

Politics and the Vocation of the American Christian

Session 3. Christian Cosmopolitanism and National Identity

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Mark R. Amstutz. Professor of political science at Wheaton College, Illinois:

“The norms of international law stipulate that people have a right to emigrate from their homeland but not a right to immigrate to any particular country. Right of entry can be granted only by the country of destination. Scholars of international relations have developed two approaches to guide these considerations: communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. The policies we favor follow from our loyalty to one of these two approaches. The communitarian favors a more restrictive approach; the cosmopolitan a more open one.”

+ Alternatively, “globalism” or “localism”

I. Biblical Themes

1. We are citizens of two “kingdoms”: Earthly and heavenly

+ Acts 21.39

+ Eph 2.12, 2.19; Phil 3.20

2. Start of nations

+ Gn 10-11. Tribal/ethnic groups; language groups.

+ Earth given to all Gn 1.28-30

+ Nations not first “political” entities in the Scriptures. But cannot push this observation too far (Is 14.9, etc. Gn 17.6, 16, Dt 17.4, 1 Sam 8.5).

+ National identities continue to the last day. Rev 21.24, 21.26, 22.2. Is 2.2-5.

3. “Subsidiarity” (Recognition of resolving local matters locally)

+ Dt 1.15 (Ex 18.21, 18.25). An administrative principle.

4. Everything is God’s

+ Acts 17.25, Ps 24.1 (1 Co 10.26). Ps 89.11. 1 Chron 29.12, 16. Dt 8.17-18.

+ This does not rule out dividing things up. Allocating stewardship (ownership) helps organize and coordinate activity. Acts 5.4. Ex 20.15.

+ Obligations exist toward others. Cf., Ro 13.6-7, Gen 41 (Joseph). Dt 23.24-25 (field eating), Dt 24.19-22 (gleaning).

5. Duties towards aliens and sojourners & the gospel

Lev 19.33-34, Dt 10.17-19, Ex 22.21, Ex 23.9.

6. God is ultimately sovereign

+ 1 Tim 6.15, Ps 103.19

+ God controls earthly sovereignty. Dan 5.18, etc. God grants nationhood. Acts 17.24-26.

7. The curse of division of Babel is undone by Jesus

+ Rev 5.9 Every tribe. Language. Nation. People. Rev 7.9 (14.6).

+ Pentecost (cf., Dan 7).

II. Implications

A. Christians are citizens first of heaven and, secondly, of earthly jurisdictions. Christians, however, do share more in common with Christians in other earthly nations than they do with non-Christians in their own nation.

B. We inhabit territory at God's pleasure. To be used for His purposes. But God gave humans the earth to use.

C. Government to serve our good, as well as others.

D. Subsidiarity implies that government of a given jurisdiction properly focuses on the needs of the people within that jurisdiction.

E. A government of a given jurisdiction cannot pursue its own people's good to the exclusion or unreasonable detriment of others.
(How to balance competing goods?)

F. People of a given geography have no intrinsic right to that particular territory. But they can use it reasonably, and exclude others consistent with reasonable use of private property and fair use.

G. Earthly governments do not have the authority to exclude non-threatening people from taking up residence in their jurisdiction.

Regulation on immigration into or out of jurisdiction can aim only to secure the orderly movement of peoples, and to facilitate the orderly impact of those movements in society. No people has a right to exclude otherwise non-threatening individuals.

+ Policy issues of how to weigh type and magnitude of threat against safety. Etc.