



CONCERNS

SOCIAL



Kingdom Culture: Rediscovering Our Mandate

by Ern Baxter

Culture is an order of life, the manner of living of a species. The Bible makes a further distinction in terms of culture—one between unregenerate mankind and regenerate mankind.

In Romans 5:19, Paul says, "By the disobedience of one man, men were made sinners." That is one culture. He then goes on to say, "By the obedience of one man, many became righteous." That is the other culture. The first culture is unrighteous; the second is righteous. In other words, unregenerate man is a distinct species and regenerate man is another, for as Paul says later in the New Testament, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation," that is, a new species. James concurs with him, declar-

ing that we are the first fruits of a new species.

Of those two species or orders of life—the adamic order and the Christ order—the latter is what I call "Kingdom culture." It is the ultimate culture, the culture that must emerge because the Bible says that Jesus must reign until His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. In other words, until the lordship of Jesus Christ becomes the norm, the ultimate culture hasn't been fully manifested. It has come ideally in that Christ came and rose from the dead, but in time and history it must yet come through the Church.

The Bible record indicates that God's intention from the creation of Adam was for man to fill the earth with his kind, supervising and ruling the earth. But Adam failed through disobedience, and after him came a procession of both faithful and unfaithful men up to the time when God called Abraham and said to him, "In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Abraham symbolizes

the beginning of the corporately redemptive purposes of God, God's establishment of a culture pleasing to Him. Abraham begat Isaac; Isaac, Jacob; Jacob's twelve sons became a nation. That nation was given a place in the earth from which to evangelize the nations, and it did a great job until the time of Solomon. Solomon made many mistakes, and from there it was all downhill.

But then the prophets began



speaking of One who would come—and the government would be upon His shoulders. When Jesus came, He was God's final word to humanity, clearly setting the whole divine history in focus, and establishing the Church to carry out God's purpose.

Where we in the Church have failed throughout history has been in losing our vision and a sense of our mandate. Rather than working toward the vision of Kingdom culture, God's government in its ultimate form, we have been taken up with lesser things and have been satisfied with incomplete emphases. Our calling as the "Christ society" is not just to be a group of people who are "saved" and going to heaven when they die, but a people who in history are manifestations of divine culture.

To put it rather daringly, we are to be an extension of the Trinity in the earth—just as Jesus was. John said of Jesus that "we beheld His glory." "Glory" in that sense is the visual manifestation of the invisible attributes of God. In other words, Jesus was a walking counter-culture—everything that Jesus said and did was an extension of the Father. And to the Church Jesus says, "As the Father sent me, so send I you" (Jn. 20:21). Thus, what He was as a one-man culture we are to be as a corporate culture. We must become "Christ people" in the same way Christ was the Father's cultural expression in the earth.

Preaching the Gospel

The first priority I see coming out of Kingdom culture is the necessity of preaching the gospel. That is God's first priority. In these days of perplexing issues and varying viewpoints, we must be clear about what is our foundation and our source. We must not allow our involvement in political, economic or cultural forums to pull us off our primary ground, which is the proclamation of the gospel.

I am, in the final analysis, a

servant of God, a proclaimer of the gospel, a pastor to my local community and a messenger of the Kingdom. These roles must be my first priority. If I leave the ground of my *primary* responsibility as a proclaimer of the gospel and go totally into politics, for example, I move out of the area of my gift and training to an area in which I am no match for what I may encounter. *On* my ground, I can speak into a situation, but *off* my ground where there are no rules, I am less effective. While this may sound self-protective, I realize that my security rests in my staying within my ground. This may well be a stance all of us need to take—even though some may label us biblicists or obscurantists.

The question that may arise from what I have said is, "Does the gospel then have no application to society?" The answer, of course, is that the gospel has *tremendous* social implications. However, over the past seventy-five years, such application has been classified by the term "social gospel," which is inaccurate. The social gospel in recent years has been perceived as total involvement in social action. We are not disturbed by social action; we *are* disturbed by the fact that much social action has forsaken the areas that we consider to be foundationally essential. In other words, some have become so completely involved in feeding the poor, for example, that they have forgotten to preach the gospel to them.

So then, our first priority must be to clearly perceive our place in the Kingdom. We must be those who, having come into a definite relationship with God through Jesus Christ, are governed by the Word of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and committed within the redeemed community to its government and oversight. We must be a part of a manifestation of the heavenly culture in the earth and we must be involved socially—first within the redeemed community, taking care

of our widows, our poor, and those of our own household, and then within the community at large. We must be alert to unrighteousness wherever we see it and speak to it to the degree that we are released to do so. But we must not divorce our social involvement from the gospel, as many have often done.

If we are firmly grounded in the Kingdom, then there will be a foundation for our involvement outside of it. But if we are not grounded here, we will probably become so involved that we forget the gospel.

Conservative, Liberal or Christian?

In the political arena we find Christians taking many positions: conservative, liberal, Democrat, Republican, left, right. I presume that as Christians these people love the Lord Jesus, but I fear that some of them are interpreting their Christianity in terms of their political positions rather than interpreting their political positions in terms of Christianity. For example, if I am "conservative," then my tendency may be toward conservative policies. In that case, as I develop Christian views I would be constantly discriminating to accommodate my conservatism. The same could be true if I were a "liberal."

Ideally, we must be constantly coming out of the biblical concept of a Kingdom culture—the culture of King Jesus. This means that there will be times when we will appear to approach an issue from a conservative perspective because it is closest to the Christian position. Other times, our



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approach may appear to be from the liberal side. Such variation may be interpreted as ambivalence on our part, and people may ask, "What is he—conservative or liberal?" But those labels are not biblical concepts. I am not conservative or liberal; I am a Christian.

Paul says, "He who is spiritual judges (or evaluates) all things, for he himself is not judged (or evaluated) by any man." That is to say, when we are acting out of Kingdom culture, we have the supernatural ability by the spirit of the Word to make evaluations of what is going on, but we ourselves cannot be cataloged or labeled because the man outside the Kingdom does not understand where we are coming from.

Saving my own skin is not really the first priority; the first priority is doing the will of God.

If we take an issue—abortion, for example—in which we are on the pro-life side where most conservatives are, we would seem to be conservative. But in the matter of mishandling wealth, which tends to be a conservative shortcoming, we may be more inclined to speak about responsible stewardship of wealth, and may consequently sound somewhat like left-wing socialists. But we are not. All we are saying is what James said to those who withheld their riches from the poor: "Go too, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you" (Ja. 5:1). That is purely a biblical stance, but it could make some conservatives

angry with us. They might say, "Well, those people are as left-wing as can be. They believe in the redistribution of wealth." That is not what we are saying. We are simply saying that the wealthy have a providential responsibility to handle their wealth as a stewardship before God; but that approach may disturb a man who is theoretically, politically and philosophically conservative and who, at least up until that point, may have considered us to be his political compatriot.

A protest to a biblical approach may indicate that a person is not coming out of Kingdom culture, but out of a conservative or liberal culture. It is debatable how much in that conservative or liberal philosophy may be compatible with Kingdom culture; but the point is that there are other things in those respective philosophies which are not coming out of Kingdom culture. We are not conservatives or liberals; we are Christians, and that may cause tension between us and both our conservative and liberal friends.

We must take issues as they come, and we must speak into them out of Kingdom culture. Many people who became involved in the drug culture of the sixties did so because they were reacting against the establishment. Certainly there was much in the establishment deserving a reaction. But we had to say, "Although there are wrongs in the establishment, the Kingdom reaction to the misbehavior of the establishment is not mindless protests and dissolving your brains with LSD." So we found ourselves in the middle of the issues, and both sides were unhappy with us. But a prophet does not have the luxury of placating anybody; he must please God.

We must constantly act out of the Kingdom culture base, and that puts us in a perpetual tension, because when we do we will not be in total agreement with anybody outside that culture. They will like us when we

speak one way and hate us when we speak another way. We will constantly be in hot water. But that is our prophetic expectation, and in spite of the hot water the person who lives that way can expect the Father's highest involvement in what he is doing. Saving my own skin is not really the first priority; the first priority is doing the will of God. If I do the will of God, I have the Father's highest blessing. Therefore it is incumbent upon us that we constantly act out of this matrix of the Kingdom culture.

We Are Not Called to Everything

We must look at how Jesus conducted Himself on earth. Certainly Jesus must have seen things that needed correcting, but Jesus did what the Father told Him to do. That is what we must do. I must admit, to my own shame, that it is only in recent years that I have been able to quiet myself and assume the same posture that Jesus took. In the past, I angrily and passionately involved myself in many things that the Father never told me to do. But if we can patiently wait on the Lord—not letting patience become laziness—we will be able to speak out of His mandates into situations of concern.

Even if I act out of my Christian compassion for a world in need—trying to help it by feeding its poor and ameliorating its suffering—if I do so without the gospel being in the vanguard of what I'm doing then I assume an unscriptural posture. Yet it is a great temptation to make that mistake for two reasons: first, because I have the compassion of Christ; and second, because I am goaded into action by persuasive yet misguided men who say, "You're a Christian. Why isn't the Church doing something?" Though it is not their prerogative to tell us what to do, we are sometimes goaded into action because we respond to *their* set of priorities and this is entirely the wrong stimulus. It is a shame for

a man of God to be imposed upon by people who only want to use his gifts and ability for their own ends for the sake of expedience.

I have been involved in a number of activities over the years. Eventually I had to tell my associates in some of those activities, "Look, I totally affirm what you are doing; but God has not called me to that, even though I believe He has called *you* to it." Involvement which may seem good in itself may be a violation of my personal call if I am not to give myself to it.

I agree with Charles Simpson when he says that he has had to differentiate between what he can bless and what he can serve. Some activities entirely within the providence of God are not for me to be involved in. I cannot do everything; I was not *called* to do everything; but the something I do must be *the something God wants me to do*. If I am not doing the something He wants me to do, it does not matter what else I am doing—it is in vain. Since we cannot do everything, we had better know what it is He wants us to do.

Speaking to the Government

One thing we *are* called to do is to speak out of Kingdom culture to the government. In Romans chapter 13, Paul speaks of government as the divine agency of God in the social realm. Paul says that "the powers that be are ordained of God and the magistrate bears not the sword in vain." Civil government is an agent of God to providentially supervise human behavior and to keep it from breaking down into self-destructive anarchy.

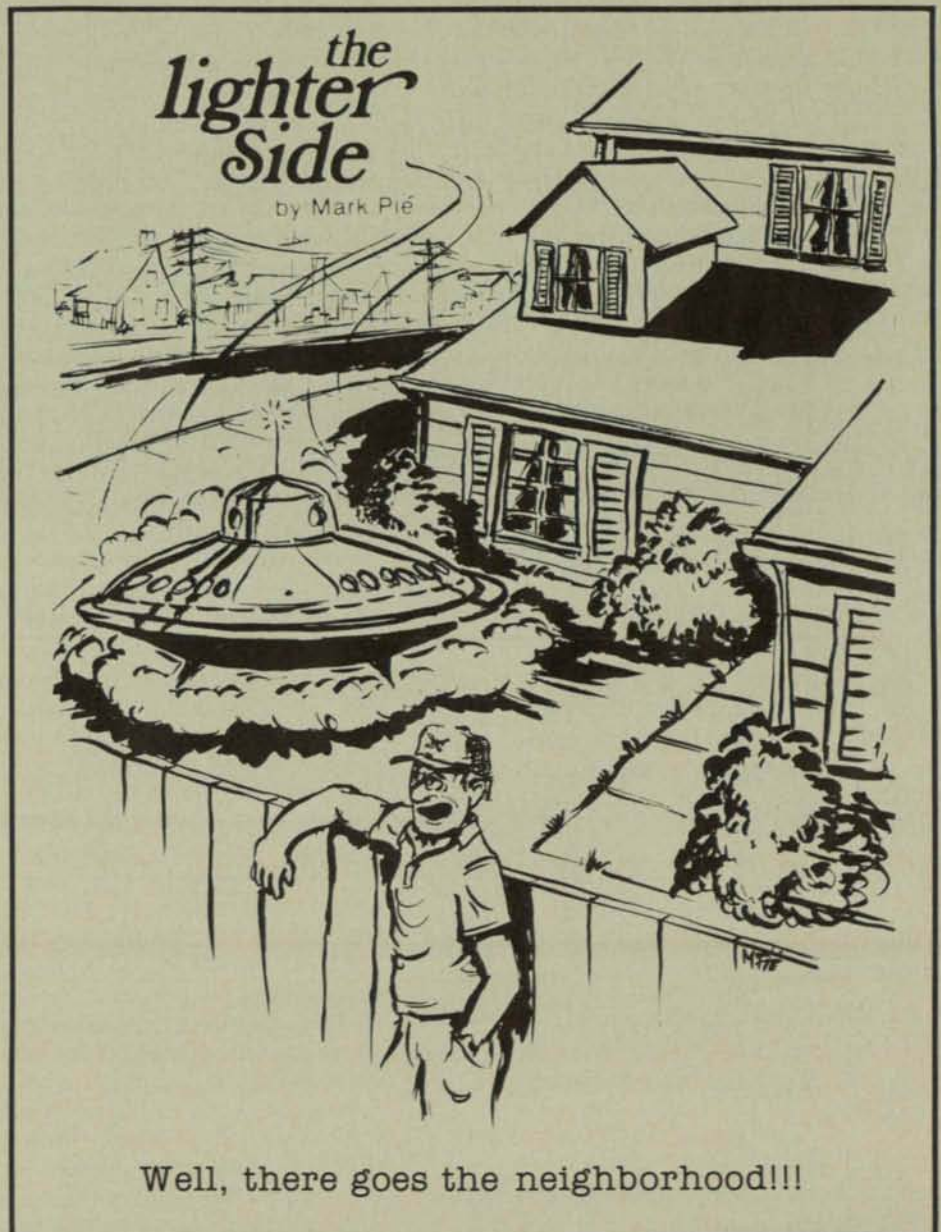
The redeemed community is also directly under the oversight of God as the redemptive arm of God. These two institutions are supposed to act together. The Church is not over the government, nor the government over the Church. Ideally each should be holding a responsibility from God. In fact, government men should be good members of the

redeemed community. Ideally, they should come out of the redeemed community, fed with the culture of the Kingdom which they seek to translate into the governmental realm. Government is an institution we must address.

God ordains the powers of men. Rulers may come to power by vote or by revolution, but God ordains them. And in the Church, God gives us the leadership of apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherds. If we hold these two poles of government in the Church and government in society properly, then we will

understand that the Church must deal with the government as the heart of the culture. Jesus appeared to Paul and said, "You will stand before Caesar." And that is where Paul ended up—he stood before government; he spoke to government.

Our stand against abortion, for example, is valid. I wish all the issues were that clear-cut, because all we are doing in this situation is declaring to the government as God's people that murder is wrong. But again, I would want to ride herd on my involvements in it to be sure that I am not violating a more fundamen-



tal priority. I would not want to go off on some kind of crusade that would keep me from fulfilling my primary calling.

Of course, some Christians are called to deeper involvement in certain areas than other Christians. In fact, there will be godly men in education, in economics and in other areas, starting to interpret Kingdom culture to those areas. It is absolutely essential that the message of the Kingdom of God eventually influence the whole social process. It will not be simply apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers called to this task; it will be the whole redeemed community. With the infinite variety of God's gifts, there will be people in government, in education, in the legal profession, in industry and in all areas of society who will speak righteousness into those situations, acting out of a foundation of the Kingdom culture.

This presupposes that Christians are teaching and embracing the concepts of Kingdom culture themselves, for we cannot very well talk of a thing we don't have. We must first understand the government of God in the

Kingdom before we ourselves can address governments. My concern is that the whole of God's people must themselves come under Kingdom culture, so that all Christians can speak out of our culture firmly, humbly and redemptively against violations of God's moral government such as abortion or sexual permissiveness. And we must do so without neglecting our main priority—preaching the gospel.

We must crucify the emotions of the self-gratifying aspect of our nature so that we don't act out of our passions, but out of revelation. If we are going to do God's job it is essential to have God's wisdom. And that can only come as we function and live in the culture of the Kingdom.

Acting Corporately

In all of this we need to respond out of corporeity. Although it may not always be possible to have total corporeity, it is very important that in decisions which influence community policy we act in symphony rather than unilaterally. We are in a time in the Body of Christ when we need to function corporately for protection and for clarity, because none of us has the whole picture.

Our strength is our plurality. As long as we can act out of council, recognizing that we are the people of God, committing ourselves to the culture of the King and approaching all our challenges and confrontations in council out of a Kingdom culture, we will hopefully be protected from grave mistakes. Through the years I have observed many who have gotten into situations where they had the right ideas, but because they did not have counsel, ended up doing something intemperate.

In the past year, I have come to see the indispensability of dialogue. Now, in discussions about matters of concern, I find myself listening for the "divine throb," the holy consensus, which indicates that God has spoken.

I remember once when the

five of us who serve on *New Wine's* Editorial Board were discussing a particular matter. Each of us expressed his opinion and every one of our opinions was different. Two hours later we came up with God's opinion, and it was different from all five of ours. Without anyone's suggestion or prompting, we spontaneously stood up together, raised our hands and began to praise God.

There is a security in council—a security to say what we may only have begun to think about because we know it will be corrected eventually. If we can understand the nature of Kingdom culture—that it is not a matter of mere human philosophy but of God's intention for mankind—and if our decisions come out of council where our hearts have been humble and open to revelation which is aligned with the Word of God, then I believe we will effectively and responsibly fulfill God's ultimate purposes for His Church.

Faith in God's Ultimate Purpose

If I did not believe in the ultimate purpose of God, I would die of discouragement. I believe that in *all* that we are seeing and hearing in our generation, God has some purpose. There is something positive in all we are doing. I constantly think in terms of foundations and ultimates, and the ultimate is that God is going to gather together all things in the Body of Christ. All of God's people must discover that they are a Kingdom culture.

I don't know how God intends to accomplish that ultimate purpose, but knowing He *will* do it gives me hope. Were I to look at what is going on among Christians without that hope, I would despair. But I do not despair because my faith is in God and in His ultimate purpose. My job is to do what He tells me to do—no more. And the promise we can trust is that God is causing all things to work together for good. ♥

Tips for Fathers

Do your children know how to take their concerns to the Lord? Have you ever gotten into a serious prayer with them that really mattered? Find an important issue and encourage your child to exercise himself in prayer about it. Give some thought to the depth of your child's spiritual life. Does he or she know the Lord Jesus? Do they have real faith? Has their nature changed? These are questions for which you are answerable to the Lord. Seek Him for your child's well-being and future.

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