



# Born to Win

## Christians and Politics

by Ronald L. Dart

Here we are once again in the political silly season. And, you know, it's a hard time for Christians to keep our hats on straight. And there's no time when it's *more important* that we *do* keep our hats on straight because ours is a government *of* the people and *by* the people. And since we Christians fall in that broad category called "the people", we are responsible before God for what this government does.

But what do I mean when I say it's hard to keep our hats on straight? Well, there are two broad categories of Christians at large in the world. (Listen to this carefully, now.) There are Christians who read the Bible regularly and there are Christians who don't. Now, I can throw the numbers at you but you know I'm right on that. About a third of Christians read something from the Bible at least once a week. About a third read something from the Bible *once a year or less*. The other third? Well, they're somewhere in between.

Now, I don't have any statistics, but my reading suggests that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century those numbers were very different from what they are today. For one thing, in the 1700s, books were a lot more scarce than they are now—they were expensive. Many families may have only had one book in the house and it was, guess what, the Bible. Many people learned to read from the Bible. Books were expensive; books were rare; and while the founders of our country were careful not to *establish* any religion (for very good reasons) they were *all* biblically literate and they governed a people who were biblically literate. So when Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence, he didn't speak of this or that God, he spoke of "the Creator". That was a good thing. What our founders and presidents personally believed was not important. That they publicly acknowledged the Creator as the guarantor of the rights of Man? Now, that was very important.

So where did the idea germinate that this is (or was back then) a *Christian* nation? Well, it was because people read the Bible and their lifestyle and their human relations were influenced by the Bible, if not governed by it. Now, mind you, I'm not talking about reading the Bible and then trying to preach it to your neighbor. I'm talking about living a life *influenced* by the Bible which in turn influences the people with whom you come into contact. The influence of the Bible on early American society was indirect but *pervasive*. And the influence of Christian conduct on society was powerful—not in any authoritative structure (no Christian wants a theocracy) but in the structure of example, persuasion, and influence. Whether we like it or not, the strongest influence on the moral fiber of this young nation was the Bible. And Jesus said it this way. Matthew 13, verse 33:

### Matthew 13

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<sup>33</sup> He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Actually it's a lot like sourdough, not so much like a clump of yeast. One takes a lump of starter dough—left over from the last batch and kept cool—and you work it into flour, you set it off to one side, let it

sit there, and slowly but surely the entire ball of dough swells as the yeast permeates it. Now, most of us are not old enough to remember or know what our country used to be like. A few years ago, I had the chance to talk to an older couple. We were having a cup of coffee together and I said, “What did old people do to survive in the days before Social Security?” Because if you listen to politicians today, you would think that, “Boy, until we brought Social Security in, old seniors were just starving to death out there around the country.” Well, I didn’t really have any real concept and I thought I’d like to know. And their answer should have come as no surprise. I should have known this, but I hadn’t thought about it. They said, “*Families* took care of their parents. When necessary, the community helped.”

I was that simple. Now, it may come as a surprise to some folks in our world but, in the USA before Social Security, old people weren’t starving. Yes, many were poor—they still are. Yes, many were sick—they still are. But they were cared for back then. And this underlines the importance of family, of personal planning, of community, and relationships. I grew up in Boone County, Arkansas. I never saw homeless people lying around the streets. Beggars were rare, indeed. The *churches* were involved in helping people all over the place, and there was a county nursing home (a county “old folks’ home”, we used to call it) where people went when they weren’t able to take care of themselves and they had no family to take care of them. And it was all *local*. When we *had* to do it; when there was nobody else to do it for us—there wasn’t this all-loving, all-caring, all-compassionate government looking after us—we knew how to take care of our own. And we did.

Now, why did we do that? Well, because our conscience was informed and educated by the Bible, that’s why. I don’t think many people realized it, but the *culture* was shaped by the Bible and we lived in it like fish swim in water. We didn’t have to think about it. We just did what had to be done. And if we have lost touch with our humanity, as some politicians want to suggest we have, it’s not because we’re less human. But it may be because we are influenced less by God than we used to be.

Not long ago, Os Guinness spoke of what he called “a moral landslide” in our country. He pointed out that you can’t stop a moral landslide with laws. Observing that all you will accomplish that way is just add to the laws, add to the laws, add to the laws, and every law you add takes away some freedom. You want to see it in action? Just watch your legislature at work. There’s an old saw: “When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.” Think about it. What can Congress assembled *do* about a problem except pass a law? It’s all they’ve got, and it won’t do the job. So thinking about how Christians can keep our hats on straight in an election year, I am moved to ask: How did we come to the pass in which we now find ourselves? Why is it that Christian influence in this country has *waned* that we find ourselves in what Os Guinness called a moral landslide. You may not think it is, but I want you to think about something. You go walking down to your local mall and you see a gaggle of about 20 teenage girls giggling in the hallway. The odds are that at least ten of those girls are engaging in oral sex with this or that boyfriend. It’s hard to imagine. You see these cute little things and you think of what they’re doing in the dark—it boggles the mind. But Dr. Bernadine Healy writing in *U.S. News & World Report* recently shocked me she said that health surveys indicate that over half of America’s teens now engage in oral sex. Girls think they are preserving their technical virginity and that oral sex is safer than the other way—the old fashioned way.

Turns out it’s not safer. STDs (that’s sexually-transmitted diseases—what we used to call venereal disease) are transmitted *orally*, as well. And they’ve got diseases now that none of us had even heard of back when I was a kid. They’ve got herpes, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and the human papillomavirus (try to pronounce that real quick) called HPV. It can take hold in the mouth and throat, did you know that? The last virus, that HPV virus, is now a known cause of cancer. In normal sex, it turns out to be cervical cancer. But it’s the same thing when it shows up in the mouth and throat. Well, it seems that, between 1973 and 2004, there has been a *doubling* of HPV-related oral cancers among people in their 40s. Guess how they got it. Now, there are indicators all around us that this kind of dangerous behavior is common. In my opinion, I think there’s a clear correlation between the moral landslide which we are facing and a waning of Christian influence in society. And I think Christian influence has waned because we Christians are no longer plugged into the source of our *moral* authority.

Authority? Well, that's a word we understand well enough. Authority is defined as "the power to enforce rules or give orders", right? Moral authority is different. Moral authority is defined as "the quality or characteristic of being respected for having good character or knowledge especially as a source of guidance or an exemplar of proper conduct." Moral authority is what Christians bring to the world. But when we're not plugged into the source of *our* moral authority, we haven't got a leg to stand on. The last thing in the world a Christian should seek is *authority*. In fact, Jesus told his disciples to avoid it. In Matthew 20:25, he said this:

### Matthew 20

KJ2000

<sup>25</sup> [...] You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.

<sup>26</sup> But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

<sup>27</sup> And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant[.]

You know, the fact is the secular society is *scared to death* of Christians with authority—probably with very good reason. So know this: If we have no *moral* authority, we have *nothing*. And without a source for our moral authority *higher than ourselves*, we are as lost as the rest of the world.

People who read the Bible seriously (now, let me make my point here) people who read the Bible *seriously*...most Christian people don't. I'm sorry, it's the truth. Let's just deal with it. Most people who read the Bible seriously tend to be personally liberal and politically conservative. And it's just way too easy for us to confuse the two. The idea of a *compassionate* government is very appealing. But you might as well forget about it. Compassion is the business of *human beings*, and government is not a human. It is a *system*. It is a power structure and power corrupts. Never forget that.

Remember that statue of Justice standing there, holding a balance scale in her hand? (You see it every once in a while.) Do you remember about her eyes? What's she looking at? Well, you can't tell because she's blindfolded, right? She's not supposed to be partial; she's not supposed to be compassionate; she is supposed to be *just*. Now, in relation to justice, I want you to consider how the Bible—that book of compassion—looks at justice. Consider this principle of biblical law. It comes in a Book of Exodus, not long after the Ten Commandments. You'll find it in the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Exodus.

### Exodus 23

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<sup>2</sup> "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd,

<sup>3</sup> and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit."

That can give you whiplash if you're not careful. You can easily see why it might say, "Don't show favoritism to the rich man in his lawsuit." That's not what the law says. That should be plain to anybody. We don't do that. *This* one's not so obvious. Now, I've always been fascinated by this passage. Every time I come to it, it stops me. Because, as a Christian, I might be tempted to do just that—to favor the poor man against the rich man in a lawsuit. Now, my wife Allie sat on a jury in a suit a few years ago that involved a traffic accident. What the jury wanted to do was to take money from someone who had done no wrong and give it to someone else for no better reason than the person who was suing in this case was *poor*. It never occurred to them that what they were really trying to do was to take money *unjustly* from one person, who was not at fault, and give it to another. But a person steeped in the Bible would have tumbled to that right away. Now, here, what should a Christian do if you're faced with that as a member of the jury? Well, here's what you must do. You must render a just verdict, regardless of the circumstances of the litigators, and then maybe you can go out after the court

is over with and find a way to help that poor person—outside the court room, with *your own money*, not someone else's.

Have you ever heard the parable of the Good Samaritan? I mean that's a good, old standard. You'll hear more sermons...especially beginning preachers love it. What happened is that someone came to Jesus asking about what there were the great commandment was, and he told him what it was, and the man finally wanted to justify himself after Jesus said:

**Luke 10**

AKJV

<sup>27</sup> [...] and [love] your neighbor as yourself.

<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, You have answered right: this do, and you shall live.

<sup>29</sup> But he, willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?

<sup>30</sup> And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

<sup>31</sup> And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup> And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

They left him lying there. Now, understand this (and this is the part I don't think you will necessarily hear). In this day and time, Judah was governed by the Romans, but they were allowed to administer their own law. In Judaism, the priest and the Levite were *government figures*. And, just for the sake of argument, even if you don't even think that, just imagine that they are. This is the government that passes by on the other side.

**Luke 10**

AKJV

<sup>33</sup> But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

<sup>34</sup> And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

<sup>35</sup> And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatever you spend more, when I come again, I will repay you.

<sup>36</sup> Which now of these three, think you, was neighbor to him that fell among the thieves?

<sup>37</sup> And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus to him, Go, and do you likewise.

Now, apart from all the lessons that can be drawn about Israelite society and Samaritans, What lessons come home from this? Okay, here's one: It was a *man*, not the government, who had compassion on the man. And he showed compassion with his own money, not someone else's money. He was not what I call an OPM liberal—that is, "other people's money" liberal. Now, you may be wondering where the Samaritan learned this. What was the influence on him that caused him to do this? After all, he wasn't an Israelite. He didn't have the law, did he? Well, you'd be half right. He wasn't an Israelite, but the Samaritan had their own text of the five Books of Moses. They had the law; they read it; and, obviously, some of them lived it. It was sound principles in the law of Moses that educated the conscience of this Samaritan. And that's something you may not have heard before.

Now, I could outline some of these principles in the law of Moses that educated the conscience of the Samaritan, but I've already done that in a book titled *Law and Covenant*. Right now, I need to explain further what I meant when I said that a person who reads the Bible seriously tends to be personally liberal and politically conservative. In Matthew chapter 25, there are three parables that any disciple of Jesus should know very well. They're part of the overall answer that Jesus gave the disciples when they asked him about the signs of the end of the age. It's the third of those three parables I want to call to your attention. Jesus said this:

**Matthew 25**

KJ2000

<sup>31</sup> When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

<sup>32</sup> And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats:

<sup>33</sup> And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

<sup>34</sup> Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

<sup>35</sup> For [...]

Now, this is really interesting. Because you want to inherit the kingdom? There is a "because" clause that comes in here. "Inherit it":

**Matthew 25**

KJ2000

<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in:

<sup>36</sup> Naked, and you clothed me: I was sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came unto me.

Aren't these liberal characteristics? Aren't these the things liberals say they want to do for us? Sure, they are. Well, then the people who did that said, "When did we do that? We don't remember that."

**Matthew 25**

KJ2000

<sup>40</sup> And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Since you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.

Now, this is really...this is basic Christianity, isn't it? Let me put a question to you: Would Jesus have commended these folks if they helped all these poor people with someone else's money? If they coerced people; if they threatened people; if they extorted the money and they used that money to help the poor people—would Jesus have thought that was a good thing for them to do? I don't think so. We gain no credit for acting like Robin Hood and robbing the rich to give to the poor. Robin Hood was what I call an OPM liberal—other people's money.

I gave a speech in Dallas some time ago that I titled *The Katrina Effect*. You remember Hurricane Katrina, don't you? The Katrina effect is the term I used to describe a situation where there is a catastrophic government failure, and where the Christian churches step up and perform *brilliantly*—which is what happened after Hurricane Katrina. All I have to do is combine the word FEMA and Katrina and I can say all I need to say about government failure to get your attention, right? You know exactly what I'm talking about when I say that. But if you were one of those who vacated New Orleans in your car and found shelter in a church in Baton Rouge, Jackson, Memphis, or even in my town—Tyler,

Texas—you know what the church side of the Katrina effect looks like. Here in my town of Tyler, Texas (and we're a long way from New Orleans) there were four or five shelters. All but one of them were in churches. And even the one that wasn't (which was at the University of Texas in Tyler) was *served* by churches. They prepared the food, they brought the blankets, they helped people settle in.

Now, why do you think churches do that when other civil institutions seem to just fumble and fail and never get it right? Well, that I think there's a reason for that. It's because our faith demands it; because it's a part of our culture—our worldview; it's a part of who we are. And all of that is shaped and permeated by one book—the Bible. And because we are applying the aid, the assistance, the help to distressed people *personally*—we're right there; were in the location; we're not off in Washington D.C. sending aid out to somebody—because the aid is *personal*, it is more efficient; it is more fair; it's more proper for the people and it meets their needs.

Now, what does all that have to do with keeping our hats on straight in an election year? Well, it can be very appealing when a politician tells us all the wonderful things he's going to do for the poor, the weak, the sick, the unemployed. And, as Christians, we think, "Well, that's good!" Now, these are the things that Christians know we *should* do because we are personally liberal, generous, compassionate people. But what this politician is doing is promising to coerce other people to provide the resources for all this stuff he's going to do. And "coerce" is precisely the correct word. Taxes are *taken* from us by law. And if you don't think so, try not paying them.

I encountered a friend, some time ago, I hadn't seen in a long time. And she told me the story of what happened to them one day—that they had an income tax problem, a dispute with the IRS. And they were working on it; thought they were working their way through it. One day there's a knock on the door. They open the door and into their house come IRS agents with guns drawn—*guns drawn*, with kids in the house. What for? Well, they were going to possess the property. They were going to take away their home and sell it on the market and so forth. That's what was going to happen. That's what the government can do. But when it comes to what *Christians* are supposed to do—well, we can give contributions *voluntarily*. We pay tithes, perhaps, to a church, or you give money to charities to show the Lord's compassion for man. Not only that but, in taking all that money from us, the politician gains power.

Now, is there anybody here listening to my voice that doesn't understand that *money is power*? And isn't it true that *power corrupts*? I offer two words: FEMA and Katrina. Power absolutely corrupts. And the politicians who are promising all these wonderful liberal things to us are looking for *power over us* so they can do the right thing for us. But any time the government gets involved in things like this, corruption dogs it. Should we really vote to take money involuntarily from others to provide health care for the poor? Or should we better organize charitable clinics to serve the poor—even to serve the immigrants among us? If I were running a health care charity, I'll bet I could get free drugs from the pharmaceutical companies *voluntarily*. Why don't we have those things? Why don't we do them? Because our government, which is us, has been systematically taking these duties away from us and screwing up everything it touches.

There's a real danger, I think, in this election year, that we would be blinded by promises of a compassionate government. It is utterly wrong for Christian folk to relinquish our duty to compassion to an all-powerful government. We are in danger of letting our government become our God.

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