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What's Inside:

"What a politician believes in his inmost being, is what will be reflected in his policies and statutes. . . ."

"If unrighteousness is the standard, then blessing will be replaced by curse and peace by chaos. . . ."

"If we are honest and view this nation in light of the covenantal model, then the only reasonable conclusion that can be reached is to say that we are destitute and destined for God's judgment. . . ."

"Furthermore, we must learn the lesson that even a good leader who acts foolishly can bring ephemeral judgment to a nation. . . ."

AUSTRALIA: CHRISTIAN OR OCCULT?

by Murray McLeod-Boyle

DO WE LIVE in a Christian country or not? For some time debate has raged as to whether or not Australia can be labeled as a Christian country. This question is not peculiar to Australia, but it is one that is raised here on a regular basis. Part of the difficulty in answering this question has revolved around the establishment of suitable criteria by which to measure the various claims.

Some base their theory upon statistics. According to this idea, the spiritual barometer to be used are the latest census results in which x number of people assert that they are "Christian", or, at the very least, profess to believe in God. Then there are those who base their ideas upon how many politicians attend the prayer meeting at parliament house, or, similarly, upon how many Christians are in cabinet et cetera et cetera. Some cling to the idea that the standard should be based upon how well our laws honour God. Still others base their claim upon public activity. One prominent American writer, in evaluating this same question in relation to his country, based his

answer predominantly upon the idea that there were some very good acts of kindness being witnessed in the local communities. The reasoning here is simple and can be shown in the following syllogism: Acts of mercy are a trait of a Godly nation; Americans engage in acts of mercy; Therefore, America is a Christian/Godly nation. If this logic were applied to Australia, we too would pass with flying colours. However, the question remains, are any of these definitions or standards acceptable? The answer to this is, no!

All these answers have several things in common. Firstly, they all show a concern that the nation should follow God. Secondly, they all imply that Christians should be politically active in their nation. Thirdly, and most importantly, they *all fail* to establish a firm criteria by which this nation, or any nation for that matter, can be truly measured.

God's Covenantal Dealings

THE BASIC PROBLEM with all the above answers is that they are

unbiblical. More to the point, these proposed standards do not allow for God's covenantal dealings. When the Bible is read in context, it is clear that God deals with man through the use of covenants. In other words, relationships are based upon promises/agreements that are backed up by both positive and negative sanctions. In the early chapters of Genesis, God makes a covenant with Adam and Eve. Later he makes a covenant with Noah, Abraham and Israel, to name but a few. Man is plunged into sin because the covenantal standard was broken and he incurred the negative sanction—Death. Salvation is possible because of the covenantal obedience of Christ with its intended result—Life. Man shall be judged eternally based upon his covenantal standing with God, and upon no other grounds.

This covenantal standard is also required of man in the various spheres of life. Why? Because we are made in God's image and, therefore, operate as analogues of Him. When a man takes on a public office he is required to swear an oath. Why? When a man

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us as a people and, in particular, the affect our leaders will have upon us.

1. The Myth of Neutrality

When we take the covenant as our starting point, we quickly realise that any act of the government is going to have a direct impact upon our lives. Hence, it is important to dispel, once again, the age old heresy, namely, the 'myth of neutrality.' The best known example of this is found in the cultic practice of the Jehovah's Witnesses. These people refuse to vote on very pietistic grounds. They believe only in God's Kingdom and His rule, and so refuse to burden themselves with earthly affairs. This sounds so nice, but the question that immediately arises is, what do you do when those in power oppose God's Kingdom? The answer? Nothing.

Unfortunately, the JW's are not alone in this thinking. Many in the Church today take the very same approach. Politics is dirty and so earthly/evil that no good Christian would deal in it. Yet, if this approach is adopted, we once again face the question, 'how can a God hating, ethically bankrupt, morally corrupt, sinner, ever rule in a way that will invoke God's blessing?

This is the conundrum in to which the myth of neutrality leads. Christians refuse to take office or develop a consistently biblical political theory; they sit in prayer meetings praying for righteous decisions to be made; then they whinge when bad decisions are made; all the time consoling themselves that this is part of the end time persecution.¹

This then is the sore lesson that must be understood. A politician can be no more be impartial in his judgments than any other human being. What a politician believes in his inmost being, is what will be reflected in his policies and statutes.² You will

not find a Marxist strengthening the position of the wealthy, nor a Humanist establishing the worship of God. It is impossible for them as these actions would betray their convictions.

Therefore, the first essential point to note is that politics is not, in any way, *neutral*.

2. The Covenantal Obligation

We made reference above to our covenantal responsibilities with each other, for example, in the area of marriage. What we must also realise is that God is involved in this covenantal transaction. Allow me to explain. In the marriage covenant, adultery is an automatic exclusion. No sexual trysts are allowed. In the case where a husband were to wander, his guilt may be hidden from his wife, but it will not be hidden from God. God, as a witness to the covenant transaction, will hold the offender to account, and He will make sure the positive and natural penalties for adultery will be visited to the transgressor.³

In the same vein when politicians⁴ take office, they are not only making an oath to the people but they are making an oath to and before God. Moreover, by taking on the leadership role, politicians are *ipso facto* embracing God, His law, His covenant and the covenant sanctions, regardless of whether they acknowledge Him or not (Deut 17:18-20). Thus, the politician enters into a covenant with God and immediately opens himself, and those he represents, up to the positive and negative sanctions of the covenant. Consequently, what a politician does or does not do, will have repercussions for those he rules over or represents.

marries a woman he is required to swear an oath. Why? When a witness gives testimony in court they are required to swear an oath, why? When parents present a child for baptism they are required to swear an oath, why? When you apply for a loan or line of credit you are required to swear an oath, why? Why are there so many vows to be made in our journey through life? Because we are covenantal creatures, made in the image of a covenantal God, to operate in a covenantal way. We relate to each other in terms of truth, honour and virtue. Our word is our bond and we will fulfill our pledges (Psa. 15:4) because we seek the positive benefits of obedience and despise the negative sanctions of disobedience.

Covenantal Politics

GIVEN THE EXISTENCE of this covenantal relationship, we need to explore its affects for

1. Consider the immorality that exists in political circles. Politicians have: conducted adulterous affairs, been caught cheating on travel allowances, been exposed as being liberal with the truth, etc., etc. How can such people ever give righteous leadership?
2. We could give a dynamic translation of Proverbs 23:7 in the following way: as a politician thinks in his heart so shall his policies be.
3. Personally speaking, I have always enjoyed the opening to a marriage ceremony. When the minister says, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the *sight of God* and of these witnesses to *join* these two in Holy matrimony," it clearly shows that the covenant transaction has horizontal as well as vertical implications.
4. Note that here the term "politician" is used in the sense of one who holds a place in the Government (the government being all duly elected members, not just the party with the most seats). Biblically this responsibility rested with the king under a monarchical reign. However, in our culture the king is replaced by democratically elected parliamentarians, and, as such, these bear the responsibility collectively. This is all the more so when they transfer their power to a person such as the Prime Minister.

Consider, meditate, think about and dwell upon the wisdom of Proverbs 14:34—Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people (NASB). If righteousness exalts a nation, then sin can only demean, debase and degrade a nation.

So, the second point that cannot be ignored is that politicians are under a divine obligation to rule in righteousness,⁵ in order that blessing and peace might flow to the nation. Of course the reverse is also true. If unrighteousness is the standard, then blessing will be replaced by curse and peace by chaos. They will sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Biblical Examples

HAVING SET THE PARADIGM let us view some Biblical examples which not only bear out what we have said, but which also show the inadequacy of the other theories surveyed. In order to achieve this we will look primarily at the book of Kings, where we are given apt descriptions of each ruler as well as the consequence of their reign.

1. Christ versus Antichrist

One of the first things which stands out when we survey the book of Kings, is that each reign is judged according to a standard. On the one hand we have the type. Here we see a reflection (antitype) of Christ and His righteous reign and the epitome of this is David.

David was a good and righteous king who brought peace and prosperity by honouring Yahweh and His Law. Whilst David was not without fault, he is viewed, on the whole as good and just.⁶ He recovered the Ark of the Covenant and brought it to Jerusalem. He sought to build a temple for Yahweh as he thought it wrong that he lived in a palace whilst the Ark had no permanent resting place.⁷ David led Israel in the true worship of Yahweh and strove to ensure that all were aware that Israel had a living relationship with a living God. As a consequence of his desire to obediently follow Yahweh, David reaped the positive blessing of the covenant. Consequently, he and his people prospered and in the long run enjoyed peace.

On the other hand, and holding the chief position as the antitype, is Jeroboam son of Nebat. Jeroboam was given the ten northern tribes when Rehoboam, Solomon's son, failed to rule diligently and properly.⁸

Jeroboam had a real opportunity to do something positive. However, he was more concerned for his position and feared that the people would return to worship at Jerusalem. To thwart this he made two golden calves and placed them in Bethel and Dan.⁹ He told his people that these were the gods that had brought them out of the land of Egypt. In this we see the antitype's character is brought to the fore. He is not concerned for the true worship of Yahweh¹⁰ or for His law, but for selfish gain.

2. Life and Death

In accordance with the rule of each king as either type or antitype, the people of the kingdom were either blessed or cursed. In this we see the covenant at work. Furthermore, we can even identify short periods in which a good king, *type*, made a foolish decision and brought death to the people.¹¹

In the first instance we will look to the negative example of Jeroboam.¹² As noted, Jeroboam acted foolishly by setting up golden calves for the people of Israel to worship.¹³ However, this was not the end of his idolatry or apostasy. Shortly after becoming king, God sent a prophet to cry out against the high places that Jeroboam established. On seeing the prophet, Jeroboam stretched out his hand and told his guards to "seize" him, however his hand withered. God

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5. Romans 13:1-7 bears out this point. Some take this text to mean that we are obliged to blindly follow the governments command at every turn. However this is an error. In its context, the text states clearly that a government has a right to rule, but it also limits that right. For example, the ruler takes his authority from God(v1), hence he can only rule as God rules and not as a tyrant. From this, the text draws the conclusion that the *good* have nothing to fear from the ruler/magistrate (v3). Conversely, the evil doers should be "shaking in their boots!" In essence no God fearing citizen should ever fear the government. I wonder if this is the case today?
 6. 1 Kings 15:4-5 reads, "But for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, to raise up his son after him and to establish Jerusalem; because David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."
 7. 2 Samuel 7:1-2 reads, "Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the Lord had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains."
 8. The catalyst for this lay in Solomon's sin, but was enacted through Rehoboam's stupidity and youthful exuberance with which he ignored sound counsel.
 9. 1 Kings 12:27-29 reads, "If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, *even* to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan." The treachery of this act is seen in the fact that Jeroboam was given the ten tribes precisely because Solomon's heart had turned away from God to idolatrous pagan worship (1 Kings 11 26 ff.).
 10. The term "worship" is used here in its fullest sense. We need to break the mindset that worship is what we do for an hour on Sunday. Our whole life is worship and this should reach its acme when we join together as the body to worship God. Jeroboam destroyed corporate worship and thus, by extension, destroyed individual worship. In other words, by destroying true corporate worship with idolatry, it was only going to be a matter of time before the individual's life became corrupted by a similar idolatry.
 11. It is important here to note the difference between a foolish or sinful decision on the part of a good king and the continual erroneous decisions of an apostate king.

had put Jeroboam on notice. Did he learn? No, he did not. At the conclusion of this incident we read: After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places. And this event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth (1 Kings 13:33-34. NASB.).

Not long after this, we see Jeroboam's wife go to a prophet to inquire about her sick child. The news she receives is all bad (See 1 Kings 14:6-16. NASB.).

These texts are extremely important for several reasons, and we will do well to note the following:

a) *Jeroboam's idolatry has covenantal consequences for his household.* Put simply, Jeroboam's line is to be extinguished because of his apostasy.¹⁴ His son, in whom good is found, is taken through sickness in his early years, and this must be seen as an act of mercy on the part of God. The rest of his family, including his servants, are to be exterminated until there is no living person left.

b) *Jeroboam's idolatry has covenantal consequences for the nation he rules.* Not only is Jeroboam to be extinguished from history, but the nation which he rules is also to be extinguished. Israel is destined for exile because of its apostasy. Now whilst we accept that there is a corporate responsibility here, e.g., the people could have taken steps to remove Jeroboam and repent, the text shows clearly that Jeroboam, as the covenant head, brings disaster on Israel. Despite God's many warnings and displays of power, Jeroboam continues to degrade himself and his people by encouraging them to commit apostate acts.

c) *The type and antitype compared.* The third aspect that cannot be overlooked is the comparison that God Himself draws between the type, David, and the antitype, Jeroboam. Jeroboam is condemned because God had exalted him to a great position. God had laid before him the example which he was to follow, yet he spurned it. Not only did he not learn from David's example, i.e., learn to follow God's law more precisely with fewer mistakes, he deliberately reversed the process, i.e., he multiplied his transgressions without reference to the law or even a show of penitence.

These examples should be a stern warning to us. God will not be mocked by the ungodly. He will act here and now to bring both positive and negative covenant sanctions to a nation. We as Christians will do well to learn from this and create a political theory that takes this teaching into account.

Furthermore, we must learn the lesson that even a good leader who acts foolishly can bring ephemeral judgment to a nation. As an example of this latter category we have David. In 2 Samuel 24:1 ff., we have recorded for us the census conducted by David—a census that Yahweh had forbidden. As an act of disobedience, this foolishness on David's part had dire consequences for his people.

Here, again, we need to note several things that are of great importance. First of all we see the covenant at work as before. David sinned, his people suffered. David saw this plainly. He owned his sin and asked that the "sheep," that is, Israel, might be spared and the judgment visited unto his house alone. This, however, was not to be. David's action as king, had consequences for his people.¹⁵

Secondly, we need to note that repentance does not always turn back judgment. Whilst the Scriptures show many examples of God's wrath being turned away by repentance, e.g., Nineveh, there are also examples of God's judgment still being unleashed when repentance is present.¹⁶ The warning for us is that we must act before we reach this point, in order that God in his grace would note our repentance and turn away His wrath.

Criteria Examined.

IN THIS THESIS a covenantal paradigm, in which the worship of Yahweh takes centre stage, has been proposed as the only means by which to measure the spiritual state of a nation. At the outset we noted some of the other criteria that modern day Christians use. Now is the time to see how these criteria fare. To do this we will look at the reign of Ahab.

Ahab was a wretched, spineless, king who married an even more wretched woman (1 Kings 16:29-33). He was so despotic that he is compared negatively to Jeroboam, and as such it is little wonder that his house suffered the same fate (See 2 Kings 9:8-10; 10: 1,11).

So, here we have an evil king who is destroyed from the face of the earth for his apostasy and for leading Israel in the same manner as Jeroboam son of Nebat. The question for us is, was Israel a holy nation or not? On the model presented in this thesis we would have to say, no! Ahab led Israel in false worship. The land failed—remember that drought is a negative covenant sanction; see Deuteronomy 29:23-24. Covenantally speaking, Israel was destitute.¹⁷

However, this is not the same answer that we would get if we applied

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12. We will not vigorously pursue the positive side of this thesis as space does not permit. Instead it must simply be understood that both aspects of the covenant are operative. Furthermore, my intent is to warn people about where we as a nation will end up, if we do not take politics seriously, or approach this topic in a covenantal manner. Hence, the negative aspects of Israel's history should stand as vivid warnings to us. We ignore them only at our own peril. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:6, it has a good many implications for the New Testament Christian: "Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved."
13. Israel at this point refers to the ten northern tribes, as distinct from Judah, the southern tribe.
14. See 1 Kings 15:29-30 for the sequel to this narrative.
15. Whilst this thesis is aimed at giving the Christian community a "yard stick" by which to measure the political climate of our day, one would hope that covenantal heads of households would take very careful note, as the same principles operate in the home.
16. There is probably no greater example than that found in 2 Kings 23:24-27 where, despite the reforms of Josiah, Judah is cast away because of Manasseh's evil.

some of the other criteria. For example:

1. Good Preaching — Elijah the prophet was very active at this time and called upon Ahab to amend his ways.

2. Good Men in Government — 1 Kings 18:3-4 records a statement about Obadiah who was over Ahab's household, saying, "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly; for it came about, when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water."

3. God-Fearers in the Population — Elijah lamented that he alone was left in all Israel as a true worshipper of Yahweh. God, however, informed him that there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Now, this may not seem many, but in context we have reason to believe that it was a substantial figure. In 1 Kings 20:15 Ahab sets out to raise an army. The total that he raised? 7000 men. Of course, we cannot use this as a one to one comparison as the army was restricted to men of a certain age. However, it does show that there was a considerable number who were faithful.

Using these criteria, it is not impossible to say that Israel was going along in a reasonable fashion. One might need to turn a blind eye to the odd atrocity, but on the whole, Israel was in good shape! However, as we have shown, Israel was not in "good shape." They were covenantally bankrupt because of a succession of covenantally rebellious leaders. The Lord had already condemned them to exile for their rebellion. The covenantal blessings of land, family and prosperity had been revoked and all that remained to be seen was the actual event. Hence, we must be careful about using false criteria.

Australia: Where are We At?

LET US NOW TURN our attention to our own country. Using the various criteria outlined in this paper there are two possible conclusions. First of all, we could blindly follow the false theories held by so many Christians and claim that we are a good Christian nation because Alternatively, we can seriously consider our position from a covenantal standpoint.

If we are honest and view this nation in light of the covenantal model, then the only reasonable conclusion that can be reached is to say that we are destitute and destined for God's judgment. Australia cannot be called a godly, Christian nation. Furthermore, we are acting foolishly if we believe that the cup of God's wrath is not being filled by our apostate acts. When that cup will fill nobody knows, but what we do know, is that when it is full this nation will have to drink it down to the very last dregs.

Those who are dismissive of such claims are no doubt seeking some sort of proof that will back up these claims. Well, the proof rests in what we see around us every day. It is time to wake up and look at the world carefully, not through rose coloured glasses.

In constructing our thesis, we took note of the covenantally rebellious acts that brought down both the individual kings and the nations they ruled. Jeroboam built "high places." In other words, he built and prospered the worship of pagan gods. He stole Yahweh's glory and gave it to another.¹⁸ Ahab was no better in this department. He also encouraged false worship. Moreover, he failed to deliver justice. When his treacherous wife murdered Naboth and stole his vineyard, Ahab simply accepted the booty. He had no concern for an innocent life that had been taken.

With this apostasy came bloodshed. Manasseh was condemned because he "*shed very much innocent*

blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 21:16. NASB, emphasis added.). Others introduced the worship of Molech which seems to have involved child sacrifice or at least torture.¹⁹ The further the king, and Israel, strayed from the true worship of Yahweh, the more despicable their false acts of worship became. More importantly, Yahweh was forgotten or, at the very least, reinterpreted, so that He became something totally different. In short, theocentric worship was replaced by occultic practice and theory.

With our eyes open wide, let us now look at our country.

The first challenge is to find a major publication, (newspaper, Woman's Day, etc.) that does not contain some form of divination. Recently, I viewed a popular woman's magazine that carried several colour pages (6 or 9 ads per page) of advertisements, all of which offered some perspective on divination. Some were even open enough to call themselves 'witches.' Look at our television programmes. We have "Sabrina, the teenage witch," "Buffy the vampire slayer," "The X files," and recently an add for a new sitcom called, I believe, "Charmed," which is the story of three sisters who are witches. Then there are the television advertisements in which the devil features so prominently.

Looking to the cinemas we have the movie "The Craft." Then there was the more recent film, the name of which escapes me, in which Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock played as sisters who used witchcraft to sought out their love lives.

Tattooing and body piercing are a great fashion statement at the moment. It is now a common sight to see earrings where there are no ears. Some youngsters may do it to be "hip" or "cool," but the reality is that they are feeding a frenzy of occultism. Go down to your local markets or shopping mall. It is almost certain

17. 1 Kings 19:10 is insightful: And he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for *the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant*, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword (NASB, emphasis added.)."

18. For pungent warnings on this point see Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11.

19. 2 Kings 23:10 speaking of Josiah's reforms mentions that he abolished this type of worship so that a child did not have to "pass through the fire for Molech." This passing through the fire is commonly held to mean, children sacrificed in or by the fire.

that you will find at least one shop/stall offering new age and occultic material. This can be anything from incense to blatantly occultic symbols.²⁰

Furthermore, consider the state of the Church at large. When taken as a whole the Church is in a very sad state. She tolerates far more than She should. All things are acceptable, well, accept for the eternal truth of God! That is a topic we can happily compromise on. What was your reaction to the news that three denominations in Sydney had banded together to turn the Wayside Chapel into a "shooting gallery" for drug addicts? To hazard a guess, one would say that you were saddened, but not surprised. Why were you not surprised? Because you know that those involved devalue God's word and, armed with their liberalism, can turn the gospel into anything. In their own way they have built Jeroboam's golden calves and are leading people in false worship. In the name of God they speak words which God would never allow to pass His lips.

As to the shedding of innocent blood and injustice, simply turn on your television or read a newspaper.

Better still, consider the government's (state, federal, local) inaction in these areas. I have been told that the current Prime Minister and Treasurer are both Christians. Whether this is so or not I cannot answer, however, one would be justified in asking why so many injustices exist if these men are indeed God-fearers? Why are so many abortions still carried out, especially the government funded ones? Why do our laws still favour the guilty and not the innocent? Why does our law system seemingly only prosper lawyers? Why did Mr. Howard happily open a Buddhist temple?

Conclusion

WHEN THE COVENANT model is applied to Australia, it is more than clear that we fail the test. As a nation we cannot claim to be a Christian nation. Each day our sin is multiplied and our accountability before God grows. When the acts of our governments are examined we can clearly see that the true worship of Yahweh is as absent, as it was in the days of Jeroboam. Their policies are directed at self interest. Senators only pass legislation

after their constituents have been guaranteed a bigger slice of the monetary cake. Right and wrong do not matter, it is simply a case of how big, sweet, and juicy the carrots are.

Covenantally, we have broken faith with God and all we have to look forward to is God's righteous judgment. Our only hope is to give up our reprehensible ways and return to God. Primarily, this will only be achieved when we, the Christians of this land, exchange our complacency and inaction for a true desire to see our God honoured as we know he deserves and commands to be.

Moses set before the Israelites the choice of life and death, obedience or disobedience, blessing or curse. He urged them to choose the former. They chose the latter, and perished for their rebellion. In our day the choice and the outcome are no different. Israel tolerated the apostate ways of their leaders, and were wiped off the map because of it. We stand to lose no less. Moses still speaks today, and he still urges us to choose life. We ignore him to our own peril.

20. Have you noted the recent increase in the occurrence of people wearing either crystals or angels on necklaces. To believe in an infinite God who can guide and protect is to believe in 'superstition,' but to believe in the protection of angels and rocks is acceptable.