Transforming the World

The word 'religion' has been defined many different ways. Some of the confusion is created by religious organizations themselves, in well-meaning attempts to get their message out and gain adherents. Some of it comes from mixed objectives as so called religious movements interact with civil society. All it has to do with the proposed context of religion and its content.

As an example, the core value of Christianity is Love. God is love. That is, He does not have love, define love or offer love - He Is Love! Everything that is an accurate representation of Christ is love. That does not mean that it is weak or without definition, but its core content is love.

By contrast, the Muslim 'religion' is geo-political. It is about the context - the Sharia Law. Its objective is the same as the meaning of its name - Submission. The objective is bringing the individual or the nation to submission to the prescribed law, Sharia Law. It is about context. It has geo-political objectives: Conquest and conflict. It does not matter the means or the motive as long as geography is enlarged and submission is obtained. That is why it is so difficult for those nations who hold the freedom of religion to negotiate peace with this faith, for it is not typical of most other religions where content is the objective. In a very real sense, Islam is more of a political and geographical context than it is about a religious content - a way of thinking and believing.

One of the chief errors that Christianity has fallen into periodically throughout history is to seek patronage from civil society. The Christian faith is not about acceptance by the civil context but about the transformation of the individual from the fallen state to the new man in Christ. The intersecting conflict between faith and form, context and content is where civil law seeks to bring moral certitude and religious structures seek to use the civil law to bring conformity to their beliefs.

The law remains a necessary evil, if you will, to regulate human behavior in the absence of internal character. It is the heritage of the fall, where the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil bring definition to human behavior and it is codified into law. It defines, prescribes and administers justice as best it can under the context of good and evil. This is the domain of the law.

The law is imperfect in that it is created by ignorant and imperfect people within structures of political power, Lord Acton has given us much to remember in his simple and very true statement, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This is not a statement of possibility but of absolute certainty. It does not matter the good intentions of the person administering power, when power exceeds responsibility it is corrupt - absolutely.

So when religion seeks political power, it is dealing with context, the law and control. This was never the objective of Christ or of His teachings. For any religion to gain political control gives rise to religious corruption, whether intended or not. But does this mean that religion should not deal with that which civil law and government deals with? Not at all, and here is the problem. The separation of church and state is not a clear line and human behavior is fair game for each. The problem comes in the perceptions of method and outcome. Where civil societies deal with law, religion should be about the grace of God to transform the nature of man, while the law of society precludes the nature of humanity to be evil in need of the restrictions and penalties of law.

One deals with law, the other with grace. Both deal with the same material - humanity!

So should the Christian be restricted from the political arena? Not at all. For the Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, or those of any religious faith are part of the civil society and should be welcomed into the political process as any other individual. In fact, in the American system of government it is supposed that the making of good people is an advantage to the state and a benefit to society. The threat to civil society comes when religion attempts to impose itself as the law or to compete with civil structures for submission to a secondary legal structure. The threat to religious practice comes when civil societies attempt to restrict the free practice of faith based structures in the administration of faith. It is always a fine line and seldom without confusion.

The call of God on His body, the Church, is to be instruments of transformation from the fall to the new man, the new life under the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not called to define sin but to put it under the power of the cross. We are not called to place restrictions on people actions but to deal with the nature of sin that motivates those actions. We are not called to create and administer the law but to be an agency of life in transformation. We are not here to become another external policeman but to see the internal policeman of a new nature take control by the indwelling presence of Christ.

Our methods are not by armed revolution but by revival. Our goal is not geographical but dimensional - internal transformation. Our power is not in conformity to structures or legal dictates, but by the transformation of the mind and heart and soul of humanity. The end result, is that the world is transformed by the power of Christ with or without permission from our civil culture.

America was formed with foundational concepts from philosophers who were classical theologians. They were God oriented and civic minded. Their ideal society was prescribed as one founded on the laws of God given to Moses, the Ten Commandments. Those concepts found their way into our Constitution and the guarantees of religious freedom. But like so many cultures of the past, we have changed. Our laws and culture no longer reflect the same concepts nor do we administer the same simple legal objectives. We have become a nation of vast legal bureaus, complicated legal documents which over-reach the original intent of the law. IT would be good if we could move back where we came from - with principles based in the laws of nature and the God of nature. But that may not be our track. Nonetheless, the cause of Christ is still the same and the promise of God remains. We are here to support transformation of the inner man and that will, by its very nature effect civil society. This is a good thing!

The methods of administering a gospel of transformation is to preach the word, believe for transformation and to not allow the church to slip into the powerless position of church structures, power objectives and denominational contrasts. We have the power of the living Lord of Creation and should be using it. We have the power of the love of God and of the grace given freely to all men. We fail when we want to win converts to our dogma rather than to provide an opening for people into the transforming power of His Spirit.

Our objective is content not context, and that is the hope of the world.