



## HOLY TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

First Principles, Week #5

Family, Church, and State: Three Institutions UNDER God

*John Murray, one of the founding faculty members of Westminster Theological Seminary, was born in 1898 into a devotional, Christian home in Scotland. His father, a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian church, was a spiritual mentor to his son par excellence. John Murray "did not witness a greater intensity of spiritual exercise of soul in any other person..." John went on to serve valiantly in World War I, where he lost an eye due to military shrapnel. He carried himself with such a humility and dignity in his Christian walk that he became known as "the conscience" of the Westminster Seminary faculty. You will see that dignity and humility as it penetrates all of life in this essay. Interestingly, Murray was a bachelor until very late in his life. He was a bachelor when he wrote this essay. But that reality did not detract from his high view of the Christian family and his belief in the need to cultivate such an institution if the church is to be true to her call. (Keep in mind that Paul was also a bachelor and yet was pro-family! A far cry from some of the sad things being written by people today, sometimes even in the church, about dismantling/de-emphasizing the nuclear family and making way for unconventional expressions of family life.) Church. Family. State. Let's pray for a recovery of a biblical view of these institutions and how they relate to one another in our day and time. What might pursuit of consistent Christianity look like in our day?*

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### **The Christian World Order**

*By John Murray*

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1. By the term, "The Christian World Order", I take it that what is meant is a world order that in all its aspects and spheres is Christian, an order so conformed to the principles of Christianity and so pervaded by the forces that are operative in Christianity that the whole of life will be brought into willing captivity to the obedience of Christ.
2. Are we justified in entertaining the conception of Christian world order? Or, at least, are we justified in entertaining such an order as an ideal towards which we should work and strive? Do we have any assurance that such a world order is attainable? And, if we have no assurance that it is attainable, are we not mocking ourselves and others by framing the conception and, particularly, by working towards the achievement of it? Should we not rather descend from the clouds and deal with more practical and sensible matters?
3. We shall have to acknowledge frankly that we do not have the right from God's Word to believe that a Christian world order in the purity and completeness of its conception will be realized on this side of that great and momentous event towards which the history of this world is moving, namely, the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the visible glorious advent of the Lord Himself. For a Christian world order, in the purity and completeness of its conception, is a world order that has brought to complete and perfect fruition the redemptive, regenerative and restorative forces that are embodied in

the Christian redemption and revelation. Such an order would mean the complete elimination of sin and of all its effects and the full attainment of righteousness and holiness. To whatever school of eschatological persuasion we belong, we cannot believe that such an order will antedate the advent of the Lord.

4. It is true that the postmillenarian believes that before Christ comes the world will become Christian. But even the most consistent supernaturalistic postmillenarian cannot hold that, even in that period of unprecedented prosperity for the kingdom of God upon earth which he posits as antedating the Lord's coming, the world order will be so completely conformed to the divine will that all sin will be eradicated and righteousness and holiness be all-pervasive. He, with other supernaturalists, believes that such an order will have to wait for the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13). A Christian world order, if the word "Christian" is applied with consistency, means an order in which the principle of redemption and restoration is brought to its complete and all-pervasive expression and fruition.
5. So a Christian world order, in the purity and completeness of its conception, will not antedate that manifestation of power and glory when Christ will come again without sin unto salvation, when He will bring to naught all rule and all authority and power and when all his enemies shall have been made His footstool.
6. Our dilemma would seem to be indeed perplexing. If we have to wait for the supernatural forces that Christ's advent will bring in its train before the order of absolute right and holiness will be ushered in, is there any sense in speaking of a Christian world order except as an eschatological hope? Particularly and most practically, is there good sense in working towards the establishment of a Christian order when we know that, in the completeness of its conception, it is not attainable in what we generally call this life?
7. We must be bold to say that the Christian revelation does not allow us to do anything less than to formulate and work towards a Christian world order in the life that we now live. It is not difficult to demonstrate the validity and even necessity of this thesis.
8. The standard of thought and the rule of conduct for us are divine obligation. The rule and standard for us are the irreducible claims and demands of the divine sovereignty, and these irreducible claims are that the sovereignty of God and of His Christ be recognized and applied in the whole range of life, a interest, of vocation and of activity. That is just saying that the demands of the divine sovereignty make it impossible for us to evade the obligation to strive with all our heart and soul and strength and mind for the establishment of an order that will bring to realization all the demands of God's majesty, authority, supremacy and kingship. And this, in a word, is simply the full fruition of the kingdom of God wherever we are and in the whole compass of thought, word and action.
9. But, since we have fallen and since the only way now whereby the claims of the divine sovereignty can even begin to be realized within the compass of our responsibilities is through the redemptive and mediatorial work of Christ, then there rests upon us, with like universal and unrelaxed stringency, the obligation to bring to bear upon the whole compass

of life the supernatural and redemptive forces that are inherent in the Christian redemption and revelation. And this is just saying that the ideal and goal imposed upon us by the kingship and kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is nothing less than Christian world order. To recede from this conception and aim is to abandon what is implied in the prayer Christ taught His disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). And it is to renounce what is overtly expressed in the words of the apostle, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5).

### **What Is the Christian Order?**

10. To the concrete question of what constitutes Christian world order, we may now address ourselves. It is necessary at the outset to premise any discussion of this practical question upon the fact of human sin and depravity. Any attempt to erect Christian order upon the ruins of human depravity must end in dismal failure. Indeed, it would be an inherent contradiction. For Christian order is order that is Christian and, if Christian, it rests upon the supernatural and redemptive foundations of Christianity. Christian order is order brought into existence by the deliverance from sin and evil wrought by redemption and regeneration. The principles and forces that must be at the basis and centre of Christian order in any of its forms must be the principles and forces of God's regenerative and sanctifying grace. Any idealism or reconstruction that proceeds upon a program that is congenial to fallen human nature or that is readily adjustable to the impulses and passions and principles of fallen human nature has denied the very genius of Christian order.
11. There is, therefore, something drastic about the transformation that Christian order effects. This is why we are so reluctant to entertain a Christian program of procedure in some of the most practical spheres such as those of education and industry. We are so often content to have a few amendments and corrections that give a Christian veneer to certain institutions. Without question these corrections may have, to a certain extent, a salutary influence, but these amendments do not change the basically nonchristian character of the principles and methods by which these institutions or orders operate. The Christian principle as applied to every order is radical and revolutionary in the true sense. of these words, radical and revolutionary because it is organically regenerative. It deals not by half-measures nor by indirection but by honest, thoroughgoing effectiveness with the reality of human sin and with the all-pervasive corruption it has brought in its train.

### **Three Divine Institutions**

12. What then is this order that Christianity contemplates? There are three basic divine institutions in human society - the family, the church and the state. All of these institutions are social in character; in each of them there is a plurality of individuals. That plurality, it is true, may sometimes be the minimum of plurality. The family, for example, is constituted first of all by two individuals. But in each case there is plurality. This is such an elementary, obvious fact that it may seem puerile to mention it. But, elementary though it be, the

implications for Christian order are of profound importance. When we say that these basic institutions comprise a plurality of individuals, we must not forget that it is a plurality of *individuals*, and we must not overlook the importance of each individual in his singularity. This has too often been the bane of social theories and movements. The individual is the ultimate unit in every social organism and organization, and Christianity never overlooks the individual person.

13. In dealing with Christian world order there is no concept with which Christianity has furnished us that is more expressive and comprehensive than that of the kingdom of God, and it was none other than our Lord Himself who said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3), "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5), "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). The kingdom of God begins its reconstruction with the individual. It never submerges the individual in the social mass. It never suppresses or blurs the needs, the interests, the obligations and the destinies of the individual in his relations to God or to men. Christian world order in its zeal to renovate and reconstruct the orders of society must ensure that the needs of the individual are fully met and his interests fully guarded and promoted.

### **The Family**

14. It is, nevertheless, true that when we are dealing with order we have principally to do with the organization of individual persons. The first is the family; it is the fundamental ordinance of divine institution. The family existed prior to the fall. God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). Implanted in the very nature of man is the necessity for, and the instincts towards, family life. But sin has brought ruin into the family institution. And perhaps no instinct has been more abused and no sanctity more desecrated than the instinct that is related to, and the sanctity that finds its basis in, that ordinance of marriage with which the family begins. The history of this world is strewn with the wrecks caused by the abuse and distortion of the sex impulse.
15. The family is the primary social ordinance. When sin wreaks its havoc here, when the sanctities, that guard and ennoble family life are desecrated and when family honor is laid in the dust, then all social order is out of joint and degradation reigns supreme in every realm.
16. The history of our generation and the commanding facts of developments in science, economics and politics, the exigencies arising from the close interdependence of all nations, are compelling us to give more attention to the question of world order than ever before in the history of our family is the primary social era. We are all aware of the urgent concern that the leading statesmen of all countries are entertaining with respect to this question. As Christians we are compelled to face the responsibility of Christian world order. Let us not camouflage the issue. Until the family, the basic social institution, the institution through which also the individual as the ultimate unit of society is brought into being and through which he receives the heritage, the nurture and the training that will fit him for every social responsibility and function-until the family is redeemed from its sin, whether it be the sin of coarse immorality or the sin of refined godlessness, and until it is renewed and rehabilitated

by the grace of God, it is a moral, psychological and social impossibility for Christian world order to be instituted.

17. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1-4). "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). These are the affections, instincts and principles that must regulate marital and family life, and only then can any Christian foundation be laid. for that social organization that can be called Christian. The Christian program is radical, and we see how grave the responsibility and colossal the task when we face the dismal fact that the rarity of the Christian family makes it as precious as diamonds.

### **The Church**

18. The second basic divine institution is the church, the visible church. It might seem that, since the church is an ordinance of redemption and preeminently the institution of God's redemptive grace; since it is the company of the faithful, renovation and reconstruction would not have to be applied to the church as to the individual and to the family. It might seem, rather, that from the church would radiate the influences and forces of renovation. But alas! we have to deplore the fact that the professing church has to a lamentable extent become the habitation of dragons and the scene of abominations. If the church had been unfalteringly faithful to the principle of its origin, constitution, witness and operation, then the situation would simply be that it should have to continue to unfold and apply with ever-increasing perseverance the principles upon which it rests. But the sad fact of our situation today is that judgment must begin at the house of God and the church must have applied to it the same radical, revolutionary and reconstructive principles and forces which we have already found to be indispensable to Christian world order.
19. The church is the church of Christ. It is subject to Him, derives its faith from Him, owes obedience to Him, performs the functions prescribed by Him, restricts itself to the sphere appointed by Him and advances His glory. Faith, testimony, worship, government-these four words sum up the function of the church. It is faith absolutely faithful to the Word of God. It is worship in accordance with the prescriptions of His will. It is government directed by the ecclesiastical order instituted by Christ and His apostles. It is testimony to the whole counsel of God to all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues.
20. Truly it is not the function of the church to put Christian world order into effect. The church must occupy its own sphere of operation and limit itself severely to that sphere appointed to it by Christ. When the church attempts to become totalitarian then it has violated Christian order. But it is the function of the church to establish and promote Christian order within its own divinely instituted domain, and it is the function of the church to proclaim the world order to which God's sovereignty and Christ's headship obligate in every sphere.

21. O how crushing is the shame that rests upon the church! Christian world order is an impossibility when the institution that is preeminently the instrument of testimony to Christ is itself the chamber of abominations. It is surely mockery and hypocrisy for the church to point the way when she herself has committed whoredom in the sanctuary of God.
22. Judgment must begin at the house of God, judgment that will issue in purification of faith, of testimony, of worship, and of government. Purified and renewed, sound in faith, steadfast in testimony, pure in worship and faithful in government, the church will become the channel of redeeming light and grace to a world lost and staggering in the confusion that the rejection of the counsel of the King of kings has brought upon it. "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isa. 48: 18).
23. When the church puts on her garments of glory and beauty, then under the captaincy of Him who is Faithful and True, the King of kings and Lord of lords, she will go forth, fair as the moon, clear as the sun and terrible as an army with banners. Then it will be said again, "In Judah is God known: his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey" (Psalm 76:1-4). Humiliating indeed is our reproach. But by God's grace and Christ's power, how glorious our vocation and responsibility!

### **The State**

24. The state is the third basic divine institution. It might be thought that, while the redemptive and regenerative forces of Christianity have an obvious bearing upon the individual, the family and the church, yet the state cannot be regarded as coming in any direct way under the demands and influences of the Christian revelation. The state has to do with civil order, the preservation and promotion of civil righteousness, liberty and peace. It will be said that the civil magistrate in the discharge of his official functions has no religious obligations and therefore should not and cannot be regulated in the discharge of his office by the Christian revelation, in other words, that the Bible is not the rule of conduct for the civil magistrate as it is for the individual, for the family and for the church.
25. This position embraces a strange mixture of truth and error. There is truth in this position insofar as it recognizes the limits of civil authority. Civil authority is not totalitarian. Civil authority must never trespass the sphere of the family, or of the church, and it must guard the God-given rights and prerogatives of the individual. If the distinction of spheres is once blurred or obliterated, then good order is impossible and Christian principles are negated.
26. It is also true that those in whom is vested the right of civil government must exercise that government in accordance with the laws of the commonwealth. If they are not able to do this in accordance with conscience, then they must abdicate their office or seek by the constitutional means provided by the commonwealth to change those laws. Especially is this the case with believers who recognize that their supreme obligation is to God and to Christ.

27. But a fatal element of error inheres in this position, if it is thought that the 1 Christian revelation, the Bible, does not come to the civil authority with a demand for obedience to its direction and precept as stringent and inescapable as it does to the individual, to the family and to the church. The thesis we must propound as over against such a conception of the relation of the Bible to civil authority is that the Bible is the only infallible rule of conduct for the civil magistrate in the discharge of his magistracy just as it is the only infallible rule in other spheres of human activity.
28. God alone is sovereign. His authority alone is absolute and universal. All men and spheres are subject to God. The civil magistrate derives his authority from God. Apart from divine institution and sanction, civil government has no right to exist. "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). Since civil government derives its authority from God, it is responsible to God and therefore obligated to conduct its affairs in accordance with God's will. The infallible revelation of His will God has deposited in the Scriptures. It will surely be granted that there is much in the Scriptures that has to do with the conduct of civil government. And this simply means that the Word of God bears upon civil authority with all the stringency that belongs to God's Word.
29. Furthermore, the Word of God reveals that Christ is Head over all things, that He has been given all authority in heaven and in earth. The civil magistrate is under obligation to acknowledge this headship and therefore to conduct his affairs, not only in subjection to the sovereignty of God but also in subjection to the mediatorial sovereignty of Christ and must therefore obey His will as it is revealed for the discharge of that authority which the civil magistrate exercises in subjection to Christ. Christian world order embraces the state. Otherwise there would be no Christian world order.
30. To recede from this position or to abandon it, either as conception or as goal, is to reject in principle the sovereignty of God and of His Christ. The goal fixed for us by the Christian revelation is nothing less than a Christian state as well as Christian individuals, Christian families and a Christian church. And this just means that the obligation and task arising from Christ's kingship and headship are that civil government, within its own well-defined and restricted sphere, must in its constitution and in its legislative and executive functions recognize and obey the authority of God and of His Christ and thus bring all of its functions and actions into accord with the revealed will of God as contained in His Word. We thus see how radical and reconstructive is a philosophy of Christian world order, if we are to face that conception frankly and address ourselves to the responsibility it entails.
31. It is, of course, true that all of life is not exhausted by the family, the church and the state. These, however, are the basic divine institutes of society. A Christian world order will embrace every department of life- industry, agriculture, education, recreation. But since these institutions are basic, it is inevitable that the Christianizing of every other department of life will proceed apace with the Christianizing of these basic institutions.
32. When we contemplate such stupendous responsibility as that arising from the sovereignty of God and of Christ's supreme kingship and lordship, we may well be crushed by the sense of our own insufficiency. How weak we are and how formidable are the enemies of

God and of His kingdom! Who is sufficient for these things? We are indeed totally insufficient and the task is overpowering.

33. But this overpowering sense of our weakness and inability is no reason for faintheartedness. It is rather the very condition of true faith and perseverance. The responsibility is ours: it is stupendously great. The insufficiency is ours: it is complete. But the power is God's. The grace is of God. The promise is His. "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand. Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psalm 89:13-14). How necessary it is to remember that Christ has spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in His death, and that He is now exalted far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that to come Being by the right hand of God exalted and having received the promise of the Father, He hath sent forth the Holy Spirit. We must do honor to Christ and to His kingly authority and might. We must also do honor to the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. We have not only an almighty advocate in heaven at the right hand of God but also an almighty advocate upon earth. How puny and helpless are the powers of evil when they are set over against the irresistible grace and power of Him who is Himself God, possessing with the Father and the Son the totality of Godhood, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son! And how shameful and vile is our faintheartedness and unbelief! "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). It is the peculiar prerogative of the Holy Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. It is His to glorify Christ. Let us lay hold upon the promise, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him" (Luke 11:13), and let us in His strength go forth to claim every realm for Him who must reign until all His enemies shall have been made His footstool.