

## Christian Civic Duty in America (Part 1)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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*This column is the first segment of a two-part series dealing with Christian civic duty.*

All Christians should be activists, although what each individual Christian decides to do politically should be left to the liberty of his conscience. Christians can make a difference through many means, such as petitioning the government for a redress of grievances, voting, participating in public meetings and informational lectures, writing to elected officials, and participating in jury duty. All of these activities are *costly* to Christians, not only in terms of incidental expenses incurred but also in terms of time. Accordingly, engaging in some political activities might seem to make no sense—at least theoretically—unless we begin to view them in a different light.

For example, voting is always futile in the sense that there is virtually no chance that any individual vote can change the outcome of a major election. The expected cost exceeds the expected benefit. Yet voting makes more sense for a Christian activist once other accrued benefits are considered. Economic efficiency is reached when the *benefits* of activism are elevated in our minds through exalting the importance of spreading the truth, standing up for principles, and transforming our society by heralding the fundamental rights that America's Founders held dear. To the extent that voting can help accomplish these things or encourage virtue it becomes a *net* benefit to a Christian (i.e., the benefit exceeds the cost).

Of course some political action remains out-of-bounds. For instance, Christians should generally not be involved in working for immoral state bureaus including welfare distribution, public education, and agencies that defy fundamental rights. By and large, Christians should not back any proactive policy either by working for a bureau that implements such policies or by voting for their creation or extension. The same restriction applies to working for or patronizing most public enterprises and state-run industries.

Nevertheless, Christians have warrant to exercise political rights when it is expedient to do so. The Apostle Paul used his political clout as a Roman citizen both when he employed his rights and when he “appealed to Caesar” (Acts 16:37-38; 22:25-26; 25:11; 28:19). Christians may thus likewise make use of political means to declare and affirm that the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property (or the pursuit of happiness) are *fundamental rights*,<sup>1</sup> derived *antecedent* to the existence of the state. They can advocate that the state does not *grant* such fundamental rights. On the contrary, the primary reason that government is formed is to protect these rights. The American Founders clearly understood that no man holds his fundamental rights at the pleasure of the state.

Christian activists should work to spell out these fundamental rights in particular. First, all human beings share equally in the right to life, and the state may not abridge the right to life of any particular human being (or class of human beings) “without due process of law” and subsequent conviction of a capital offense. Second, all human beings share equally in the right to liberty, and the state may not forcibly enslave, conscript, or incarcerate a human being “without due process of law” and subsequent conviction of a crime. Third, all human beings share equally in the right to hold and enjoy property, so long as their pursuit of happiness does not infringe upon the rights of others, and the Constitution prohibits government from taking private property “for public use, without just compensation”.<sup>2</sup>

Since Christians are required to “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21), they should be at the forefront of the battle to save their fundamental rights from being taken away by the wayward state and its evil policies. Accordingly, American Christians might choose to organize or participate in First Amend-

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<sup>1</sup> These rights are set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Fifth Amendment (Bill of Rights) to the Constitution.

<sup>2</sup> Such public uses include highways, dams, bridges, government office buildings, military installations, and similar public projects. Other uses such as increasing local tax revenues, clearing urban blight, removing church buildings, promoting urban development, and similar proactive “public interest” or “public welfare” schemes are not contemplated in the phrase “for public use”. The phrase “just compensation” refers to market value based on comparable properties, and would not preclude the government from paying relocation expenses. Of course, such loopholes are constitutional matters, but in terms of a Christian ideal there should be no eminent domain policy at all. If the government needs real property for some project then let its bureaucrats go to a realtor like other people do. Christian activists might shoot for the ideal of eliminating eminent domain. At the same time, they might fight to at least preserve the constitutional restrictions, in light of the dangerous popular “living interpretation” of modern courts.

ment protests to that end. They might also “break the law” in order to preserve life. (A strong case can be made from Proverbs 24:11-12<sup>3</sup> that justifies abortion clinic protesting with groups like Operation Rescue.)

And here’s another biblically-based maxim apropos to Christian social conduct: *The truth is never owed to a criminal*. Accordingly, any statute requiring the disclosure of privileged information may be violated by Christians in order to prevent the state from committing crimes. If a robber enters your home and demands to know if you have any gold you do *not* have to tell him the truth. If Hitler’s men ask you if you have any Jews you do *not* have to tell them the truth. If an extortive taxing authority that accomplishes evil policies hopes for voluntary disclosure of your earnings (that you can avoid by some means), you do *not* have a duty to tell them the whole “truth” about your income.

The taxpaying requirement set forth in Romans 13:6-7 refers to circumstances in which paying a tax is demanded by the state on-the-spot, and where noncompliance would inevitably expose a Christian to facing the state’s “wrath”—not to mention cause him much anxiety. Note that Jesus Christ was not *worried* about His tax liability (Matthew 17:27), even though (being God) He knew it existed. He might even have opposed paying taxes (Luke 23:2). He certainly manifested no qualms over avoiding taxes.

Christians overcome evil with good by proclaiming the truth and living a life that glorifies the Lord. On occasion, being valiant-for-truth involves exercising political rights or even breaking the state’s rules. Yet God is honored as Christians spread goodness and expose or cast out evil state policies.

## Christian Civic Duty in America (Part 2)

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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*This column is the second segment of a two-part series dealing with Christian civic duty.*

Active Christians need an objective in carrying out their civic duty. In America, Christians need to have a vision of what an ideal *republic* would look like, along with some specific objectives of social transformation in order to achieve that republic. A fallen world can be improved by a Christian’s efforts, but his efforts need to be focused.

In terms of political activism, a useful starting point for thinking about ideals is facilitated by considering society without any political structure, as well as considering the actions of fallen men in establishing it. The natural state of society is *anarchy*—not in the sense of untrammelled chaos but in the sense of having no established civil authority. Yet the sinful tendencies of men have led them to create states—parasitic power structures that devour social order and bring chaotic social conditions. As bad as society under anarchy may be it is always preferable to life under a state.

Therefore, Christians must be active in promoting a limited government that improves the social conditions that exist under anarchy. But they must also help to develop the means to check the power of government so that this predominant social apparatus is not transformed into a virulent and lethal state. They must establish institutions that secure and guarantee fundamental rights through the collective self defense of limited government, the strict application of the rule of law, and completely free markets.

Jury nullification is one such method for American Christians—from the ordinary to the most sophisticated—to work out a proper civic duty. Through jury nullification Christians can apply God’s principles to criminal or civil cases and quash a wayward judge’s penchant or defy a foul decree of the legislative or executive branches. To promote this concept, the American Jury Institute was founded.

Their website candidly and lucidly states:<sup>4</sup> “Juries protect society from dangerous individuals and also protect individuals from dangerous government. Jurors have a duty and responsibility to render a just verdict. They must take into account the facts of the case, mitigating circumstances, the merits of the law,

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 24:11-12: “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Surely we did not know this,’ Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.fija.org/> and <http://www.americanjuryinstitute.org>. Their mission is: “to inform all Americans about their rights, powers, and responsibilities when serving as trial jurors. Jurors must know that they have the option and the responsibility to render a verdict based on their conscience and on their sense of justice as well as on the merits of the law.”

and the fairness of its application in each case...Jurors, as the representatives of the people, hold no personal agenda during any trial and most certainly not the government's agenda<sup>5</sup>...and are, in fact, the only truly objective individuals in the courtroom. The role of our jurors is to protect private citizens from dangerous, unconstitutional government laws and actions.” By doing so, jurors react against tyrannical states.

The republic that Christians should vie for is one based on the need for *reactive* public policy.<sup>6</sup> Reactive policies are those policies which pertain to limited government: protection from predators foreign and domestic, seen and unseen (including hazardous microorganisms), and the establishment of law and order. Conversely, *proactive* policies seek to change or restrict the behavior of people or to redistribute social wealth via welfare state programs or by granting monopoly privileges to business interests.

What exactly does it mean to have a republic limited to reactive public policy? Local criminal courts, along with an appeals system, a military and some police forces to protect us from predators, a health department to combat epidemics, a statistics and elections section, some apparatus for engaging foreign policy including a consular system, border control, and passport issuance would be all that is required. A federal court system would deal with constitutional and inter-jurisdictional matters. The sheriff and judges from each county would be the highest civil authorities to ensure domestic tranquility. All other modern state functions would be privatized.<sup>7</sup>

Having this kind of republic also means the elimination of proactive policies: welfare and poverty programs, Social Security, federal grants, public education, agriculture, homeland security, borrowing, empire-building, foreign aggression, and wage and price controls. There would be no regulation of business whatsoever. There would be no state-granted monopoly privileges for business interests: tariffs, patents, copyrights, licenses, or permits. All welfare would be performed by private charities and churches.

Consequently, taxes would be very low and almost entirely indirect and voluntary through lotteries and use fees. There would be no need for payroll deductions or income taxes. Real property would be fully allodial<sup>8</sup> or absolute with no property taxes, regulation, or eminent domain. Government would have few tasks and society would have greater peace and prosperity as a result of individuals enjoying more liberty. People would also have greater personal responsibility for their own actions and would thus have to help ensure that the rights of others are not violated.

This ideal or vision of civil society, paring off some 90% of the current behemoth state (and the proportionate amount of taxes it requires), is what Christian activists should contend for as their proper civic duty. And with such clear objectives in mind Christians can effectively work to improve this fallen world.

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<sup>5</sup> The site also adds: “Let us not forget that the prosecutors, judges, arresting officers—and the forensic investigators in most cases—are all a part of and receive their paychecks from government, with personal power bases to build and personal careers to protect through the ‘productivity’ of successful prosecutions resulting in convictions. Jurors have no such stake in the outcome.” Plus, “The recognition of the authority and right of jurors to weigh the merits of the law and to render a verdict based on conscience, dates from before the writing of our Constitution, in cases such as those of William Penn and Peter Zenger. Should this right ever be suppressed, the people will retain the right to resist, having an unalienable right to veto or nullify bad and oppressive laws, and in fact then would be morally compelled to do so.” And, “Many existing laws erode and deny the rights of the people. Jurors protect against tyranny by refusing to convict harmless people. Our country's founders planned and expected that we, the people, would exercise this power and authority to judge the law as well as the facts every time we serve as jurors. Juries are the last peaceful defense of our civil liberties.”

<sup>6</sup> Jury nullification is one of the main means that Christians have to achieve predominantly reactive public policy. Christians may also participate in voting, local political meetings, letter-writing to congressmen, liberty-advocating political action committees, and drives to petition government for a redress of grievances are other means of attaining and retaining reactive (rather than proactive) public policy.

<sup>7</sup> State functions to be privatized include building inspectors, public works projects (e.g., roadways, bridges, railroads, and dams), civil procedure, marriage and divorce, product safety, mining, space exploration, transportation and occupational safety, securities and insurance markets oversight, controlling banking and the nation's money supply, national parks, food and pharmaceutical grading, institutional accreditation, medical and disability insurance, small business development, postal services, firefighting and most policing services, and retirement savings (e.g., Social Security) plans.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of allodial property and allodial policy, see John M. Cobin (1997), *Building Regulation, Market Alternatives, and Allodial Policy* (chapter 4, “An Overview of American Allodialism”) and John M. Cobin (1999), *A Primer on Modern Themes in Free Market Economics and Policy* (chapter 15, “Allodialism as Economic Policy”), both published by Alertness books.