

GOD AND GOVERNMENT – HAS THE CHURCH FAILED?

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At no point in history has it been more crucial than now for the church to review its position and relevance in society. The number of new Christians added to the church world-wide has been more in the past five decades than in all of church history, yet the impact of the church on modern society remains negligible. The question is why? And what is there to be done to address this situation?

In these days the Holy Spirit is bringing renewed focus on the message that Jesus preached; throughout the New Testament it is referred to as “the Gospel of the Kingdom of God”. Recent church history reveals that the church has abdicated its responsibility in almost every area of life in society. The primary focus of our message has been the salvation of souls, which is important, but not an end in itself. However, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, that includes salvation, pertains to every area of personal and public life - education, health, legislation, politics and economics, included.

In Africa the fact that the church has denied responsibility in these areas has born tragic consequences as a press account published in the Daily Graphic, a Ghana newspaper, dated 31 December 1957 records. It was reported that President Kwame Nkrumah, first president of the newly independent state of Ghana, formally the Gold Coast in West Africa, called a meeting of ninety five church leaders to confer on the development of the infant state. His reason was that under colonial rule the missionaries of the day introduced First World education and healthcare to the nation. He therefore sought assistance with the development of national policy and legislation. The report recorded that these leaders had failed to respond to his request in this regard, yet had called for his assistance to mediate in a matter that had caused significant dissension between key leaders in the group. In the process of mediation Nkrumah found these Churchmen to be stubborn and irreconcilable and the mediation process failed.

History records that Nkrumah went elsewhere for the help he sought. Under the influence of Chinese Communists he constituted and built two institutions that spawned ideologies and policies that have influenced and destroyed all but some of the nations on the continent of Africa. These were the Kwame Nkrumah Institute of Political Ideology, and the Kwame Nkrumah School of Military Training. He was the founding father of the non-aligned movement and the originator of the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) He also formulated the ideology of Pan-Africanism. His influence in Africa today is exercised in the leadership of several modern post-colonial democracies, including Zimbabwe, Namibia, and others.

The modern history of Africa may well have been very different had the church taken Nkrumah’s initial approach seriously and provided the counsel that he sought. There is no question that the responsibility for the ensuing chaos in Africa must, at least in part, be carried by the church that has failed to represent Almighty God in matters

pertaining to national development, economics and political policies. The Bible has much to say on this, yet the church has not contributed in matters pertaining to government, much less made it a priority to prepare and equip Christians to serve in positions of public service.

The Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached and the wisdom and truth of God harnessed and applied for the benefit of all men in all areas of society, this is the responsibility of the church. As modern Christians we are too often defensive and apologetic about our faith, confessing Christ yet without testimony of the power of God we essentially live under siege to the powers of darkness and the world system.

It was Jesus Himself who said that, “The Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.” (Matt 11:12) Of His Church He said, “I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” (Matt 16:18) Both statements imply conflict; not passive, apathetic existence and, as is often the case, hopelessness. The church is called to be an instrument of spiritual violence against the powers of darkness that have entrenched wickedness and unrighteousness in the structures of society, and in doing so facilitate the redemptive work of the cross. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”(Col 1:19-20; Ephesians 1:7-11).

All things, including governments, were created by Him and for Him (Col 1:16). All government officials, ministers of governments, prime ministers and presidents are “God’s ministers” (Romans 13:1-6). Whether they know it or not, whether they accept it or not, they are accountable to God for what they do with the authority and power that their position affords them. This power and authority belongs to Him; it is therefore to Him that they will have to give an account. Abuse of power, corruption in government, exploitation of material and human resources, all of this will have to be answered for to Him who owns it all.

Africa has a legacy of bad governance essentially because of the lack of understanding and hence the failure of the church to equip men and women in the fear of God to administer the affairs of nations according to the precepts and statutes of God. The church in each nation will account for this before those in government are called to book. The church’s failure to teach and inform individuals of these facts will also have to be accounted for, before unbelievers are judged on their conduct in government.

The Biblical record includes significant references to the administration of nations. The following are submitted as an introduction to the subject of Biblical principles for governing nations.

Principle 1: Government must be people orientated – for the good of the people

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good.” (Romans 13:3-4). It is a fact that government can cause a lot of pain. Africa has groaned and travailed because of the influence of wicked and unrighteous rulers. How is it that men in authority do not fear God and wield the power they have in the interests of the people who they are responsible to

serve as God's ministers for their good? Pro 29:2 spells it out: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan."

Principle 2: Righteousness and justice – the premise of godly government

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (Psalm 89:14 & Psalm 97:2). The foundation of God's throne, the seat of all authority and power, is righteousness and justice. It is from this premise that the Kingdom of God is administered. We claim to represent this God yet have failed to train leaders in principles of righteousness to represent Him in positions of authority. Isaiah 59:9: "Justice is far from us, nor does righteousness overtake us; we look for light, but there is darkness! For brightness, but we walk in blackness!"

Where the rule of law has been destroyed and justice evades society there is pending chaos and anarchy. It is the responsibility of government before God to provide justice for the good of the people. Apart from God's precepts of righteousness and justice there can be no rule of law to provide light for men (Is 59:9-15). The hope of Africa is that the Church will rise to this challenge and bring forth properly trained leaders to govern the nations of the continent in the fear of God on the basis of righteousness and justice.

Principle 3: Government involves establishing and enhancing the dignity and continuity of the throne (seat of government) with truth

The king who judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever. (Pro 29:14). It is the responsibility of the government to provide stability in order that the nation can be effective. Stability ensures continuity. Africa has been characterised by instability. People live ad-hoc lives with no hope for tomorrow. Right government is needed to address instability on all levels, economic, political and other so that the full potential of individuals and communities can be realised.

Principle 4: Government involves establishing the land.

The king establishes the land by justice, but he who receives bribes overthrows it. (Proverbs 29:4). The king establishes the land by justice! That is all structures, institutions, resources, everything within the land is established by the application of principles of justice. Conversely these are overthrown where justice is absent and bribery and corruption are the order of the day. Spiritually every bribe that is taken overthrows the land. It brings instability and overthrows society. Corruption affects the church itself. Economically, spiritually and morally it saps the church of credibility.

In most African nations bribery is part of the culture. In some it has almost become a philosophy and way of life, yet Scripture clearly shows that it overthrows the rule of law and justice. There is no one who can deny that this is evident throughout the continent where government officials have entrenched a culture of bribery and corruption in exchange for favours and perhaps the service which they paid to provide.

Principle 5: Government is defined, as the ability to manage what God would do in the nation at a given time.

“This is the thing which I have spoken to Pharaoh. God has shown Pharaoh what His is about to do.” (Gen 41:28). Through prophetic insight and the gift to interpret dreams and visions, Joseph was able to tell Pharaoh: “this is what God is going to do” in the nation of Egypt. God can and will do whatever He wants to do in the nations (Jer 18:7-10) In this dispensation we see the fulfilment of many end time prophecies. Nations are travailing, yet few if any leaders have a clue as to what God would do in their nations. Good government will mitigate what God would do.

The Egyptians had no choice, God proceeded to do what He wanted to do, yet in the process He showed mercy and demonstrated His Wisdom to the nations of the ancient world through the administration of Joseph. Joseph was able to manage the circumstances in Egypt by harnessing and applying the Wisdom of God over a period of fourteen years and bring the nation through a time of national crisis without full-scale revolution and anarchy taking place.

Where are the prophets in our nations who will advise government on how to manage what God is about to do? Has God prepared men who will rise as Joseph did to take responsibility in the nations of Africa in the next millennium? If He has, will the church recognise them and support them in the work they are called to do and give God the glory due to Him?

Principle 6: Government is defined as the ability to lead people into their inheritance

“When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.” (Deut 32:8). As Joshua led the people to subdue the land and allocated an inheritance for the people of Israel, so civil government is to lead and administer the allocation of resources to the people in modern nations. The land must be subdued and its resources distributed by a system of just and righteous administration. God, who created all things, has placed an inheritance in the land for the people who dwell on it. Good government through principles of righteousness and justice, should bring about the distribution of an inheritance for all of the inhabitants of the land.

Principle 7: Government involves leading a nation in a time of national rehabilitation and reconstruction

The ministry and work of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate government leadership during a time of national rehabilitation and reconstruction. All three of these men were given responsibility by both God and the pagan authorities to plan and facilitate the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the nation of Israel after the Babylonian captivity.

The reality of the wars in Africa today possibly represents the greatest challenge to the church on the continent. It is the responsibility of the church to be involved in quelling the series of military conflicts that afflict the continent, first through prayer, intercession and spiritual warfare, and secondly in the process of reconciliation to bring peace and stability.

It is the responsibility of the church to train leaders in conflict resolution, in order to bring about peace and reconciliation through the ministry of reconciliation in Christ

Jesus (2 Cor 5:18-21). If the Body of Christ does not take this responsibility seriously the powers of darkness will surely overtake and destroy the Church in their efforts to oppose God's purposes on the continent.

Principle 7: Government involves leading a nation in a time of reorganisation and establishment

“He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.” (Psalm 78:70-72). David's example of servant leadership remains the number one Biblical role model for civil and church government. God chose David as His servant to lead Israel in the time of reorganisation and transition. This required strong servant leadership that solicited the loyal support and commitment of men and women who understood what God was doing as He transferred the Kingdom from the house of Saul to that of David in order to take His redemptive purpose forward.

We need government leaders who are chosen by God to serve the nation in these days. They in turn must be given the loyal support of faithful believers who, like the men of Issachar (1 Chr 12:32) “who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do”, and can advise the nation accordingly.

In conclusion then: Scripture refers to the nations as “God's inheritance”(Ps 2:8; Dan 7:14). They are not merely “the masses” or the “proletariat” or the “bourgeois”. The mandate of the church is to “disciple the nations”, (Mat 28:19) this includes imparting Biblical revelation on the matter of government.

Many leaders, particularly those in Africa, operate in the realm of both politics and religion – they pour libations, bring sacrifices and appease the “ancestors” through various rituals and traditional practices. Their seats of power are strengthened through the counsel of sorcerers and magicians. Through this they draw satanic wisdom, counsel and spiritual power from the kingdom of darkness by means of which they secure economic and political advantage for themselves and their cohorts at the expense of others.

The church has for too long said that politics and religion don't mix. In doing so the seats of power to govern nations have been relinquished to the influence of unrighteous men that collaborate with demonic rulers to oppress people and exploit the resources in the nations of the world while deliberately obstructing God's redemptive purposes for both.

In this day it is no exaggeration to say that the 730 million people on the African continent have not yet experienced the benefit of God's Wisdom. It is a matter of godly leadership in the area of government. The Church must train people to minister in society or bear the consequences of this negligence by bowing to the rule of the unrighteous and Christians will ultimately answer to God for abdicating from this responsibility. There is no other way. This is the challenge that lies before us at the dawn of the new century. The Church must take responsibility in this matter as it is accountable to God for the state of the nations on the continent. The mandate has not changed, we are to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”