

A Pastoral Call:
Engaging the Culture from the Pulpit

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2017

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

Since the founding era, the United States has experienced a line of strong religious leaders who have diligently influenced the nation by applying the Bible to the whole of life. There are numerous examples of pastors who have used the pulpit to influence their congregations, and consequently, their societies. Although it is commonly argued today that pastors should not combine political and religious issues within sermons, discussing culture within a biblical worldview is critical to the health of a nation, and a vital role each pastor bears. This paper examines the scope of the biblical foundations which influenced America's early pastors and how they sought to combine their duty to God with their duty to man and country by addressing the cultural issues of their day. The effort of many of the patriot pastors within their ministries during the American Revolution helped to influence the tide of a new nation, the United States of America. This thesis proposes that modern-day pastors follow the patriot pastors' historic example and address current cultural issues.

A Pastoral Call: Engaging the Culture from the Pulpit

We have to preach the Gospel, empower the people, open the doors of our church and turn 'em loose, because they've got a culture that is constantly hammering them...and they're using culture, using politics, to change lives, to implement a godless worldview and to steal your children and rob your freedom.

Senior Pastor, Jack Hibbs, Calvary Chapel Chino Hills¹

In 2014, several California churches filed a complaint against the California Department of Managed Health Care because it passed a law that required churches to pay for elective abortions of church employees as part of their health insurance plans.² In accordance with their obvious religious convictions regarding abortion, the pastors filed a complaint through Alliance Defending Freedom. Senior Pastor of Calvary Chapel Chino Hills, Jack Hibbs, stated in a response to the case, “We will take this to the point of being jailed, if necessary, being arrested, if necessary – whatever it takes. I cannot violate my biblical worldview. Once I have to do that, I no longer live in the United States our founding fathers gave me.”³ Pastor Jack Hibbs’ experience is not an isolated case. Pastors throughout the nation are forced to make decisions on whether they will allow civil government to govern their churches.

Unfortunately, the separation of church and state has been a longstanding issue facing the United States. Proponents within the church provide strong arguments as to why politics and church issues should either be combined or separated. A pastor willing to discuss controversial political issues or voice dissent on certain policies from the pulpit

¹ Bradford Richardson, “Pastors Congregate in D.C. to Discuss Politics, Religion,” *Washington Times* (May 26, 2016): para. 11, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/may/26/pastors-congregate-to-discuss-politics-religion/>, accessed February 5, 2017.

² *Ibid.*

³ Becky Yeh, “Pastor: I’d go to jail before funding abortion,” *LiveActionNews* (November 9, 2014), <http://liveactionnews.org/pastor-id-go-to-jail-before-funding-abortion/>, accessed February 4, 2017.

fuels heated debate relative to freedom of speech, as well as the lawfulness of IRS regulations curtailing such speech. While a pastor's role in the church is to be a teacher and messenger of the Scriptures alone, some would argue that role includes challenging his congregation to engage the surrounding culture to further the Gospel. This sort of engagement requires knowledge of issues facing the culture. Although it is commonly argued that pastors should not combine political and religious issues within sermons, discussing cultural issues alongside a biblical worldview is critical to the health of a nation, and vital to a pastor's role. The examples of early American pastors have set the precedent for modern day pastors to begin actively engaging their cultures, and consequently, influencing their societies.

INFLUENCE OF A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW ON THE AMERICAN SOCIETY

Despite the obvious evidence of differing worldviews in today's culture, the words and writings of the early American founders reveals a heavy reliance upon the unchanging principles of Scripture. Many of the colonial leaders and early founders incorporated their biblical worldview into the founding documents of early America and sought to apply the Scripture. Dr. Francis Schaeffer's studies indicated the intense and positive influence of a biblical worldview upon early American history. Schaeffer noted that the early leaders of the budding nation recognized that their biblical presuppositions applied to the whole of life and that these presuppositions influenced how they understood and believed the Bible addressed issues of self-government, family

government, church government, and civil government.⁴ Schaeffer wrote,

“Presuppositions rest upon that which a person considers to be the truth of what exists....Their presuppositions also provide the basis for their values and therefore the basis for their decisions.”⁵ As a result, the Bible was used to influence early government organization and was a pivotal instrument in determining the course of how one ought to live and relate privately and corporately to others. In Dr. Gai Ferdon’s book, *A Republic if You Can Keep It*, she further expanded on the belief system held by many early modern Americans:

Early modern America subscribed to a supernatural view of origins based on the Genesis account, a revelational view of absolute truth which rests on God’s inspired Scriptures, and a theistic view of value whereby God is the most valuable being in the universe. Americans also perceived man as a being of infinite eternal value since God created him in his image, and held to an eternal view of destiny defined as supreme service to God’s kingdom purposes. These basic assumptions directly impacted the formation of early American culture, society, and institutions.⁶

The presuppositions held by early Americans influenced how they drafted their founding documents and viewed their surrounding institutions.

The belief that the Bible ought to directly influence every part of man’s life was the fruit of the hard labor of many of the biblical scholars of the Reformation. In fact, the idea that the Bible applied to the whole of life was perhaps one on the most powerful ideas to come forth from the Reformation.⁷ Ferdon noted that the Reformers firmly believed that “all human relations—public or private—including the relationship between

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1976), 84.

⁵ Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 19.

⁶ Gai Ferdon, *A Republic if You Can Keep It: America's Authentic Liberty Confronts Contemporary Counterfeits* (Chesapeake: Foundation for American Christian Education, 2008), 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

governors and the governed, were to be informed by it [the Bible].”⁸ Thus, as the American Colonies sought to establish themselves, they sought to instill a biblical worldview that guided how they lived their lives both privately and publicly.

EXAMPLES SET BY HISTORICAL PASTORS

In his piece, “Pastors as Public Servants in America,” Dr. Kenyn Cureton, the Vice President for Church Ministries at the Family Research Council, presented a brief overview of a few pastors of the American founding era. These pastors carried out their God-given calling as ministers of the Word, and committed themselves to actively serve as a public voice to the budding American nation. Their active engagement in this tense environment directly impacted many decisions of American political leaders, as well as their congregations, and the role their congregants would play in the political arena.⁹ Cureton highlighted just a few pastors who recognized the cultural depravity and who faithfully challenged it. Pastors like George Finney, Jedidiah Morse, and John Witherspoon used the platform of the pulpit to challenge their congregations to be obedient to their duty to God and their duty to civil government.

Pastors play a vital role in leading their congregations in opposing societal evils and advocating morality. The church has long been seen as a vital tool in raising a society’s “consciousness regarding political issues.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, America has drifted far from her founding principles when it was populated with pastors unafraid to preach on

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kenyn Cureton, “Pastors as Public Servants in America” (unpublished manuscript), Word file. File available upon request.

¹⁰ Steffen N. Johnson, “Of Politics and Pulpits: A First Amendment Analysis of IRS Restrictions on the Political Activities of Religious Organizations,” *Boston College Law Review* 42.4 (2000-2001): 882.

the issues of their times, and who believed the Bible applied to the whole of life.¹¹ The Bible was the foundational text from which pastors and citizens drew their values and morals. While many appropriately attribute high praise to men like Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, and John Hancock for America's liberty traditions, many pastors of the American founding era like Reverend George Whitefield and Reverend James Caldwell had a profound influence on their congregations' views of American principles.¹² It is their sermons, and similar ones, that helped the "pulpit of the American Revolution" become prominent, and to strongly influence the new nation.¹³ Cureton noted in his article "The Power of Preaching," that "the problems we face in America are not just economic problems or cultural problems, they are spiritual problems, and if we are to experience a return to God in this nation, pastors must stand up and be counted."¹⁴ When the Bible is applied to the whole of life, then healing and change can occur.

The messages of these pastors from the early American era significantly impacted the political understanding of the American people. Their words spoke to themes such as civil government, civil liberty, religious liberty, as well as inalienable rights among others. The following examples are taken from pastors who not only embraced their calling as messengers of the Scriptures, but spoke directly into the culture of their day.

George Whitefield (1714-1770)

Despite his prominent place in the Great Awakening, George Whitefield grew up

¹¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live*, 84.

¹² David Barton, *The Role of Pastors & Christians in Civil Government* (Aledo, TX: WallBuilder Press, 2003), 35.

¹³ Ellis Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1991), xxvii.

¹⁴ Kenyn Cureton, "The Power of Preaching" (unpublished manuscript, May 27, 2016), Word file, 2. File available upon request.

in a conservative English home that faithfully adhered to the established Church of England.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Whitefield came to be one of the most outspoken advocates of the reformation of the Church, and challenge its theology and its role in society.

Whitefield was greatly concerned with the individual person and his “new birth” in Christ. Thus, a significant amount of his sermons focused on the depravity of man and his sinful nature.¹⁶

Among Whitefield’s first supporters in America was the Tennent family. The Presbyterian minister Gilbert Tennent greatly influenced Whitefield and the sermons he delivered while Whitefield traveled throughout the American Colonies. Tennent reminded Whitefield that pastors, along with their congregations, had “to experience conversion. In salvation, religiosity did not matter. A preacher must have experienced the conviction of sin and the redeeming power of grace in his own heart, or else his preaching would inevitably be cold, moralistic, and misleading.”¹⁷ Whitefield integrated this message of repentance and redemption as he preached throughout the Colonies. Whitefield resolved that pastors and their congregations not settle comfortably into society, but rather, because of their new births, exude a passionate zeal characteristic of a people transformed by the Gospel. In one sermon, Whitefield wrote, “The great and important duty which is incumbent on Christians, is to guard against all appearance of evil, to watch against the first risings in the heart to evil; to have a guard upon our

¹⁵ Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3.

¹⁶ Thomas Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, US: Yale University Press, 2014), 87.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

actions, that they may not be sinful, of so much as seem to be so.”¹⁸ Whitefield consistently encouraged his church members to guard against the rising immorality of their society.

As an example, Whitefield actively engaged the evangelism of slaves throughout the American Colonies. Though not ardently opposed to slavery, Whitefield became a well-spoken orator on the necessity for Christians to minister to slaves and to evangelize them.¹⁹ Consequently, he faced extreme disapproval from many Southern planters for teaching this doctrine of redemption and new birth to their slaves.²⁰ Whitefield even went so far as to write letters to local newspapers to defend his position as to why it was necessary to preach the Gospel to all people regardless of the color of their skin.²¹ Stout wrote of these letters: “The letters represented the first journalistic statement on the subject of slavery. As such, they marked a precedent of awesome implications, beyond anything Whitefield could have imagined.”²² Whitefield’s fervor for the Gospel was not bound by what the culture deemed acceptable. Rather, he shared the tenets of the Gospel to all he encountered, determined that all should come to a saving faith, and which identified him as one of early America’s greatest preachers. Stout describes Whitefield as “the first colonial-American religious celebrity.”²³ Whitefield, as an advocate of the Gospel, extended its life-giving truths to those considered unworthy.

¹⁸ George Whitefield, “Christ the Support of the Tempted. A Sermon Preach’d at Black-heath” (London: C. Whitefield, 1740), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁰ John Piper, “‘I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!’ The Life and Ministry of George Whitefield: Living and Preaching As Though God Were Real (Because He Is),” *Desiring God* (February 3, 2009), http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/i-will-not-be-a-velvet-mouthed-preacher#_ftn81, accessed March 5, 2017.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 123.

²³ *Ibid.*, 92.

Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766)

Pastor Jonathan Mayhew, a Massachusetts native, preached that pastors could and should bring politics into the pulpit.²⁴ In his sermon, “A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Nonresistance to the Higher Powers,” Mayhew argued that since the Scriptures applied to the whole of life, then those issues concerning politics addressed in the Scriptures ought to be discussed from the pulpit. He argued that when pastors discuss political issues they are not doing so at the expense of the Gospel:

It is hoped that but few will think the subject an improper one to be discoursed on in the pulpit under a notion that this is preaching politics instead of Christ. However, to remove all prejudices of this sort, I beg it may be remembered that “All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Why then should not those parts of Scripture which relate to civil government be examined and explained from the desk?”²⁵

Mayhew was unconcerned with those who opposed his sermons, as he considered Scripture the ultimate authority, believed Scripture spoke to the issues that touched men most, and that as a pastor, he had a duty to discuss these issues.

John Witherspoon (1723-1794)

Son of a reverend, John Witherspoon followed in his father’s footsteps as he faithfully led a New Jersey church congregation. Witherspoon’s strong Calvinist roots led him to adhere deeply to the belief that if one is part of the elect, then the fruit of one’s life would demonstrate a deep commitment to the faith.²⁶ The effect of Witherspoon’s

²⁴ Cureton, “The Power of Preaching,” 2.

²⁵ Jonathan Mayhew, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers: With Some Reflections on the Resistance made to King Charles I. And on the Anniversary of his Death: In which the Mysterious Doctrine of that Prince’s Sainthood and Martyrdom is Unriddled* Digital Commons (1750), <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=etas/>, accessed February 4, 2017.

²⁶ John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution: The Faith of our Founding Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 85.

ministry would reach into the lives of many of American's founding fathers. John Eidsmoe described Witherspoon as the "man who shaped the men who shaped America."²⁷ Witherspoon was president of the College of New Jersey where, of the 478 graduates during his tenure, 114 became ministers; three were state governors; three were U.S. Supreme Court Judges; twenty were United States Senators; thirty-three were U.S. Congressmen; one became a vice president, and one became a sitting president.²⁸ The academic fruit of his labor led to the development of many strong leaders that established the United States on Judeo-Christian principles.

In 1776, just a month before he was elected to the second Continental Congress, Witherspoon delivered his first highly political sermon, "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men." In the sermon, Witherspoon discussed the current state of the American Revolution and the Colonies' relationship with England.²⁹ While many of Witherspoon's sermons focused purely on the message of the Gospel, this sermon challenged the congregation to take action as the course of history was quickly changing.

Witherspoon also highlighted the relationship between religious liberty and civil liberty. He challenged his congregation to "make a wise improvement of the present threatening aspect of public affairs, and to remember that your duty to God, to your country, to your families, and to yourselves, is the same."³⁰ A Christian is to preserve his relationship with God as well as his country. When cultural forces do not directly threaten the ministry of the Church, the Church typically becomes complacent, a dangerous position. Witherspoon argued that men must be culturally aware at all times:

²⁷ Ibid., 81.

²⁸ Ibid., 83.

²⁹ Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 362.

³⁰ Ibid., 379.

Both nations in general, and private persons, are apt to grow remiss and lax in a time of prosperity and seeming security; but when their earthly comforts are endangered or withdrawn, it lays them under a kind of necessity to seek for something better in their place. Men must have comfort from one quarter or another. When earthly things are in a pleasing and promising condition, too many are apt to find their rest, and be satisfied with them as their only portion. But when the vanity and passing nature of all created comfort is discovered, they are compelled to look for something more durable as well as valuable. What therefore, can be more to the praise of God, than that when a whole people have forgotten their resting place, when they have abused their privileges, and despised their mercies, they should by distress and suffering be made to hearken to the rod, and return to their duty?³¹

Witherspoon asserted that when men are in a state of comfort, they neglect their duty.

Nevertheless, the Christian, in all seasons, must be prepared to defend his civil and religious liberties.

Jonas Clarke (1730-1805)

Reverend Jonas Clarke, born in Massachusetts, faithfully led his Lexington congregation in their understanding of biblical and political principles. His ministry covered political and military engagement.³² Reverend Clarke's notable contributions to an understanding of both civil and clerical duties are relative to policies affecting the Colonies. Clarke became an outspoken voice on the British Parliament's infringements upon the Colonies with acts such as the Stamp Act and the Quartering Act.³³ In his sermon at Lexington, Clarke reminded his congregation of their predecessors who fought tirelessly for their freedoms:

Accordingly, after renewed injuries and repeated insults and cruelties, which rather invigorated than disheartened the free and truly noble spirits of the Dutch, at last, it came to blood!—The contest was, as might be expected, long and bitter!—But, under every disadvantage, but the righteousness of their cause, they

³¹ Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 367.

³² Cureton, "Pastors as Public Servants in America," 4-5.

³³ *Ibid.*

rose superior to their mighty and numerous oppressors; and heaven, at length, decided in their favour, crowned their endeavours with desired success, and gave and established unto them that freedom and independence, for which they had so bravely fought and so freely bled. This freedom and independence, so dearly purchased, they well knew how to prize and preserve; and by the smiles of heaven, upon the wisdom and policy of their government, they have now enjoyed the blessings thereof, with but little interruption from enemies abroad, or factions at home, for near two hundred years: And, in proportion to the extent of their territories and the number of inhabitants, they are, at this very time, justly esteemed one of the richest and most flourishing states in Europe. Thus hath a righteous God been pleased to plead their cause, and cleanse and avenge their innocent blood; and set them free from the oppressors hand. Is not the cause of Americans equally just?...Is not their God the same?³⁴

Clarke commended those that were willing to go to great lengths to defend righteousness and to defend their liberties. Not only was he heavily involved in the political documents that were drafted in Lexington, Massachusetts, but he prepared and educated his congregation on the role the people played relative to the tyranny of Britain.³⁵

At the outbreak of civil discord with British forces, Reverend Clarke formed a militia from the men of his Lexington congregation. Under his lead, this militia advanced into the front lines of the American Revolution at the Battle of Lexington in April, 1775.³⁶ The effect of Clarke's ministry and civil engagement culminated in this Lexington Mantra: "We shall be ready to sacrifice our estates and everything dear in life, yea and life itself, in support of the common cause."³⁷ Clarke utilized his role as a pastor to instill biblical truths for active civil engagement.

³⁴ Jonas Clarke, *The Fate of Blood-Thirsty Oppressors, and God's Tender Care of his Distressed People; A Sermon, Preached at Lexington, WallBuilders* (April 19, 1776), <https://wallbuilders.com/sermon-battle-of-lexington-1776/>, accessed April 6, 2017.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Patriots in the Pulpit Series- Jonas Clarke," *The American View* (February 20, 2014), <https://www.theamericanview.com/patriots-in-the-pulpit-series-jonas-clark/>, accessed March 20, 2017.

³⁷ "Report of the Committee of Correspondence adopted by the Town of Lexington, December 1773," as found in the Lexington Historical Society Archives.

James Caldwell (1734-1781)

James Caldwell was a part of the Black Robe Regiment, which consisted of clergyman throughout the American Colonies greatly involved in the American War of Independence.³⁸ Caldwell, the “Rebel High Priest,” was an active patriot in America’s quest for independence who died along with his wife at the hands of the British.³⁹ In Charles Platt’s book, *Ballads of New Jersey in the Revolution*, a ballad titled “Parson Caldwell,” briefly illustrates Caldwell’s work in the American War for Independence. One line of the ballad reads, “Who’s that riding in on horse-back? / Parson Caldwell, boys; Hooray! / Red-coats call him ‘Fighting Chaplain;’ / How they hate him! Well they may!”⁴⁰ The ballad goes on to explain Caldwell’s eminent work in the American Revolution. In one battle, when it appeared that Caldwell’s men no longer had any ammo for their muskets, Caldwell ran to a local church and gathered up hymnals filled with many hymns written by Isaac Watts. Upon returning, he told his men, “Now put Watts into them, boys.”⁴¹ Though a preacher by nature, he was not afraid to take up arms alongside his patriot brothers and fight for civil liberties.

Caldwell is a prime example of someone who engaged culture from the pulpit, as well as outside the church. The *American Review* wrote, “He [Caldwell] preached fiery sermons, pleading for independence and was able to inspire the service of 31 officers and

³⁸ Chuck Baldwin, “The Black Regiment,” *FriendsUSA* (September 14, 2009), <http://www.friendsusa.org/uploads/2/3/5/8/23587798/black-robbed-regiment.pdf>, accessed February 16, 2017.

³⁹ “Patriots in the Pulpit Series- James Caldwell,” *The American View* (February 27, 2014), <https://www.theamericanview.com/patriots-in-the-pulpit-series-rev-james-caldwell/>, accessed February 19, 2017.

⁴⁰ Charles Platt, “Ballads of New Jersey in the Revolution” (Morristown: New Jersey 1896), 110.

⁴¹ Paul F. Boller, “George Washington and the Presbyterians,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* (1943-1961) 39, no. 3 (1961): 129-46.

52 enlisted men from his church. It was not common for ministers to preach on liberty, and even fewer pastors actually served in the military.”⁴² Though his life was cut short in his effort to fight for independence, Caldwell set the precedent for other patriot pastors to be active voices in America’s cause.

John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg (1746-1807)

Both a minister and statesman, this Pennsylvania-born pastor argued that men had a responsibility to engage with society. Pastor Muhlenberg warned multiple churches of the impending war against the British and encouraged them to be prepared to act.⁴³ On January 21, 1776, Muhlenberg delivered a powerful farewell sermon to his congregation informing them that now was a season of action:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven, A time to be born, and a time to die.... A time to weep, and a time to laugh.... A time of war, and a time of peace. It is a time for war!...The British have marched on our own city of Williamsburg, seizing our supply of gunpowder and munitions. Soldiers are entering private homes, homes just like ours. It is time for war!⁴⁴

These words spoke of the difficulties that the colonists were facing. However, Muhlenberg wanted his congregations to be active citizens that fought for their God-given rights. He continued in his sermon telling his congregations that, though a clergyman, he has an inherent responsibility:

It is time to act! Many of us came to this country to practice our religious freedoms. It is time to fight for those freedoms that we hold so dear. It is time for war! Let us pray. I am a clergyman, it is true. But I am also a patriot — and my liberty is as dear to me as to any man. Shall I hide behind my robes, sitting still at home, while others spill their blood to protect my freedom? Heaven forbid it! I

⁴² “Patriots in the Pulpit Series- James Caldwell.”

⁴³ “John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg- The Minister Soldier,” *The American View* (January 9, 2014), <https://www.theamericanview.com/john-peter-gabriel-muhlenberg-the-minister-soldier/>, accessed March 20, 2017.

⁴⁴ “John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg: Pastor, Patriot, Soldier and Senator,” *Order of Centurions*, (January 22, 2014), <http://orderofcenturions.org/muhlenburg.html>, accessed March 20, 2017.

am called by my country to its defense. The cause is just and noble. I am convinced it is my duty to obey that call, a duty I owe to my God and to my country. The Bible tells us there is a time for all things and there is a time to preach and a time to pray but the time for me to preach has passed away, and there is a time to fight, and that time has come now. Now is the time to fight! Call for recruits!⁴⁵

Muhlenberg spoke of both conviction and action. The content of his messages warned that sitting idly within the pews would consequently allow Britain to strip Americans of their rights. By combining biblical principles with civic duty, Muhlenberg became a patriot committed to fighting for his developing nation.

Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826)

Jedidiah Morse, born in the northern colony of Connecticut in 1761, was both an educator and a minister. Morse was among the first to highlight the political reading of the Bible and how that method expounded on issues such as liberty and republicanism.⁴⁶ The young Jedidiah developed his strong political and biblical understandings as a result of the Great Awakening, and the growing political revolution.⁴⁷ As Morse cultivated his pastoral and political platform, he made an unsettling observation regarding the fundamentals of Christianity: “Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.”⁴⁸ Morse recognized the influence Christianity had upon American political institutions. Though he wrote considerably to expand the nation’s educational

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ferdon, *A Republic if You Can Keep It*, 21.

⁴⁷ Joseph Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1983), 15.

⁴⁸ Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers, and Consequent Duties of the Citizens of the United States of America, Delivered at Charlestown, April 25, 1799, the Day of the National Fast, Early American Imprints*, (Charlestown, MA: Printed and sold by Samuel Etheridge, 1799) First series: no.35838, II.

sphere, Morse's sermons demonstrate a strong zeal to incorporate the political truths found in the Bible regarding political republicanism.

Furthermore, Morse believed that man enjoyed civil freedom and political happiness due to the principles of Christianity.⁴⁹ The basic tenets of Morse's faith included the doctrine of human depravity, leading him to argue that government was a biblical institution established by God because of the Fall.

Charles Finney (1792-1875)

Charles Finney, originally from New York, was a man dedicated to church revival throughout the east coast. His autobiography contains summaries of various revivals he helped lead. His steadfast work in admonishing believers to take a hold of their faith carried over into his church meetings. Finney stated that it somehow pleased God "in some measure to connect [his] name and labors with an extensive movement of the church of Christ."⁵⁰ Yet, deeply rooted in his church revival movement was the attempt to connect the Church with civil government. In his extensive research on systemic theology Finney wrote, "In a popular government, politics are an important part of religion. No man can possibly be benevolent or religious, to the full extent of his obligations, without concerning himself, to a greater or less extent, with the affairs of human government."⁵¹ Finney recognized not only the vertical relationship between God and man, but the horizontal relation between men as well. Furthermore, Finney argued that Christians have a responsibility to be involved in the political sphere of their communities. In one of his lectures discussing the hindrances that affect revivals, Finney commented on the creeping

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Charles Finney, *Charles G. Finney, an Autobiography* (Old Tappan: 1975), 1.

⁵¹ Charles Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (Oberlin: 1878), 480.

complacency among Christians:

The time has come that Christians must vote for honest men and take consistent ground in politics or the Lord will curse them...Christians have been exceedingly guilty in this matter. But the time has come when they must act differently...Christians seem to act as if they thought God did not see what they do in politics. But I tell you He does see it—and He will bless or curse this nation according to the course they [Christians] take in [politics].⁵²

Finney recognized that Christians had a responsibility to the political sphere, and that they would ultimately answer to a Supreme Being regarding the actions they took within this realm.

Finney's revivals linked the religious duties of man with public duties associated with the affairs of civil government. While his message focused on the revival of Christian doctrine as aligned with Scriptures, he recognized the necessity for Christians to be involved in politics. Just as religion impacted every aspect of humanity, Finney believed that politics ultimately concerned itself with the goal of Christianity:

It is true, that Christians have something else to do than to go with a party to do evil, or to meddle with politics in a selfish or ungodly manner. But they are bound to meddle with politics in popular government, because they are bound to seek the universal good of all men; and this is one department of human interests, materially affecting all their higher interests.⁵³

Thus, Christians ought to participate in every matter that touched their lives, even in matters political and civil.

While this list is not exhaustive, these men provide a pastoral example for engaging culture from the pulpit. Many of them understood the risks faced by speaking against culture, but were adamant about their roles as public servants. These men

⁵² Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, c1960), 297.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

believed the fundamental truth that the Scriptures applied to the whole of life; whether discussing the American revolution, slavery, or active political involvement.

THE SCOPE OF TODAY'S PASTORAL ENGAGEMENT

Despite the cultural influence that pastors played in early America, current pastoral engagement on key cultural issues is in decline, and the courage and discernment early American pastors displayed is difficult to find in many of today's pastors. In a recent study by the Barna Group, OneNewsNow reported that 90% of pastors in this study believed that the Bible spoke to many of today's issues.⁵⁴ Interestingly, when asked if they were teaching their congregations what the Bible says about those issues, less than 10% revealed they mentioned them.⁵⁵ Many interpreted their church's success relative to "attendance, giving, number of programs, number of staff, and square footage." While these characteristics certainly convey the appearance of a successful church, Barna explained that Jesus did not die for those distinctions. Barna argued pastors shy away from discussing such issues because they fear controversy within their churches: "[Those pastors] won't [sic] probably get involved in politics because it's [sic] very controversial. Controversy keeps people from being in the seats, controversy keeps people from giving money, from attending programs."⁵⁶ Despite the need to address such issues, pastors are fearful of what the consequences will be for their churches.

Cureton summarized the responses of nearly 3,000 pastors in a OneNewsNow Poll as to why they do not discuss political issues from the pulpit:

⁵⁴ Chris Woodward, "Barna: Many Pastors Wary of Raising 'Controversy'" *OneNewsNow* (August 1, 2014), <https://onenewsnw.com/church/2014/08/01/barna-many-pastors-wary-of-raising-controversy>, accessed March 13, 2017.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

- 32% (935 votes): Fear threat of punishment by ACLU or IRS
- 23% (665 votes): Believe politics, church is separate
- 15.78% (463 votes): Told to do so by elders/deacons
- 13.15% (386 votes): Denominational constraints
- 9.03% (265 votes): Distaste for Politics
- 7.53% (221 votes): Unfamiliar with those issues⁵⁷

Those numbers are astonishing considering that pastors are to be the spokesmen and public servants of America. Cureton explained that despite a pastor’s concern relative to discussing these issues from the pulpit, the Church has a desire to hear them. The American Culture and Faith Institute’s study revealed that a high percentage of congregants want to actively engage with these issues. The table below demonstrates the results of the almost 3,000 respondents surveyed regarding their desire to hear their pastor speak on these:⁵⁸

Issue	Congregants	Issue	Congregants
Abortion: beginning of life, right to life, contraception, adoption, unwed mothers	91%	Christian heritage: role of Christian faith in American history, church role in US development, modern-day relevance	79%
Religious persecution/liberty: personal duty, government duty, church response, global conditions	86%	Political participation: voting, running for public office	68%
Cultural restoration: appropriate morals, defensible values and norms, self-government	83%	Self-governance: biblical support, personal conduct, impact on freedom, national sovereignty	75%
Sexual identity: same-sex marriage, transgenderism, marriage, LGBT	82%	Church in politics/government: separation of church and state, legal boundaries, church resistance to government	73%
Israel: Christian responsibility to Israel, US foreign policy toward Israel and its enemies	80%	Public school education: allowing Bible reading and prayer; teaching religious content	68%

⁵⁷ Cureton, “The Power of Preaching,” 2.

⁵⁸ “God’s People Want to Know,” *American Culture & Faith Institute* (September 22, 2015), <https://www.culturefaith.com/gods-people-want-to-know-2/>, accessed February 23, 2017.

These numbers represent the evangelical community across the nation, and indicate that pastors are not instructing their flock on critical issues of this current generation. In the same article, Cureton examines just a few biblical characters considered political, but whose actions were in direct obedience to the Lord's command. Moses, charged by God to confront Pharaoh to demand Israel's freedom, was forced to engage with the political elites of Egypt, Elijah confronted King Ahab, because he had forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and John the Baptist declared that King Herod was morally wrong for taking his brother's wife. Cureton argued that these men, while not forsaking their calling to be messengers of the Gospel, were indeed being political.

THE ROOT OF THE JOHNSON AMENDMENT

A major deterrent to pastors discussing controversial issues from the pulpit is the fear that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will terminate their churches' tax exempt status, if they exceed the IRS code that limits speech from the pulpit. If American pastors continue to be silenced from their pulpits, then the moral strength of the nation prevailing in the 1700s will continue to disintegrate. The political sermons that were so common to America's founding era have since lost intensity, frequency, and importance due to the legal threats put in place by the IRS Code. The section of the IRS Code, known as the Johnson Amendment, that prohibits non-profit organizations from supporting or promoting political campaigns is often confused as a direct link to the false notion of the separation of church and state.

However, the Johnson Amendment was established, not in response to churches intruding into political discourse, but to contain non-profit organizations strongly

influencing an anti-communist movement.⁵⁹ Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, in an attempt to dispose of his conservative opponent during a senate reelection campaign, proposed his Johnson Amendment in July of 1954, which would prohibit tax-exempt organizations like Facts Forum and the Committee for Constitutional Government from electioneering against Johnson.⁶⁰ The amendment, which is written directly into the code, reads as follows:

Corporations, and any community chest, fund, or foundation, organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, or educational purposes, or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals, no part of the net earnings of which insures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, no substantial part of the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, no substantial part of the activities of which is carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting, to influence legislation, and which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.⁶¹

Consequently, churches, though not originally targeted by the Johnson Amendment, were now subject to it, because they fell into the same tax-exempt status of non-profit organizations opposing Johnson. In *Regent University Law Review* it is noted that “Johnson was not trying to address any constitutional issue related to separation of church and state; and he did not offer the amendment because of anything that churches had done.”⁶² Rather, Johnson was only concerned with the non-profit organizations that were hindering his reelection. Though this may have been Johnson’s original intention, the amendment has been applied to tax exempt churches.

⁵⁹ James D. Davidson, *Why Churches Cannot Endorse or Oppose Political Candidates*, *Review of Religious Research* 40, no. 1 (1998), 16, 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Internal Revenue Code of 1954, 68 Stat. i, 984.

⁶² Erik Stanley, “LBJ, The IRS, and Churches: The Unconstitutionality of the Johnson Amendment in Light of Recent Supreme Court Precedent,” 24.2 *Regent University Law Review* (2011), 247.

Despite the Johnson Amendment, pastors can still discuss legislation, and inform church members of political facts. The IRS notes on its website that organizations classified as non-profit, can legally associate themselves with public policy positions:

Organizations may, however, involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status.⁶³

Too many pastors believe, wrongly, that their churches will risk losing their tax exempt status should they discuss politics from the pulpit.⁶⁴ However, organizations like Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) establish educational tools to inform pastors of their free speech rights. ADF has also established the Pulpit Freedom Initiative, which seeks to combat the constitutionality of the Johnson Amendment.⁶⁵

While pastors are allotted limited freedom relative to political discussion within their churches, the Johnson Amendment is becoming increasingly more oppressive. In 2014, after the city of Houston passed an ordinance that allowed the public to use the bathroom of the gender with which they associated, citizens began a petition to appeal the ordinance. Several pastors in Houston, Texas were required to turn over their sermons as well as various other communications so civil officials could determine their involvement in the city petition.⁶⁶ Alliance Defending Freedom argued that this was an unconstitutional action taken by the local government to monitor and control the voices

⁶³ "Lobbying," *IRS.gov*. (Last updated March 4, 2016), <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>, accessed February 5, 2017.

⁶⁴ Cureton, "The Power of Preaching," 3.

⁶⁵ "Pulpit Initiative | Pulpit Freedom Sunday," *Alliance Defending Freedom* (February 9, 2017), <http://www.adfmedia.org/news/prdetail/4360>, accessed March 20, 2017.

⁶⁶ Erik Stanley, "Houston, We Have a Problem," *Alliance Defending Freedom* (October 13, 2014), <http://www.adfmedia.org/News/PRDetail/9349>, accessed March 23, 2017.

of the pastors.⁶⁷ It is instances like this that place an undue fear upon pastors and what they deliver from their pulpits. As teachers, pastors should be able to freely speak to issues to educate and inform their congregation. Their constitutional right to free speech should not be limited by the IRS due to their political speech from the pulpit.

THE MORAL MAJORITY AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Despite the political speech obstacles many pastors face, there are those who have unabashedly spoken about the issues from the pulpit. In the 1980s, Jerry Falwell Sr. and his Moral Majority campaign sought to divert the course of politics through the church by encouraging the political and civil education of Evangelical Christians, and in part, by asserting there cannot be a true separation between religion and politics. Susan Harding said of Falwell: “During the 1980s, Falwell delivered many politically charged sermons. He was an omnipresent spokesman and activist for the New Christian Right, and he headed the flagship conservative Christian political organization, the Moral Majority.”⁶⁸ Falwell used his platform as a pastor to challenge Christians nationwide to speak into the political issues of their culture. In one of his sermons, Falwell stated, “This idea of ‘religion and politics don’t mix’ was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country.”⁶⁹ Issues such as homosexuality, abortion, education, family structure, civil authority and law are all religious in nature. The Moral Majority demonstrated that religion could affect politics just as much as politics could affect religion.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 2000), 10.

⁶⁹ Frederick Lane, *The Court and the Cross the Religious Right’s Crusade to Reshape the Supreme Court*, (Boston, MA: Beacon, 2008), 44.

The Moral Majority and similar religious groups, such as the Religious Right, became a voice against the rising liberal political tides on key controversial topics. However, not all evangelicals agreed with the position taken by the Moral Majority. Cal Thomas, a former member of the Moral Majority, drastically changed his views regarding the role of the church in the political realm. He argued that politicizing sermons is ineffective.⁷⁰ When a church involves itself in the political realm, it relinquishes its spiritual authority to political authority.⁷¹ Thus, there must be a middle ground that is reached in order to insure to ensure that spiritual and political authority are held in balance.

Do Evangelism, Not Politics

This view of limited to no political involvement from within the church stems from arguable and contending views of the Church's purpose. According to Wayne Grudem, the concept of eradicating politics from the church pulpit is seen as the "do evangelism, not politics" view.⁷² Grudem provided a list of eight reasons that refutes this idea and seeks to provide a middle ground for both evangelism and politics:

1. "Too narrow an understanding of "the Gospel" and the kingdom of God?" (45).
2. "The 'whole Gospel' includes a transformation of society" (47).
3. "Which parts of the Bible should the church not preach about?" (47).
4. "God leaves Christians here on earth both to do evangelism and to do good for others" (47).
5. "God established both the church and the government to restrain evil" (48).

⁷⁰ Cal Thomas, and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1999), 56.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 44.

6. “Christians have influenced governments positively throughout history” (49).
7. “Doesn’t the Bible say that persecution is coming?” (51).
8. “But won’t political involvement distract us from the main task of preaching the Gospel?” (52).⁷³

First, for those who argue that “we should just preach the Gospel, and that is the only way Christians can hope to change people’s hearts and change our society,” Grudem responded stating this is “too narrow an understanding of the Gospel and the kingdom of God.” Jesus commands his followers throughout the Scriptures to go and teach the commands of God.⁷⁴ Grudem wrote, “Preaching ‘the whole Gospel’ must also include preaching what the Bible says about civil government. That means that Christians will learn from the Bible how to influence governments for good.”⁷⁵ Teaching the commands of God means addressing the cultural issues. If the government is the deciding voice on issues such as requiring churches to pay for abortions for their employees, then the church has every right to be an active voice.

Furthermore, Grudem argued that the “do evangelism, not politics” view is wrong because “the ‘whole Gospel’ includes a transformation of society.”⁷⁶ The message of the Gospel is not limited in scope. While forgiveness of sins is a large component of the Gospel, individual transformation impacts society:

Jesus is looking for transformed lives and through them a transformed world...The good news of the Gospel will result in changed lives, but Jesus wants that to result in changed families as well. And when the Gospel changes lives, it should also result in changed neighborhoods. And changed schools. And changed businesses. And changed societies. So shouldn’t ‘the Gospel’ also result in changed governments as well?⁷⁷

⁷³ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 45-52.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁷ Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 47.

The Gospel's transformation of lifestyle and values will impact the surrounding culture.

Thirdly, by deciding to preach only the Gospel, then one must decide what parts of the Bible to discuss. There are many passages that mention politics and the role individuals play in their civic responsibility. Grudem pointed out that it is difficult to only preach the Gospel to transform the individual at the expense of other parts of Scripture.⁷⁸

Grudem also argued that commandments given within Scripture such as “love your neighbor as yourself,” require that men seek laws that protect and maintain the well-being of a society. Man's duty to his fellow brother requires more than just the sharing of the Gospel. Grudem wrote, “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ means that I should seek the good of my neighbors in every aspect of society, including seeking to bring about good government and good laws.”⁷⁹ The Christian's response to infringing government policies should be one in which he seeks to safeguard the inherent liberties of every man.

The fifth point that Grudem discussed is the idea that church and government were created to restrain evil, and throughout Scripture, God uses both institutions to organize a fallen human race. By neglecting the discussion of politics and government, the Christian fails to utilize the very gifts that God has given for the protection of man.⁸⁰

The sixth point, which has been previously stressed, is that Christians have influenced government and society throughout history.⁸¹ Pastors have encouraged and commissioned their congregations to go outside the walls of their church to engage

⁷⁸ Ibid., 47.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 49.

culture, and have used their platform to be agents against immorality. Had pastors from the early American founding era only evangelized and avoided politics, the course of American history would be vastly different.

The seventh point overlooks the fruit of the actions taken by past Christians and pastors. Despite the prospects of persecution, a Christian still has a responsibility to seek the good of his society. Grudem concluded that if Christians had refused to seek change within their government due to coming persecution then “there would still be human sacrifice and burning of widows alive and slavery and racial discrimination protected by law.”⁸² The Christian has a duty to practice biblical principles and allow those principles to impact society.

Finally, Grudem addressed the argument that political involvement may distract the church from the main task of preaching the Gospel.⁸³ However, Grudem argued that discussing politics and knowing how one can influence the government is a task to which the Lord has called Christians. Pastors should remain as messengers of the Gospel, but should not do so at the expense of ignoring other areas that the Lord commands.

Grudem’s points provide the evidence necessary to determine that pastors and Christians have a responsibility to not only share the Gospel, but to influence their civil institutions. Though some may argue that pastors should just do evangelism and not politics, Grudem argued that discussing politics and becoming actively involved ultimately provides opportunities to draw others to the power of the Gospel.

⁸² Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible*, 52.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

America's rich history of faith and government provides the grassroots for today's pastors to begin educating their congregations on the issues of the day in order to challenge evangelicals to begin actively implementing their biblical morals in culture. The rhetoric on the left, in general, is to silence the Church. The issues of marriage, the unborn, education, or rearing one's children are issues society has taken upon itself to determine. The pastor has a unique platform from which to speak to these issues.

In one of his essays, C.S. Lewis discussed the spread of Christianity from one generation to another generation. He argued that the "transmission" of Christianity depends primarily on the teachers of the current day. Children will grapple with the ideas handed down to them by their elders. When teachers are "unwilling or unable to transmit Christianity" a dangerous chain of unbelieving generations grows. Lewis believed that this consequently leads children to become agnostic or indifferent toward Christianity:

If the younger generation have never been told what the Christians say and never heard any arguments in defence of it, then their agnosticism or indifference is fully explained. There is no need to look any further: no need to talk about the general intellectual climate of the age, the influence of mechanistic civilization on the character of urban life.⁸⁴

When leaders within the Church abandon the absolutes of Scripture for a "more relevant" message then the transmission of Christianity begins to falter. The spread of Christianity can be debilitated as individuals abandon the teachings of the early church in order to adhere to the desires and fads of the current culture. The Gospel must remain the focal point of any pastor and church. However, as a church, a congregation must be able to

⁸⁴ C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 115.

actively engage its society so that the Gospel can go forth. To stand by as injustice flourishes contradicts what many of the pastors from America's founding era fought so hard against.

Many of the foundational pillars on which America stands were established by pastors who knew and understood the importance of upholding and implementing a strong moral core to preserve their nation. However, as a culture changes, this moral thread is weakened, and eventually destroyed. The health and moral well-being of America rests largely on those who are willing to stand against the whims of a fallen, broken culture.

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