

An Evaluation of the Moral Majority in the Light of Scriptures

By John F. Vogt

For years now, we've seen liberal religious leaders in the foreground, claiming to speak for us Christians. And we've listened in shock as they've spoken out for free abortions, for gay rights, against capital punishment and in defense of a welfare system that discourages people from working and encourages them to live together without getting married so they can collect ADC money. Through the National Council of Churches liberal theologians have followed their own minds rather than God's Word in their support of Communist-backed terrorist groups who are seeking to overthrow established governments. And in recent months we've been reading how they have taken it upon themselves to correct God's male-chauvinist tendencies and bring him into the Twentieth Century by eliminating the Bible's sexist bias.

Recently I received a copy of a magazine called *The Link*. For 16 pages it spells out how "National Council of Churches Adopts New Comprehensive Statement on the Middle East." That policy statement tells exactly what Israel and the U. S. must do to bring peace to the Middle East, including the recognition of the PLO and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State.

In the face of years of such liberal drivel, in 1980 evangelicals struck back. Led by flashy, self-confident, often self-appointed TV preachers, they took up the fight for life, family, America and morality. This paper will be an evaluation in the light of Scripture of this evangelical movement, which is best known under the title, "The Moral Majority."

I. Origins and Issues of the Moral Majority

Jerry Falwell describes the beginnings and purpose of his Moral Majority this way:

Back in the sixties I was criticizing pastors who were taking time out of their pulpit to involve themselves in the Civil Rights Movement or any other political venture. I said you're wasting your time from what you're called to do. Now I find myself doing the same thing and for the same reason they did. Things began to happen. The invasion of humanism into the public school system began to alarm us back in the sixties. Then the Rowe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision of 1973 and abortion on demand shook me up. Then adding to that regulation of various things it became very apparent the federal government was going in the wrong direction and if allowed would be harassing nonpublic schools, of which I have one of the 16,000 right now. So step by step we became convinced we must get involved if we're going to continue doing what we're doing inside the church building. Occasionally we've got to step outside the church building as private citizens and be good citizens. But then we didn't know how to do it. In the last couple of years I've talked to Tim LaHaye, Charles Stanley, Jim Kennedy, and a number of others about what we could do, and the idea of the "moral majority" became more and more of a reality as we decided to put together a coalition of people in America. We believed then that we ought to poll them. George Gallup said his findings indicate that a whopping 84 percent today in America believe the Ten Commandments are valid for today, so we began putting together the Moral Majority—a coalition crossing all the lines. It's not a theological thing. The idea is: Here's something we can get people involved in who normally for theological reasons would never, never cooperate, but who for the sake of survival of this country will get involved.

We thought then, and we're more convinced now that the problem of the nation, the real problem is a moral one, that the economic problems, the energy crisis, our international embarrassments are all simply symptoms of the fact that God is angry with us as a nation.¹

The “Moral Majority” organization is but one of several groups that make up the Christian “New Right”—“a coalition crossing all the lines” with the mission “to clean up America by getting moral values back in government, school and families.”

The Moral Majority itself has been founded and organized by TV evangelist, Jerry Falwell, pastor of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. Other evangelical groups associated with the Moral Majority include Christian Voice headed by Robert Grant, The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress led by Paul Weyrich, and National Conservative Political Action Committee headed by Terry Dolan.

The New Right Coalition claims to speak for 45 million evangelical Christians. The Gallup Poll supports this claim, estimating the number between 30 and 60 million—more than 20% of the adult population. TV evangelists of this coalition, including Falwell, James Robison and Pat Robertson, reach a claimed TV audience of 50 million each week. The Moral Majority organization alone spent \$5,000,000 on the political campaign last year, signing up 72,000 pastors and 4 million lay members.

The Christian New Right has met with flak, of course, from political and religious liberals—as well as evangelicals who resent the New Right’s claim to speak for “true Christians” on issues that lack specific biblical directives. *Christianity Today* is disturbed that the movement tends to ignore the Bible’s teachings regarding justice, peace and care for the poor. The New Right has even spawned at least one counter-group, People for the American Way, which has purchased TV time to speak out against religion getting into politics.

The Moral Majority and its allies speak out on a wide range of conservative religious and political issues. They label themselves “Pro-Life, Pro-Family, Pro-America, Pro-Morality.”

PRO-LIFE: The movement speaks out strongly against abortion and any politician who favors abortion. They support a Pro-Life Amendment to the Constitution, which would outlaw abortion on demand. They oppose all government funding of abortion.

PRO-FAMILY: The Moral Majority and its allies opposed the ERA, feeling its effect would be to further undermine the family. They object to the registering of women for the draft, saying “The drafting of women will be a vicious assault upon the home.”² They support Senator Paul Laxalt’s legislation which would prohibit subsidized public-interest lawyers from handling divorce cases and which would prohibit any federal attempt to outlaw spanking or tighten statutes against child abuse. They object to busing and government desegregation plans as infringements on parents’ rights over their children.

PRO-AMERICA: “This nation is a chosen instrument of God, and it carries the major responsibility of implementing God’s will in the world.”³ Strongly anti-Communist, they favor a strong national defense. Jerry Falwell advocates a “100% increase in our defense spending.”⁴ They object to the Panama Canal treaty and SALT II and favor continued strong support of Israel. They speak in glowing terms of individual freedom and free enterprise, while decrying “Big Government” and its regulations. In this connection, they are especially concerned about government interference with churches and church-schools.

PRO-MORALITY: The Moral Majority and its friends oppose all gay rights legislation and instead favor laws which would legalize job discrimination against homosexuals. They favor a constitutional amendment to legalize prayer in public schools and even propose legislation to deny federal education money to states that do not allow prayer in public buildings. They want to

root out pornography and clean up the sex, language and violence on TV. Local groups have been organized in various cities to picket pornography places—with notable success in Jacksonville, Florida, by the way. A national organization, called the “Clean Up TV” campaign, is taking up the challenge of cleaning up TV programming by boycotting sponsors of objectionable shows. Legislation, supported by the Moral Majority, would require institutions receiving government funds to inform parents when their children request contraceptives or abortions.

In 1980, the Moral Majority and friends were very much involved in the political process, and it is generally felt that the Christian Right had some effect on the outcome. Twenty-three of the 38 congressmen with low ratings on Christian Voice’s “Report Cards” were defeated, including 7 of the 9 senators on its “hit list.” “Most of our people voted for traditional family values,”⁵ said Jerry Falwell. At least one defeated senator, George McGovern, blamed his defeat on the efforts of the Christian Right, saying: “These people have been getting away with dirty tactics in American politics for too long a time. I regard them as a menace to the American political process.”⁶ Some of the New Right campaign literature was highly questionable as, for instance, material which suggested Senator Bayh promoted homosexuality or which accused Senator Church of causing CIA agents to be murdered.

With regard to the future, New Right groups say this “marks only the beginning.” They plan to continue to lobby for their causes, while singling out and working for the defeat of liberal politicians. Moreover, they plan to organize local groups to take up the battle. Jerry Falwell envisions “an organization in every county and precinct in the country within this decade.”⁷ Sometime ago I received a letter inviting me to join the Lansing chapter.

II. Some History

The mixing of religion and politics and its resultant confusion of church and state are not new. For the Christian Church it has gone back at least to 313 when Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian faith in the Roman Empire. His Edict of Milan reads like an edict of perfect toleration and enlightened understanding of the role of church and state:

We thought we ought, with sound counsel and very right reason, to lay down this law, that we should in no way refuse to any man any legal right who has given up his mind either to the observance of Christianity or to that worship which he personally feels best suited to himself, to the end that the Supreme Divinity, whose worship we freely follow, may continue in all things to grant us his accustomed favor and good will.⁸

At once, however, Constantine involved himself in various projects to support and promote the church. In the end Constantine went so far as to make the church a state-church and make himself head of both the state and the church.

We know how that reversed in medieval times, with the popes dominating temporal authorities. In 1077, Emperor Henry IV succumbed to Pope Gregory VII in that well-known incident in the snow at Canossa. Already for years the popes had claimed it as a right inherent in their office that they not only rule the church, but also secular government. Henry’s capitulation made reality of that claim.

Pope Gregory VII formulated his claims in a document which is known as the *Dictatus Papae*. In it he claimed:

That the Pope has the power to depose emperors, that his decree can be annulled by no one, and that he alone may annul decrees of any one; that he can be judged by no man; that he has the power to absolve the subjects of unjust rulers from their oath of fidelity.⁹

At the time of the Reformation, the Lutherans took a stand against such an understanding of church and state. In the Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, we read:

There has been great controversy concerning *the Power of Bishops*, in which some have awkwardly confounded *the power of the Church* and *the power of the sword*. And from this confusion very great wars and tumults have resulted, while the Pontiffs, emboldened by the power of the Keys, not only have instituted new services and burdened consciences with reservation of cases and ruthless excommunications, but have also undertaken to transfer the kingdoms of this world, and to take the Empire from the Emperor. These wrongs have long since been rebuked in the Church by learned and godly men. Therefore our teachers, for the comforting of men's consciences, were constrained to show the difference between the power of the Church and the power of the sword, and taught that both of them, because of God's commandment, are to be held in reverence and honor, as the chief blessings of God on earth.¹⁰

The clear distinction between church and state in the Confessions was not carried out in practice, however. In the disorder that followed the Reformation and the subsequent Peasants' Revolt, Luther asked and encouraged the princes, as leading members of the church, to use their influence to organize the new Church and to restore order in it. In a theological opinion of 1536, signed also by Melancthon, Bugenhagen, Jonas, and Myconius, Luther says:

The calling and election of orthodox ministers of the Church is really and originally not the function of the government, but of the Church. If the government consists of believers and members of the Church, they call, not because they are the government, but because they are members of the Church. For "My kingdom is not of this world."¹¹

Those who study the Reformation are convinced that Luther and the Confessions envisioned the princes' involvement in the new church as temporary, emergency situations.

The state-church officially came into existence later when in 1555 the emperor forced the Religious Peace of Augsburg upon the contending factions. The principle *cuius regio, eius religio* was established. And in one form or other, all European countries became confused regarding the proper and distinctive roles of church and state.

Zwingli and Calvin complicated matters further. Zwingli from the very beginning of his reformatory work followed a policy of letting government carry out and enforce his reform measures. In theory John Calvin emphasized the difference between the two realms; in practice they overlapped. Calvin wrote about the church as the conscience of the state. And he saw the state as the enforcer of the church and the Bible. Indeed, he set up a theocratic state in Geneva—an arrangement that seems to differ little from what the Popes had tried to do for centuries. It seems to me that the thinking of today's Moral Majority reveals the Calvinist theology that underlies their denominations.

It was out of this confused background of church and state that Europeans began to colonize our nation. It should surprise no one, therefore, that United States history also reveals considerable confusion of church and state. In fact, before the Revolution we had state-churches. The Congregational Church was established by law in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut. The Dutch Reformed was the legal church in New Amsterdam; the Anglican Church was the establishment in Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Pennsylvania and Delaware did not discriminate against Protestant denominations, although there were some restrictions for Catholics. Jefferson and Madison were leaders in the movement in Virginia that eliminated

special ties between the state and all religious denominations. Then their principle was written into the First Amendment of the Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Even with the adoption of the Constitution, Massachusetts did not abandon its legal recognition of the Congregational Church until 1833. A mixing of church and state has in numerous ways continued to this day—especially in the practice of school devotions and prayers which have been commonplace in many parts of this country until just recently.

This glance at history has shown that the basic church-state relationship has been confused throughout most of the history of the Christian Church. But what are the scriptural principles involved?

III. The Church and the State According to Scripture

1. The Church and the State Are Separate and Distinct Realms, Each with a Job to Do.

To the Church the Lord has assigned the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance, of proclaiming forgiveness through the cross of Christ, of encouraging believers in their Christian living. The purpose is to lead the elect of God through faith in Christ to eternal salvation. To the state the Lord has assigned the keeping of good order and peace, the arranging of all civil matters among men (Romans 13:3–4). The purpose is “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (I Timothy 2:2).¹²

In other words, the church works for the spiritual and eternal welfare of all men. The state is to protect and promote the temporal welfare of all men. Jesus recognized the God-given authority of the state when he told Pilate: “You have no power over me that was not given to you from above” (Jn 19:11).

2. Church and State Each Have Been Given Means, Uniquely Tailored for Its Task.

We believe that the only means God has given to the Church to carry out its assigned purpose is His revealed Word in the Holy Scriptures (Mark 16:15). Only by preaching the Law and Gospel, sin and grace, the wrath of God against sin and the mercy of God in Christ, will men be converted and made wise to salvation. We believe that the means given to the State to fulfill its assignment are civil law and force, set up and used according to the light of reason (Ro 13:4). The light of reason also includes the natural knowledge of God, the inscribed law, and conscience.¹³

The church’s tool is God’s Word. “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to tear down strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4).

The state’s tools are force and reason. We might note that Paul wrote the words of Romans 13 regarding the pagan Roman government. It was not under the influence of God’s Word, the Bible, yet it had the means necessary to be “God’s servant to do you good” and “God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

The government, therefore, for its purposes may at times even pass and operate on the basis of laws that are not God-pleasing. Jesus acknowledged this in his discussion of the divorce laws which Moses permitted “because of the hardness of your hearts.” Such laws were permitted even by a godly leader like Moses. However, that did not change the fact that God says: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery” (See Mt 19:7–9). Such laws by the state must be formulated in a way that the unregenerate do not infringe on the rights of others or endanger the safety of the nation. The fiasco of prohibition shows the folly of government trying to legislate a morality that exceeds what the people are willing to accept.

The state may allow some things that are not in full harmony with God’s revealed Law. The state, however, dare not command people to do what God’s Law prohibits—for then a higher law takes over, “We must obey God rather than men” (Ac 5:29).

3. Church and State are to Exist Side by Side Without Becoming Confused—the Church not Interfering with the State, and the State not Interfering with the Church.

We believe the proper relation is preserved between the Church and the State and the welfare of all is properly served only when each, the Church and the State, remains within its divinely assigned sphere and uses its divinely entrusted means. The Church is not to exercise civil authority nor to interfere with the state as the state carries out its responsibilities. The state is not to become a messenger of the Gospel nor to interfere with the church in its preaching mission. The church is not to attempt to use the civil law and force in leading men to Christ. The state is not to seek to govern by means of the Gospel.¹⁴

It is evident from Scripture that church and state should exist side by side in the world. Jesus points to this in Mathew 22:21. “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” He showed it again while on trial before Pilate. In John 18:36–37, he said: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place....” Jesus’ kingdom, the church, posed no threat or challenge to Pilate’s authority in the state. Or again, when approached by the man who wanted Jesus to make his brother give him his share of the inheritance, Jesus refused to enter into the area of the state’s judicial authority, “Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” he asked (Lk 12:4).

If it abides in its sphere the state poses no threat to the sanctified life of the Christian either: “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good” (Ro 13:3,4).

4. Church and State Can Best Serve the Nation and Each Other by Each Doing Its Own Job Faithfully.

“No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life,” Paul warned his student and fellow-pastor, Timothy (2 Tm 2:4). In Acts 6, the disciples even freed themselves from the temporal affairs of the congregation so they could “give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.” The church must always keep its focus and purpose clear. And in this it best serves the nation, because only changed hearts can lead to the truly changed lives that are of inestimable value to the nation.

On the other hand, the greatest service of the state is not to try to force people into the kingdom of God, but rather to provide the kind of quiet and peaceable place where the church and the people in it can devote themselves to proclaiming the Word of God and carrying out all spiritual tasks.

5. Church and State May Complement One Another and Cooperate with One Another—Provided Each Remains Within Its Realm and Each Restricts Itself to Its Own Means.

As the state goes about its business, it performs many functions, passes many laws, exerts much influence, and much of this has a side effect of benefiting the church. If the primary purpose of any of these actions were to aid the church, this would be in violation of God’s established plan. But when the state does them to serve its own purposes, then generally there is nothing wrong if the church is benefited. For example, there’s the tax break. Church property is generally tax-free in our country, and this greatly eases the church’s financial burden. In fact, much money is saved which can be used instead for mission work and improved facilities. This special tax privilege may indeed violate the establishment provision of the Constitution (as the

Supreme Court is now considering). Historically, however, the state has not considered this the case. There is also the prohibition provision to be considered. And for the state, it has been a case of payment for services rendered. The state recognizes that churches advance the peace and wellbeing of the land. The tax break is an example of how the government “praises” those who do good (Ro 13:3).

Or another example, the state deems good education of its citizens vital to the peace and wellbeing of the nation. When it therefore wants to aid education by providing transportation to all students who need it, regardless of what school they attend, it may do so, and, if such transportation is offered, students in our Christian day schools may also take advantage of this benefit.

On the other hand, our churches do benefit the state and its work when we encourage our people to be law-abiding, responsible citizens, when we provide education in so-called secular subjects in our schools, when we establish and support Christian charities like the Martin Luther Homes.

The Supreme Court seems to have recognized this kind of cooperation in some of its recent decisions.

The court seems to be saying that the government may not *sponsor* religious exercises in the public schools, but it may *permit* them under certain circumstances: (1) as long as the end result does not favor one religion over another, and (2) as long as participation in the religious exercise is completely voluntary.¹⁵

One warning remains in place at all times, however. Both church and state must always be on guard that they do not become dependent on the other or expect the other to do the work it should do.

6. Christian Citizens Are Part of Both Realms and Serve Their God by Being Faithful to Both.

Christians are members of the state as well as the church. Part of their sanctification is being responsible citizens. We need only recall the following Bible passages:

Ezra 7:26: Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

Jeremiah 29:7: Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.

Romans 13:1, 5–7: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.... Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

I Timothy 2:1,2: I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

I Peter 2:13,14: Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

7. The Church Is to Instruct Its People in the Whole Counsel of God, Including What the Bible Says About God-pleasing, Responsible Citizenship.

To the young pastor Titus, Paul writes: “Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do what is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men” (Tit 3:1, 2). Titus was to preach about God-pleasing citizenship.

Like Paul, the church is “to declare all the counsel of God” to its people (Ac 20:27) showing them their sins and their Savior and then the sanctified life that is pleasing to God. Where God’s Word speaks, for instance, in matters such as abortion, homosexuality, divorce, family, etc., the church is to instruct its people and encourage them out of love for Christ to live in a God-pleasing way.

8. To Those Outside the Church, the Church’s Job Is to Seek to “Make Disciples of All.”

The Christian church does have a responsibility toward those outside its walls, namely, as God gives the opportunity to “go and make disciples of all nations.” This is done by preaching the law and the gospel—the law to bring the sinners to their knees before God, and the gospel to bring faith and pardon in Jesus Christ. To those outside the church, the church preaches in hopes of bringing the unbeliever into God’s kingdom. Only then does the church begin to lead him down the road of sanctification, because “without faith it is impossible to please God” (He 11:6).

It is true that in some, the church’s preaching of the law may effect mere outward reform and civil righteousness. This, however, is a byproduct and not part of the church’s mission.

9. As Citizens, Individual Christians Will Seek to Lead Their Country Along a Wise and Righteous Course, Which Will Be Good for All Citizens of the Nation.

Jesus said: “You are the salt of the earth” (Mt 5:13). As citizens who care about their land and the people in it. Christians want what is good and beneficial for their country. They want to be an influence (salt) to slow its decay and deterioration. For this reason, not only will they cooperate with the laws of the land and work with self-sacrifice for the good of their nation, they will also seek to influence the nation to wise and profitable courses. They want laws that serve for the good of all in the land—both the Christian and his unregenerate neighbor. Because we believe it is good and profitable for all, we will work for fair, just laws and honest, wise leaders. We do believe God meant it when he said: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Pr 14:34), and when he said of government leaders: “By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down” (Pr 19:4).

Since the government operates on the basis of human reason, Christians who want to influence government must do so on the basis of reason and common sense, drawing on people’s inborn knowledge of right and wrong and on their conscience. We cannot say: “Government, you must do this because the Bible says so.” We can say: “It would be wise, and beneficial for our land to do this which the Bible says, because...” and then show why. Christians, as responsible citizens, can work long and hard to try to convince the state of the wisdom of righteous and moral courses of action. And certainly as they are given opportunity, they can make known their desires and the course they feel is best through legal means at their disposal, such as voting.

Should our government tolerate homosexual activities between consenting adults? Should it tolerate abortion on demand? Should it permit the use of hard drugs if a person chooses that? What about alcohol or cigarettes which can also be harmful? Individual Christians should take stands as they are led to them by conscience, enlightened by God’s Word. But we all need to remember that any sanctified change or control must come from changed hearts, not changed laws. If the government gives us an environment where we can lead quiet and peaceable lives and spread the Word, it is doing its primary job and doing it well.

The resolution regarding abortion which was passed at our 1979 synodical convention shows a correct understanding of this. It makes no pronouncement to the government, demanding a particular course of action. Rather after stating the Scriptural basis for our concern, it goes on:

- Resolved, a)* that we encourage the editors of our synodical periodicals as well as our pastors and teachers to continue fervently and faithfully to testify against abortion; and be it further
- Resolved, b)* that we continue to urge our membership to make God's will in this matter known to our fellowmen whenever the opportunity presents itself; and be it.... finally
- Resolved, d)* that we more zealously preach the Gospel of Christ which alone can change the wicked hearts of men and turn them from sin to righteousness.¹⁶

IV. Applications to the Moral Majority

As we seek to apply the scriptural principles of church and state to our discussion of the Moral Majority, what conclusions can we draw?

First of all, let me say that I think we all find ourselves quite sympathetic to most of the causes of the Moral Majority and the Christian New Right. We support pro-life efforts. We too questioned the adverse effects of ERA on the family. We favor morality in government, on TV and in our communities. We tend to favor a strong national defense and a stand against atheistic Communism. In fact, with the possible exception of the prayer-in-public-schools issue, I'm sure that a poll of us would find us in agreement with the Moral Majority on its major issues.

But the question remains: Is the Moral Majority and its type of activities proper for Christian churches and pastors?

Some of the Moral Majority's issues have scriptural merit. I'm sure we are in agreement that Scripture teaches that abortion on demand is murder and therefore morally wrong. I'm sure we agree that the Sixth Commandment and especially Jesus' words: "Who looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt 5:28) are speaking out against pornography and the immorality depicted and promoted by TV and movies. I'm sure we agree that the Second Commandment is speaking out against the increasing public misuse of the Lord's name. Some of the Moral Majority's issues are scriptural and, therefore, we should be concerned that our people are instructed in what the Word of God says regarding them.

Some of the Moral Majority's issues involve human judgments on scriptural issues—judgments which make it possible for differing views on the specific application to a particular situation. The ERA, for instance, certainly could have far-reaching effects on our society. But can one say with scriptural certainty that the amendment itself is going to destroy the family? Can someone claim that God brands a vote for ERA as "a vote against the divine order of the family?"¹⁷ Prayer certainly is a scriptural issue, but can someone say with absolute certainty that God supports voluntary prayer in schools over against no prayer at all? Or does he perhaps prefer a moment of silent meditation? Christians certainly may differ in their application of Scripture to such cases and still be sincere and faithful Christians.

Some of the Moral Majority's issues clearly overstep the bounds of Scripture altogether. God does not speak of SALT II or the Panama Canal Treaty. God has not come out strongly for Sunday blue laws. In fact he says: "One man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord; and he that regards not the day, to the Lord he does not regard it" (Ro 14:5, 6). It would be hard to prove from Scripture that God favors "a 100% increase in defense spending." And how do you reconcile God's words, "Honor all men.... Honor the king" (1 Pe 2:17) with the belying, betraying, slandering and defaming of politicians that accompanies the efforts to defeat the opposition?

The dubious nature of the church's dabbling in politics is shown by the Rev. Harold O'Chester of Austin, Texas. In 1976 he invited Jimmy Carter to preach at a televised church service and endorsed him for president. In 1980 he repudiated President Carter in favor of Ronald Reagan. This raises the question whether God has it right this time.

We object when the liberals do it. I feel we must object now, too. The Moral Majority seems to be confusing the role of church and state. If the movement was lay-led and promoted its issues and concerns outside of the pulpit, our judgment might be more favorable. But even then we would have to wave a caution flag and say: "In areas of judgment, Christians may disagree and still be Christians. And the church's taking political stands in dubious issues can seriously harm the outreach of the Gospel message."

As the Moral Majority presently operates, we have to fear that this political involvement by evangelical Christians will have serious adverse effects. Paul spoke about himself, saying: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel" (1 Cor 9:22, 23). I'm sure Paul would have been just as open and polite to a Democrat as to a Republican. He would have preached the law and gospel in the same way to both a liberal and a conservative. Martin Marty writes: "Count on the rise of a new anticlericalism and a new antichurchism among many now congenial people who find their candidates and themselves crowded out."¹⁸ I fear that he has a valid point.

Concluding Thoughts

In preparing for this paper, I polled sixty adults in our Sunday morning Adult Bible Class regarding their views of Moral Majority issues and the church's involvement in politics. I discovered that in areas like abortion, homosexuality, pornography, sex and violence on TV, they were clear and stood solidly for scriptural truth. I also discovered that in dubious areas like ERA, national defense, etc., there were a wide variety of views. I discovered that all who were eligible were registered to vote, and that 89% did vote in the 1980 presidential election. By more than two to one, they felt that "our congregation should be giving more help in evaluating timely issues."

Admittedly the people in this poll reflect members who for the most part are among the spiritually mature in the congregation. They are people who know their Bible and care about it, as was evident from the fact they were in that class. The polls returned indicated to me that they understood quite well what the Bible says on those issues which it addresses. I'm sure that they are God-pleasing, responsible citizens who stand up in the correct way for their Christianity in the realm of the state. My conclusion, therefore, is not that we need to do things differently as Christian congregations. Through our sermons and our Bible classes we are leading our people on the path of God-pleasing sanctification.

The Moral Majority raises some questions and poses some challenges for us. We will be meeting its questions and challenges in a God-pleasing way if we continue to make faithful use of the agencies of our congregations to "declare all the counsel of God." When God's Word speaks on timely issues, we should not be afraid to speak to our people about them. Most of our people will welcome such guidance. On the other hand, where God's Word is silent, we must be silent, too, lest we become like those prophets of old who say "Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken" (Eze 22:28).

I do suspect, however, that our sensitivity for keeping the church out of politics has perhaps communicated to our people the message: "Christian, don't bother with that corrupt world out there." Our message, rather, should be: "You are the salt of the earth.... Let your light so shine before men." We should not hesitate to encourage our people to go out and be responsible citizens, getting actively involved as God gives them the opportunity.

For us as pastors, I can think of no better words of instruction than these:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of

teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (2 Tm 4:2–5).

End Notes

1. “Where is Jerry Falwell Going?”, *Eternity*, Vol. 31, no. 7 (July-August, 1980), pages 18, 19.
2. “Falwell Will Resist,” *The Christian Century*, Vol. 97, no. 9 (March 12, 1980), page 279.
3. “Christian Politics and the New Right.” *The Christian Century*, Vol. 97, no. 31 (October 8, 1980), page 937.
4. See 2 above.
5. “Religious Right Goes for Bigger Game,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Vol. 89, no. 20 (November 17, 1980), page 42.
6. See 5 above.
7. See 3 above, page 939.
8. “Church and State,” *Abiding Word*, Vol. 2, page 577.
9. See 8 above, page 581.
10. *Concordia Triglotta*, page 136.
11. See 8 above, page 587.
12. *This We Believe*, page 21.
13. See 12 above.
14. See 12 above.
15. “Church and State: Playing Fair with Prayer,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 24, no. 11 (June 6, 1980), page 12.
16. *Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Biennial Convention (WELS)*, page 48.
17. See 5 above.
18. “Twelve points to consider about the new Christian right wing,” *Context*, Vol. 12, no. 14 (July 15, 1980), page 4.

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