

FRANCIS BECKWITH'S

POLITICS FOR CHRISTIANS

SOUL CRAFT AS STATE CRAFT



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POLITICS FOR CHRISTIANS: Statecraft as Soulcraft

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PERSONAL NOTE

This is an election year and the candidates for both the Democrats and the Republican parties are less than stellar according to many. Moreover many people while having opinions on their preferred candidates have no grid from which they clearly decide on a particular person for office. As Christians, we divide on many things and our preferred political party is certainly one of them. Whatever party lines believers find themselves coming under, a fundamental question needs to be answered: “what policies come closest to our worldview as ambassadors for Christ?”

Answering that question takes careful thought and humility. It’s my hope that the summaries of this book will help the Christian in particular be salt and light as they engage to the glory of God, the political process. Moreover, it’s my desire to see the citizens of heaven consider their temporary earthly citizenship as a means to rule and reign that honors Christ and their fellow man, rather than shaming his name.

SERIES PREFACE (Pgs.9-27)

This book is written for the busy student or parent in mind. The goal of integration is both conceptual and personal. The former blends its’ theological beliefs with one’s profession of faith into a coherent Christian worldview, where the latter seeks to publically and privately live out the implications of what it means to be “Christ’s disciple”. Moreland/Beckwith (series editors) argue that the reason integration is vital (among other things) is because the Bible is true in its teachings and our vocations and discipleship demand it.

One of the ways we love God is with our minds, thus to neglect it fosters a secular/sacred divide which works against the spiritual warfare in which believers are already engaged. Our battle as Christians involves ideas that oppose Christ’s Lordship. Grappling with epistemological ideas (i.e., ideas of what we know and how we know them) are part of that battle.

Moreland therefore emphasizes the need to bring back into culture Christian truth claims as part of the plausibility structure. If they are not part of it, then our ideas won't even be considered. These are ideas, or set off ideas a person either is or is not willing to entertain as true. To accomplish the aforesaid, Moreland explains that it is therefore necessary to employ the three integrative tasks.

First, is *direct defense*; here the goal is to show that the Christian worldview is rationally justified. Second, is *polemics*; which involves criticizing rival worldviews to Christianity, and third, are *theistic explanations*; which are used to explain phenomenon in one's profession.

The approach Moreland and Beckwith take of integration has its critics (Pgs.24-26), but one thing however is certain, for Christians not to engage in discipline (x) with their worldview, has actually aided in the secularization of our western culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (Pgs.29-31)

Beckwith starts off by stating that to learn this "state craft" as "soul craft" one must take many years to hone these skills and contemplate these truths. For me these years have become increasingly lessened because of my age (53). Yet, there's no time like the present to learn any subject and consider how it relates to my personal discipleship to Christ. A grown man with grown children I thought it appropriate to gather as much knowledge as I possibly can from this source.

#1: THE STUDY OF POLITICS (PGS.41-57)

Beckwith starts the chapter by pointing out that political execution concerning its powers comes from worldviews that are never neutral. He then asks, "is the Bible a reliable means to make public policy: some Christians would affirm its use, while others would deny it for such activity.

Another issue raised is the Church/State tension and how Christian values are to be established when one is a democrat and the other is a republican? To answer these questions, Beckwith accentuates the need for us to know *what* politics is and *why* Christians should actively study and shape political discourse.

Almost every university, notes Beckwith, has a political science studies of sorts that studies the nuances of politics in areas of philosophy, history, theology,

medicine, etc., within its' sub-fields (Pgs.42-43). Thus, this book is a mere introduction to the subject.

Beckwith points out that *Political Theory* encompasses many philosophical questions about the nature of government, the individual, rights, democracy, liberty, equality, and the good. According to Locke, not only do natural rights exist, but the best form of government to protect these rights is the 'the separation of powers' as we have in the U.S (e.g., executive, legislative, and judicial) because unaccountable people with too much power lean toward despotism and rampant injustice. This form of government at least makes it possible to curb said abuse of power.

Moreover, assuming that Locke is correct about natural rights, then the purpose of liberty is to secure the public good for its' citizens so that those who defraud, murder or steal from their neighbor are held accountable for such violations.

Beckwith explains that the fact that different forms of government exist, naturally leads to the study of *Comparative Politics*. This is where one nation's policy is considered to whether or not it would be good for another nation to adopt (E.g., Denmark the first nation to legalize same sex marriage. How will this play out in the USA?). Here, philosophy, worldview analysis and statistics are used to arrive at some kind of resolution.

Beckwith astutely points out that the theories these sub-fields obtain never operate alone, but rather necessarily intersect each other because of the contribution each field affords to the other and thus our political understanding. Thus, for the responsible Christian citizen who wants to advance the good, the true and the beautiful, Beckwith insists that theology along with other disciplines must be studied in order to have a more robust political theory and application.

#2: LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN (Pgs.59-89)

Beckwith begins the chapter by explaining that Liberal Democracy (LD) has been absent from most of history and thus our Christian heritage. Yet, Christians have largely embraced (LD) because it accentuates the liberty to worship, holds governments accountable, empowers people to form the mores of society, and

because it seems consistent with the Christian worldview concerning its views of persons and natural rights which are grounded on natural law (NL).

The term **Liberal** concerns the freedoms government is to guarantee and **Democracy** refers to the principle of self-governance and equality each citizen possess before the law. Beckwith notes that **self-governance** deals with having a representative government which is ultimately accountable to the people. Thus, for (LD) to work well a nation must be under the rule of law and have a developed civil society. These laws are to be equally applied to every citizen and under all of this must obtain 1st principles that are unassailable by government or the masses thus guaranteeing the proper use of power to move a nation.

Accordingly, the duty of government is to protect certain freedoms while simultaneously having limited power by the law and individuals they protect. For this to work and society to flourish, individuals must be civil. This is where the problem with a relativistic society comes in. Such a society kills objective truth, the result is that might makes right and the mob mentality wins the day because no “1st principles” exist above the people. Sadly, we’re there today.

Beckwith continues and explains that by **separation of powers** each branch of government has jurisdictional authority to perform their duties unique to themselves. This often affords a compromise of views held between differing parties and ultimately reduces the occasion for despotism or tyranny to arise. Historically the Parties in the USA have been the *Democratic-Republican* Party and the *Federalist* Party. Today, it’s the Democrats and Republicans holding opposing views on many issues precious to Christians (e.g., the state of the unborn, gay rights, public education policies, religion/state relations, etc.)

The **Christian citizen** is the subject of two cities (e.g., one of earth and one of heaven). As resident aliens, Beckwith accentuates the fact that justice and doing good to others is based on people being created in the image of God and both Church and State can work together to achieve such ends. Yet, the Church must beware of backing government programs which would halt evangelism. Doing justice is part of God’s rebuke of the nations in the Old Testament and the Good Samaritan as a swift reprimand to the Church in the New Testament (Pgs.68-69).

Inevitably, to love neighbor will require that God’s truth interrupt the cultural moral climate and when this obtains, true tolerance is carried out and

thus true civility will obtain. For this to happen, it's critical for Christians to know the laws of the land in order to use them for the advancement of the common good as Paul often did in the book of Acts with his Roman citizenship.

Beckwith accentuates how Paul understood that all authority comes from God (Rom.13) but it's also limited. Significant also is to fight the split view of knowledge within Western Society that says Science gives us objective facts binding on everyone and religion provides only private subjective values binding only on the community holding said values. For when people have this view of knowledge it prevents the Christian worldview from even being considered for making public policy.

Beckwith holds that **supporting non-Christian candidates** can be done and sometimes it should be done, the grounds of which is competence to rule rather than religious persuasion. A major mistake to avoid is to think that only a "religious" view (whatever that means) is not neutral. The fact is that neutrality is impossible specifically because everyone has a worldview from which they try to make sense out of reality. Thus, worldviews play a vital role in deciding the desirability of a candidate. Moreover, one can champion democracy and natural law and be informed by their theological position for the good.

#3: THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE (Pgs.91-117)

In this chapter Beckwith tackles what the Bill of Rights says as to how state and religion are to relate, what their boundaries are and specifically the interpretation of the "establishment clause" and the "free-exercise clause". It's here where the battle rages for all advocates.

The *establishment clause* from the First Amendment states that: "*Congress may not employ legislative power to establish an official national religion*". Thus, for example, Congress (not any other branch of government) can't legally put into law that citizens become a Muslim and financially support its local place of worship. The *free-exercise clause* asserts that the Constitution protects the religious liberty of citizens from any legislative act of Congress. Thus, laws should be set-up to protect a citizen's right to worship as they deem fit, without the interference of the State (or so it seems to me).

As a form of legal shorthand, Beckwith notes that the phrase "separation of church and state" is now employed to describe the religious clauses of the First

Amendment. However, ambiguity is an infamous problem with the phrases, “free-exercise”, “establishment”, and “religion”. It’s this lack of clarity that causes so many interpretations, nevertheless, as the author notes:

The notion of “separation of church and state” exists as a largely unquestioned dogma in American political and legal discourse, even though the phrase does not appear in the text of the Constitution and a plain reading of the religion clauses is just as consistent with some forms of moderate separationism as it is with strong separationism.
[pg.93]

Beckwith goes on to explain the similarities and differences between moderate and strong separationists. *Both affirm* that government religious liberty should be maximized for the public good and that neither government nor ecclesiastical powers should attempt to control the other’s sphere of duties. Yet there are disagreements.

On the one hand, *moderates* don’t attempt to exclude religion from public life, thus supporting public funding programs of similarly situated religious and secular entities. On the other hand, *strong separationists* forbid any aid to religion even when similarly situated secular entities are given aid. These also exclude any political input from a religiously based worldview from its citizens (i.e., if the view is informed from a sacred book, it is de-facto unacceptable).

Beckwith asks if there’s any place where government and religious institutions can cooperate together (e.g., school vouchers for private religious schools). Important to point out is that there’s no definition of religious or religion that can be pointed towards which both exposes the ambiguity that obtains in people’s minds and also hides the myth the state comes from a neutral, non-religious position.

Beckwith further reflects on the interaction between the Danbury Baptists and Jefferson in order to clue in on the “slogan’s” original intent [pgs.95-98] and explains that the letter, far from being in the US Constitution, was routine presidential correspondence that strong separationists hi-jacked (my view) and gave it the status of “holy writ”. Unfortunately, the strong separationist movement of the time won the day on a false epistemological view that religious

principles are not based on reason or logic and thus have no place in the making of public policy [pgs.98-107].

Beckwith then contemplates the limits of religious freedom and the exercise thereof which at the end of the day anyone can relativize according to what I've seen. According to Beckwith, the application of the establishment clause has not only been misapplied, it has also muddied the understanding of what the Separation between the Church and State mean.

#4: SECULAR LIBERALISM AND THE NEUTRAL STATE (Pgs.119-143)

In this chapter Beckwith begins pointing out that Christians who support a liberal democracy (see chapter 2) nevertheless are dismayed at the fruits of incivility, relativism, and the use of tax dollars to support abortion, SSM, and public education that's less educative and more indoctrinative in nature.

In all spheres of life people have embraced "secular liberalism" as the position to maintain and safeguard democracy while simultaneously marginalizing "religious positions" for making public policy. There's much confusion concerning the term "religious" but it's assumed by far too many people such that the cultural haze is continues to be perpetuated.

After considering the aforesaid, Beckwith delves into the meaning of secular liberalism which at its core makes the individual king when moral disputes arise in order to resolve them. That is, the individual is ultimate never the state nor any "religious" tradition, all of which is a relativized view of the "good life".

When it comes to the meaning of "secular" Beckwith notes that restraints on citizens can only be enforced through "non-religious" arguments or worldviews. The problem of definition of course obtains but no one bothers with this. They just assume everyone "knows" the meaning being employed. In other words, "religion" brings bondage to citizens, but the "secular" non-religious bring liberty. The state here may even pay for the poor to have an abortion, but it must never stop said procedures from obtaining lest personal liberty be hindered.

The reality here is that a relativistic presupposition is being employed in absolute terms. It's Secular Liberalism that's largely responsible for advocating SSM, Abortion, etc., which is fine because the reasons used to support such acts

are *secular, not religious*. That's bogus because it's also coming from a worldview that is absolutely not neutral but "closed minded".

Beckwith continues and points out three arguments used to advocate (SL) that doesn't measure up to rationality and are thus self-refuting in nature. First, is the *Golden Rule* argument advanced by philosopher Robert Audi which holds that we ought not to impose our religious viewpoint on those who disagree with us because we would not want that done to us. Two problems obtain here; one is that the term "religious" is vague and second there's always a worldview governing human affairs telling us what is and is not good. Why is SL better than a "religious" point of view? Beckwith then uses examples which either expose SL's relativism or radical subjectivism [pgs.123-132].

Second, there's the *Secular Argument* argument which essentially hi-jacks reason to mean "non-religious in nature" but Beckwith rightly points out that *reason* has the properties of either true or false right or wrong, not black or white, religious or non-religious. This muddies the waters of reason and clarity and is used to justify the issue of abortion [pgs.133-138].

Third, there's the *Err on the Side of Liberty* argument which ends up being not just obtusely incoherent but also shoots itself in the foot when applied to itself [pgs.139-142]. Beckwith concludes the chapter by pointing out that secular liberalism is no more dogmatic in its stance than any "religious" view ever has been. The irrationality here is legion and yet largely goes undetected by throngs of people. It's bizarre.

#5: GOD, NATURAL RIGHTS AND THE NATURAL MORAL LAW (Pgs.145-163)

Beckwith here explores whether or not it is reasonable to hold, as the founding fathers did, that natural moral law requires God's existence. He considers the atheistic, theistic and Biblical view as to its origins (Hobbes, Locke, and Aquinas were major contributors to our understanding and disputes). Beckwith explains that it's reasonable to believe in natural law being grounded in God's existence and since the existence of God is a philosophically defensible position, one may legitimately claim it as an item of knowledge. Thus, those who reject said position, aren't unreasonable for doing so, yet neither are those who accept it.

Beckwith considers contemporary atheism and some of its key players (E.g., Hitchens and Dawkins) and sees an inconsistency with their worldview and natural rights. That is, atheism essentially affirms that we are accidental, purposeless, pieces of meat who when we die we're done. Humans have no intrinsic value in and of themselves and yet when moral dilemmas arise who cares if there's agreement or disagreement because there's no purpose or meaning to life. But people like atheists deeply care about their views and thus betray their worldview unwittingly. That's an oversimplification of what Beckwith considers [pgs.148-152].

Beckwith then considers why moral natural law suggests God. He holds that God's existence best accounts for said laws and are most at home in a theistic universe for these objective moral values are grounded in God, the Designer, the Supreme Being (even if Christendom is rejected, some ultimate being grounds natural law). There are really only two options to buttress the origins of Human dignity and rights; (a) its either accidental, a chance result, or (b) its the result of intelligence.

If it's accidental then why obey a mindless principle? Beckwith then considers evolutionary arguments for said position that are merely descriptive, not prescriptive and there's the rub [pgs.152-157], for that worldview only explains *what is* not *why it is* and that is precisely the realm of morals (e.g., what we ought and ought not do).

If it's the result of intelligence, then we have an explanation that fits most consistently with human experience. For we obey "beings" not "principles", we fulfill our duties toward those whom are owed, the objects of which are persons, not accidents. Beckwith continues and considers examples that have been used to ground these laws in Scripture [pgs.158-162].

He concludes the book with a wise reminder that while politics is not everything, it is not "nothing". It is often messy and filled with conflict, but so is much of life (e.g., family, work, school and church). Thus he ends with words from Ecclesiastes that are often quoted, but not often reflected on:

"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

² *A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.*

³ *A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.*

⁴ *A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.*

⁵ *A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.*

⁶ *A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.*

⁷ *A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.*

⁸ *A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.” (Ecc.3:1-8 NASB)*