else would be publicly excluded from the

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1. Some of the themes that I have tried to bring together in this article have been developed separately and at greater length in the following articles: Rodes, *The Passing of Nonsectarianism—Some Reflections on the School Prayer Case*, 38 NOTRE DAME LAW. 115 (1963); Rodes, *Sub Deo et Lege—a Study of Free Exercise*, 4 RELIGION AND THE PUB. ORD. 3 (1968); Rodes, *The Last Days of Erastianism—Forms in the American Church-State Nexus*, 62 HARV. THEOLOGICAL REV. 301 (1969); *From Pierce to Nyquist—Free Churches in an Expensive State*, in FREEDOM AND EDUCATION 47 (Kommers and Wahoske eds. 1978).

privileges of membership ("excommunicated") and not restored until he had undergone an elaborate penitential process. The eschatological community has dropouts rather than weak, scandalous, or hypocritical members. Since it assumes no responsibility except for its own members, the dropouts relieve it of many problems.

When Constantine became a Christian, it was no longer possible for the church to have nothing to say about how the state should be run. The church taught that fornication and idolatry were wicked: should it teach that the Christian ruler must use the powers of his office to suppress them? The early church was not comfortable about Christians bearing arms (although soldiers were evidently not uniformly excluded): was a Christian Caesar to be uncomfortable about bearing the sword for the security of his people? These questions had to be answered. Then, too, with the newly Christian emperor encouraging Christianity and discouraging other religions—sometimes by precept, always by an example—the church became less and less able to reject half-hearted converts, or to treat all marginal adherents as dropouts.

In short, the conversion of the emperor and the ensuing changes in the state forced the church to develop an agenda for the whole society and to take responsibility for persons of widely different degrees of moral and spiritual development. The result, by a series of historical evolutions that it is not the function of this article to describe, was the medieval church-state nexus, which I shall call integral Christendom. It was characterized by a certain unity of purpose between church and state, an institutional symbiosis in which the church took responsibility for offering the state a Christian agenda for the whole society (one which, to be sure, the state did not always fully accept), and the state took responsibility for making the church's ministrations available to all citizens according to their several needs and desires.

The twin developments of Reformation and Renaissance gradually undercut the foundation of integral Christendom by presenting it first with a multiplicity of churches, then with a multiplicity of religious or nonreligious commitments, and finally with a multiplicity of moral and social agendas. The result is a state of affairs which people call pluralism; some add the epithet "post-Christian."

In the face of this pluralism, many Christians have felt that the attempt of the church or churches to keep offering a Christian agenda for the whole society is self-defeating or perhaps unjust. Thus, a prominent Roman Catholic legislator is reported to have characterized the anti-abortion movement as an attempt to return to the days of the Constantinian church.² Many Christians have, therefore, tended either to

2. In my opinion, the characterization of the anti-abortion movement as religious overlooks (perversely, I sometimes think) the rigorously Millian tone of many arguments

ally themselves with agendas determined by secular philosophy, or to opt out. The alternatives in secular philosophy are numerous; Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Jeremy Bentham, and John Stuart Mill all offer agendas that are possible to regard as neutral between religions or even as neutral between religion and atheism. All of them are reasonably consistent with taking a Christian position in one's personal lifestyle. As for opting out, there are old eschatological communities like the Amish, and there are new ones like the Jehovah's Witnesses or some of the Catholic Pentecostals. They have in common with the primitive church their lack of an agenda for the wider society, and their treatment of sinners as dropouts, with a consequent lack of concern for the spiritual lives of people who are not up to the full rigors of their program.

In my opinion neither of these alternatives provides an acceptable Christian response to the present situation. The quest for a religiously neutral agenda seems to me illusory. There is no doctrine about human beings and their affairs that is consistent with all possible religious commitments and inconsistent with none. There are ways by which Christians and non-Christians can make common cause, but common acceptance of a value system in which Christianity plays no part is not one of them.

Opting out and joining an eschatological community may prove necessary in time, but I believe that at the moment it is premature. It is a step that we should not take until we must, for it would represent a relinquishment of many valuable accomplishments of many centuries. The Christendom of our ancestors was not at all the Kingdom of God, but, considered in relation to the alternatives (including the one we have now), it was not without its merits. There have always been Christians who have little respect for the Christianity that grows under the auspices of a favoring state instead of weathering the harsh rigors of the desert, or who scorn such of their coreligionists as do not make the cut for a spiritual elite. But the Church of God cannot turn itself into a corporal's guard gathered around the old rugged cross without doing some violence to the universality of the Gospel.

I submit, then, that the advent of pluralism, despite the disappointments it has brought to many Christians concerned with the wider society, has not made it either necessary or appropriate to relinquish the two main responsibilities that distinguish the Constantinian church from the primitive church—the responsibility to offer an agenda to the wider society, and the responsibility for the spiritual development of

against abortion. If a fetus is a human being like you and me, Mill's doctrine will not support destroying him or her for the convenience of his or her mother any more than the Catholic Church's doctrine will.

all comers. I find that the following observations, although sometimes precarious, are still true, by and large, of our society:

1. A clear manifestation of a Christian conscience in a social matter is always politically significant and one in which all or most Christians could agree would be irresistible.
2. Ordinarily, a Christian can accept a public office and discharge its duties without doing violence to his conscience.
3. Most people give serious thought at one time or another in their lives to the possibility of being some kind of Christian.

As long as these continue to be true, we can think of our society as still part of the Christendom that started with Constantine.

To be sure, it is now a pluralist Christendom rather than an integral one. We have people of many different views all around us, and even if we were not disposed to respect them, our religion itself would require us to do so. The question then becomes one of what agenda a Christian can offer for a society in which many people are not Christian. It is with this question, in one form or another, that I shall try to deal in the remainder of this article. I will begin by looking at some of the characteristics of the old integral Christendom, then, against that background, I will examine the characteristics of the pluralist Christendom of today and the role it offers the Christian civil magistrate, successor of Constantine.

II.

When we look at the integral Christendom of the Middle Ages, what strikes us first is the set of arrangements that I have called an institutional symbiosis. I suspect that we tend to exaggerate the importance of these arrangements because they are so unfamiliar to us. The identification of church and state, or the domination of one by the other, was far from being as complete as some modern observers have supposed.

Still, there was more unity than the most triumphalist of churchmen or the most devout of politicians would care to support today. The ties were not merely ceremonial ones like coronations. Bishops and abbots, *ex officio*, occupied some of the most important positions in secular government. Church courts handled all marriage cases, and, in England, all probate cases. Their judgments were enforced by the king's sheriffs, and their jurisdictional boundaries were set by the king's courts. Church agencies took most of the responsibility for social services like poor relief, education, and the care of the sick, while kings and lay magnates were heavily involved in the building and staffing of churches and the deployment of the ministry.

Alongside these institutional ties, and largely independent of them, society reflected deeper and more enduring Christian concerns.³ Christianity tempered the rigorous stratification of medieval society with a common Eucharist, and an eschatology in which there was no respecting of persons. It assured a modicum of personal dignity for even the lowest members of society.

This recognition of personal dignity supported a certain sense of responsibility for the victims of misfortune, poverty, and disease. While relief arrangements were generally under ecclesiastical auspices, it was understood that the whole society was concerned in seeing them effectively carried out. They were often inadequate, but, such as they were, no one supposed them to be superfluous or even optional.

It was also a Christian view of human beings and their affairs that supported the stubborn resistance of medieval Christendom to every kind of claim to absolute power. Popes, kings, and lesser magnates all derived their power from a god, many of whose purposes had been revealed to man. Every man could measure the exercise of power against the scope and object of what God had given: if he found it wanting, it was lawful, even commendable, to resist. The result in medieval society was an exuberant confrontiveness, that later generations found it necessary to moderate for the sake of peace. But the rejection of absolute power has endured, along with the expectation that free people will think before they obey.

With the church responsible for presenting and even implementing a practical agenda for the whole society, and for offering a lifestyle within the reach of people with average or below average spiritual capacity and moral fiber, it was difficult to maintain an effective eschatological witness. Every human institution is in some measure under judgment because it falls short of the Kingdom of God. A state that assumes a Christian agenda and a Christian lifestyle does not thereby avoid either the judgment or the church's duty to proclaim it. The proclamation, however, may well be less whole-hearted in such a state. Moreover, to the extent that the church must proclaim a judgment on the state, and the state is privy to the purposes of the church, the state must be privy to its own condemnation—a stance that a state, even with great good will, may find difficult to accept. What the primitive church experienced as a tension between itself and the

3. Here and elsewhere, I include among "Christian" concerns many concerns that Christians share with other people. Traditional Christian thought assigns an important place to a systematic development of the requirements of human nature. These requirements are part of Christian teaching even though everyone human experiences them in one way or another.

world, was experienced by the medieval church as an internal tension, or a tension within the church-state nexus of Christendom.

The political battles growing out of the effort to update the old nexus after the Reformation produced a terminology that I have found useful to describe this tension. A Swiss physician and amateur theologian named Erastus (1524-83) gave his name to one of the competing values. He attacked the rigorous disciplinary apparatus of the Calvinist churches and insisted that if church discipline needed enforcing it should be enforced by the civil authorities in the same way as any other discipline. By extension, any approach based on a general unity of function between church and state can be called "Erastian." To the extent that Christianity is viewed as a social agenda and a lifestyle for whole peoples, this unity of purpose will indeed exist: there is no reason why the public implementation of such matters should not be in the same hands as other public affairs. Erastianism, properly understood, is not a subordination of religious to secular concerns; rather, it is a placing of religious concerns on the same level with all other concerns of a Christian government.

Those who opposed this government concern in the seventeenth century, those who insisted on the internal autonomy of the church under its divinely-appointed ministers, and its inherent power to censure those who failed to live up to its teachings, were called High Churchmen. (High is used in the sense of proud, zealous, or extreme.)⁴

High Churchmanship sometimes goes beyond an eschatological stance, but when it does, it tends to move toward a domination of civil by ecclesiastical authority which is not acceptable either theologically or politically. In general, therefore, the High Churchman tends to present an eschatological witness over against society and to leave it to the Erastian to present a feasible agenda for the society to implement.

The High Churchman-Erastian tension is not merely ideological or political. It is reflected in laws and institutions as well. An institution-like sanctuary, for instance, corresponds to a High Church vision. It does not particularly promote the ends of criminal justice; all it does is symbolize a Christian reproach to a society flawed by violence and arbitrary punishment. Clerical immunity from the draft is similarly envisaged: it points to an eschaton when people will study war no more, and makes the clergy a sort of team of advance men for that eschaton. By contrast, provisions like poor relief and education correspond to an Erastian vision: they are efforts to implement a practical Christian agenda for the whole society here and now.

4. OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY (3d ed. 1962).

III.

The pluralist Christendom of our own day is a result of the proliferation of churches in the two centuries following the Reformation. The Reformation was originally conceived of almost everywhere as restructuring the old integral nexus without altering its basic terms. However, when the idea of altering church polities became current, it proved to be impossible to get everyone in the same place to accept the same polity. The institutional symbiosis had to give way at least to the extent of recognizing the existence of good citizens of the state who wanted nothing to do with the prevailing version of the church.

From this recognition, it was but a step to do away with the church part of the symbiosis entirely, to say that there was no reason for favoring one church over another, but that all of them could be taken equally as vehicles for the Christian commitment of the state. This seems to have been the original understanding of the church-state nexus in this country. It showed its evolution from the English situation by according to all churches the same status that English law accorded to bodies of Protestants who dissented from the Established Church. Later generations went on to accord similar recognition to individuals or groups that were not Christian at all.

Today, all that remains of the institutional symbiosis in most places is a certain gingerly respect that the agencies of government offer to ministers and works of religion. The prevailing wisdom is that churches, in their corporate capacity, are given legal status for the sake of their adherents or for the sake of the secular tasks (running schools, hospitals, and so forth) that they carry out. People may incorporate churches just as they may incorporate the other groups that they form for useful or at least innocuous purposes.

Deep down, there is a further concern. When the Supreme Court in *Kedroff v. St. Nicholas Cathedral*⁵ subjected the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States to the Moscow Patriarch despite the wishes of its American adherents, it cannot have been vindicating the right of American citizens to organize their own churches. It was vindicating the right of the Russian Orthodox Church to govern itself. In other words, autonomy belongs to churches just as freedom of association and freedom of religion belong to people. Even in a pluralist society, a church institution needs, and gets, its own kind of recognition.

The deeper concerns of medieval Christendom as I have described them do not have to go the way of the institutional symbiosis. If a pluralist Christendom cannot be a society in which the public purse is drawn on to support the clergy or the public force to keep backsliders

5. 344 U.S. 94 (1952).

in the fold, it can still be one in which the rise and fall of the laws and institutions, the fundamental exercises and restraints of power, are governed by a Christian understanding of human destiny and affairs. Such an understanding entails in a modern pluralist society, by and large, just what it entailed in the Middle Ages—respect for the dignity and worth of every human being, whatever his moral or religious situation; a social agenda commensurate with that respect and the rejection of claims to absolute power. None of these requires the medieval symbiosis or is dependent on it. All are as compatible with pluralism as with any other social form, if not more compatible.

In a pluralist Christendom, although there is no longer a common Eucharist, there is still a concern with the familial quality of human society. For a Christian, human beings are neither isolated units nor atoms in a collectivity nor cogs in a machine. They are brothers and sisters. Within Christendom, there must be an aspiration to fraternal union among the citizens. It follows that government cannot be a mere umpire—or a mere commissary sergeant—in the struggle for survival. Nor can it be a mere pursuer of corporate goals, a chef who cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs. It must give expression to a common desire for a fully human life for all.

The aspiration to a fully human life requires a social agenda. Respect for people of other, or no, religious beliefs should not stop a Christian from formulating his social principles on the basis of a Christian understanding of human destiny and affairs. Indeed, such an understanding gives the firmest possible support to that very respect. That respect in turn gives a solid foundation not only to traditional educational and charitable endeavors, but also to continuing efforts to eliminate race discrimination, to provide the poor with decent homes and enough to eat, to secure to the worker both the psychological and the economic fruits of his labor, to promote a radical redistribution of income and resources, to resist unjust war, or to establish the right of the unborn to live. These are all matters on which Christians can make common cause with other people, but I believe that a Christian must base his own support for them on his own commitments.

The Christian rejection of absolute power originates, just as it did in the Middle Ages, with the recognition that all power comes from God. He alone is the absolute ruler, and He has given only limited authority to anyone else. This is the real basis for what we refer to as the "rule of law," the principle that no person can rule another except within determined limits. This is the principle that the church raised against the Roman Empire, medieval kings against the church, seventeenth-century lawyers against church and monarchy together. In recent times, the claims of dissenting consciences have been made on the same basis against the law itself. These claims also are subject to

the principle that no human authority is absolute. If neither church nor state may claim absolute authority, no more can the individual conscience.⁶ The modern clash between authority and conscience, like the medieval clash between church and state, can admit of no ultimate solution. It is characteristic of the pragmatism of Christendom that it admits of no ultimate solution—only a *modus vivendi*—this side of the Kingdom of God.

The lack of an ultimate solution underscores another typically Christian insight, one that was not absent from the integral Christendom of the Middle Ages, but which did not come into its own until more recently: the perception of the limited role that any social order can play in the life of a human being. The role is God-given but by no means all-embracing. Society contributes to a human fulfillment that it is incapable of actually bringing about. It cannot deliver the human being from the predicament in which he finds himself, but it can strive to preserve in him that posture of openness in which he can look for the mercy of God. Institutions established in this spirit are capable of combining considerable nobility of conception with considerable pragmatism in execution.

This awareness of man's exalted destiny and society's limited role in fulfilling it has had a good deal to do with personal liberty as we know it in this country. A person's freedom to work out his own salvation is never really secure except under rulers who feel they are incapable of working it out for him, and the dissenter is never so much in danger as he is when society seeks to play a Messianic role.

In pluralist Christendom, no less than in integral Christendom, the limited role of society and the need for an eschatological witness involve a tension between Erastian and High Church approaches. Erastianism tends to see the church as subject to the same limits as any other social institution in its attempt to further the ultimate destiny of human beings; High Churchmanship tends to see the church as operating outside those limits. Institutions and agendas affected by Christian insights betray the resulting tension in a variety of ways.

I have already referred to the two different ways in which churches are recognized by the civil government. The view that they

6. I do not mean by this argument to deny the principle of moral theology that everyone is bound to follow his conscience. This is neither more nor less true than the principle of legal philosophy that a clear conscience will not get you out of the punishment prescribed for breaking the law. My point is that when law and conscience clash, neither is unaffected by the clash itself. Both sides will tend to reconsider their positions, to negotiate, and often to reach an accommodation. If no accommodation can be reached, the clash must continue, because the two sides have no common superior, able and willing to adjudicate it.

are recognized because of the people who form them, or because of the social utility of what they do, is Erastian: it places them on the same footing as the other institutions of society. The view that they enjoy an inherent autonomy is High Church: it places them outside the realm of effective concerns of government.

When it comes to social concerns, the adoption of specific Christian agendas within the realm of political possibility (say, requiring American companies operating in South Africa to provide family housing for their black employees) is Erastian, whereas a prophetic denunciation of a social condition (for example, apartheid) as unacceptable to God is High Church. This difference is responsible for a good deal of acrimonious debate among Christians over social issues. The legal, political, or institutional approach best calculated to embody an effective prophetic witness is not always the one best calculated to effect a practical amelioration of the situation. Developing an approach that will keep both goals in mind is a constant challenge for Christians.

An Erastian approach to freedom is based on a general idea that practical affairs will turn out better if people are generally not interfered with. The best ideas will prevail in an atmosphere of free debate; goods and services will be more efficiently produced in a system of free enterprise; virtue will flourish more if people choose it freely instead of having it forced on them. A High Church approach would prefer to find the source of freedom in that core of the human personality that is accessible only to God. It is from there that a human being reaches out to God and neighbor by a process that can be affected only peripherally by any form of social control. Freedom, therefore, is a recognition of the inherently peripheral quality of any possible control.

The difference between the two approaches can affect the resolution of such concrete questions as whether commercial advertising, inherently a pragmatic endeavor, is entitled to the same constitutional protections as literary expression, often a reaching out. Even more important is the fact that the Erastian conception of freedom, being pragmatic, may be invalidated by experience, whereas the High Church conception cannot. It may well turn out that bad ideas fare better than good ones in an atmosphere of universal debate, or that free enterprise will produce a plethora of goods and services that are both useless and misdistributed. People, however, will still have to reach out to God and neighbor, and the process will still be only peripherally amenable to social control.

"Liberation" theology, which seems to be a sort of amalgam of a Christian pursuit of freedom and a Christian social agenda, also gives rise to a tension between Erastian and High Church elements. Liberation from oppression can be seen as the removal of pragmatic obstacles

to a fully human existence, or it can be seen as a sign of Christ's liberating action in the depths of the human personality. From a complete Christian perspective, it is both. Again, the problem is one of balance. If we place too much emphasis on the pragmatic, we will be in danger of turning liberation into a new form of oppression; if we go too far in the opposite direction, we may turn it into some form of pie in the sky.

One way in which pluralist Christendom differs from integral Christendom is in being faced with an internal opposition. Opponents may or may not be dissenters from the Christian religion as such; what they have in common is that they choose a nonreligious basis for their action as citizens. Whether they are Christians, followers of some other religion, or atheists in their personal lives, when it comes to law and politics, they are secularists. Secularism, as it is manifested in our own society, is not so much a coherent program of opposition to Christian goals for society as a difference in emphasis that leads to opposition at particular points. The points are somewhat disparate, and can take one by surprise if one is not looking for them.

For instance, the Christian understanding of our traditional freedoms is based on respect for other people's commitments, and for their pursuits of transcendent goals beyond the reach of society. The secularist understanding is based more on a view that everyone should be diffident concerning his own commitments and goals. It is perhaps overly glib to say that for the Christian freedom is a doctrine, and for the secularist it is the lack of a doctrine, but the two approaches do tend to differ along those lines.

Either approach will support most of our customary freedoms well enough, but there is apt to come a parting of the ways. The secularist can always have a problem seeing why a person should not be as free to be a prostitute or a drug addict as to be a Swedenborgian or a coffee drinker, or why he should not be as free to sign a yellow dog contract as to sign a political petition. The Christian approach allows restraints to be differentiated on the basis of what freedom is for.

Similarly, when Christians and secularists agree on a social program, they may find themselves at odds over where to draw the line in its implementation. Just as the secularist lacks a basis for restraining the individual for his own sake, he lacks a basis for restraining society for the sake of the individual. The Christian perception of transcendent goals provides a basis for doing both. Secularism tends to vacillate between an extreme individualism and an extreme collectivism, neither of which a Christian can accept. The stand is not altogether coherent. Early in this century, secularists were supporting state interference with drinking and sex on the same grounds they now use to support economic regulation, and were resisting economic regulation on the

same grounds they now use to resist state interference with drinking and sex. Their arguments are not without merit, but taken by themselves, they tend to prove either too little or too much. The Christian perception of the human condition offers a way to set limits on both kinds of regulation.

The secularist approach to relations within a pluralist society is based on what has been called civic friendship. This is conceived of as arising from the desire of people of differing views to live together rationally and at peace. It seems to be an alternative to the familial quality I have alluded to as part of the Christian perception of society. In my opinion, it will not do. For people of strong conviction (as almost everyone is on some issue) there can easily come a stage in a political standoff when one has had it with rational debate and cannot look on the opposition with friendship, civic or otherwise.⁷ At that point, it is good to remember that the same thing happens in families. It is easier, and more important, to see a stubborn wrong-headed opponent as a brother than as a friend.

IV.

Some years ago, there was a suspended priest who held religious gatherings in a large Eastern city, in public places that were not supposed to be used in this way. He was not always civil to the police officers assigned to stop him. It is recorded that one such police officer, a good Irish Catholic, rebuked him by referring to the Gospel passage about rendering unto Caesar, and concluded with: "Well, I'm Caesar!" Caesar, the personified civil magistrate, the "power" of *Romans* 13, is, then, not only the king or president, not only the judge or legislator; he is also the police officer on the beat, or the functionary in a government office. Indeed, in a democracy, he is each one of us insofar as we vote or take part in public affairs.

The Christian civil magistrate, no less than any other Christian, must consult his Christian conscience in deciding how to go about his work. This is just as true now as in Constantine's time, just as true in a pagan state as in Christendom. In Christendom, however, there is a political and legal basis for giving the Christian conscience institutional effect. The difference between integral and pluralist Christendom lies not in the applicability of Christian principles, but in the people to whom those principles must be applied. I have tried thus far in this article to establish a framework for applying those principles in a pluralist context like our own. It remains for me to offer my conception

7. It seems that many acts of civil disobedience have for their main purpose a symbolic disruption of civic friendship.

of the work of the Christian civil magistrate within that framework. Here, then, briefly, is my conception of how a model Christian civil magistrate will do the work of governing a pluralist Christendom.

In the first place, he will recognize that he is administering a government neither of laws nor of men, but of God. His positive orientation will reflect an awareness of God's purposes in human life, his self-limitation, his diffidence, an awareness of how far those purposes are inscrutable to man. In dealing with individuals, he will recognize that they can neither be reduced to formulas nor comprehended within his personal intuitions. He can act neither unrestrictedly as God does, nor deterministically as a machine does. He must act person to person—as a human being making an intervention of limited scope into a human situation whose ultimate significance is impenetrable to him.

He will support religious liberty not as an abstraction, but as something that real people must have if they are to become what God wants them to be. In deciding how far liberty extends, he will take people's opinions and observances as he finds them and not rest on theoretical definitions of religion. Where religious freedom comes up against some other human or social goal, he will seek an accommodation, not a neutral principle. Because he considers religion important, he will consider religious differences important. His aim will be to respect them, not to minimize them.

The Christian civil magistrate as I conceive him will not be a follower of John Stuart Mill. He will have no *a priori* inhibition against "enforcing morality." If no man is an island, and if any man's death diminishes me—that is, if the society has the familial quality that I have discerned in it—it is idle to say that a person must be left free to do himself all the harm he cares to as long as he does not harm anyone else. The Christian must respect people's moral autonomy, because it is a gift of God to meet a human need. That kind of respect does not, however, rigorously preclude every legal obstacle to a person's breaking his neck, trivializing his sexuality, blowing his mind away, or working for a starvation wage.

Nor does respect for moral autonomy entail neutrality as between right and wrong. Thus, it does not require Christians to put up with the social ambience that is being created by current interpretations of free speech and sexual permissiveness. For the police to ferret out and punish clandestine sexual liaisons or under-the-counter pornography is neither Christian nor seemly. It does not follow, however, that for all official purposes cohabitation must be as good as marriage or gay as good as straight. Those who wish to live by traditional Christian sexual standards need support and encouragement from the

community as much as those who wish to live otherwise need respect. It is both practical and desirable for a Christian civil magistrate to provide both.

My model civil magistrate will have a social agenda. This too will be based not on a philosophical *a priori*, but on what real people need here and now if they are to become what God wants them to be. It will be politically feasible, but not necessarily painless, to those who are prospering under the existing state of affairs. The concern of a Christian with social justice cannot be limited to taking measures that cost him nothing. As justice is the same for Christian and non-Christian, what sacrifices the Christian can accept for himself he can accept for others.

If the Christian maintains his social agenda with firmness, he will also maintain it with diffidence. He will adhere to it as a pragmatic judgment, without closing off the possibility that he has misunderstood what the problems are or that other solutions will work better than the ones he has proposed. Most particularly, he will not confuse his social agenda with the coming of God's Kingdom. He will not expect it or any other social reform to resolve the basic human predicament or to bring history to an end.

The Christian civil magistrate, then, will accept the limitations on all power and will not make his power oppressive by turning it to things it cannot do. He will listen with humility, but without despair, to the prophetic witness that keeps showing him how little he has accomplished from an eschatological standpoint and how much in society remains that is unacceptable to God. He will go on proposing and will go on expecting God to dispose.

In his relations with the institutional church, he will recognize a source of a prophetic witness that the state cannot afford to be without, a vehicle for various socially useful works, and a guide to people in a realm of existence beyond the reach of his own power. He will listen to the first, support the second, and give way to the third. He will be skeptical of the notion of "separation of church and state," whether as a philosophical notion or as a metaphorical "wall." Here again, he will look for ways to accommodate the real needs of real people.

He will not feel it necessary to avoid all ceremonial recognitions of God or the church. He will see such ceremonies not as transcending the limits on his power, but as acknowledging them. In the realm of education, he will encourage mutual respect rather than a playing down of differences. I could envisage, for instance, a public school environment in which different groups of children were able to celebrate different religious holidays in their own ways while explaining to other

children what they were doing and why.⁸ I could see such a program as more in keeping with genuine religious freedom and equality than a program of filling the corridors with plastic Santas or Easter bunnies.

On the difficult question (at least, it has been difficult in our country, though others have coped with it fairly well) of public support for religious education, I could see the Christian principles of freedom and respect as providing a less dogmatic answer than the one currently given by our courts. If a particular group of people feels that the public schools do not meet their needs, and if they wish to set up their own schools, we are obviously enhancing their freedom and showing them respect by subsidizing their endeavor. Unless there is some other group who are made less free or less respected by reason of the subsidy, it is difficult to see why the subsidy should not be allowed. Here again, I would expect the Christian civil magistrate to act pragmatically to meet the needs of real people, rather than theoretically to implement a philosophy of religious neutrality.

V.

It seems that in our country, despite its Christian heritage and its fairly high level of Christian profession and practice, it is becoming harder and harder for Christians to locate themselves or their doctrines within the mainstream of our national life. Furthermore, the decisions and forces that keep driving them toward the periphery seem to be coming from the Christians themselves as much as from anyone else. Most Christians seem to find no way of bringing their religion to bear on the central concerns of an open and pluralist society.

The concept of Christendom has become eroded, because it has been too closely connected with the integral Christendom of the past. It is this connection that I have tried to sever with the concept of pluralist Christendom as I have developed it here. My hope is to offer a basis for Christians to respond as Christians to the public issues of the day while still not wronging or undervaluing the other people in our society. To this end, I have tried to show that limiting the exercise of power and according freedom and respect to all human beings are not obstacles to the application of Christian principles; they *are* the application of Christian principles.

Here we encounter something of a paradox. Christendom, for all its theological underpinnings, remains a secular construct. God can do very well without it. Many Christians believe that it is high time for

8. The combined Christmas-Hanukkah celebrations discussed in PFEFFER, *CHURCH, STATE, AND FREEDOM* 493-96 (rev. ed. 1967) are not really what I have in mind. They seem more syncretistic than dialogic.

Him to begin doing so. Indeed, it is especially the clergy who feel that the idea of Christendom should now be permanently laid to rest. They feel—perhaps with good reason—that they can do their work of preaching the Gospel better if it is not related to the dubious enterprise of governing the secular community.

In our society, however, Christians are still largely responsible for this dubious enterprise. They occupy positions at every level of the decision-making process. As a practical matter, nothing can happen in our public affairs unless a good many of them acquiesce. If they are not to relinquish this power and responsibility, they ought to exercise it with some understanding of who they are and whom they serve. I have tried to show that they will take nothing away from their fellow citizens by doing so. Christians can claim no monopoly on love or wisdom. They will be as perplexed as anyone else by the problems facing society, and on particular solutions they will agree with non-Christians as often as with each other. But their collective participation in the internal dialogue of our society can still afford some witness to the redemptive presence of Christ in all societies.