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Beyond Government: The Future of Christian Virtue

By Christopher Manion

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I'm delighted, as always, to be back at The Heritage Foundation. As most of you know, I have a special devotion to the Third Generation, and have always felt that I was a part of it. I well remember packing my station wagon the day after Ronald Reagan won in 1980 and heading to Washington—so I got here about the same time that the first members of the Third Generation did. And I think my father qualifies as a First Generation member, since he was the first man (and a Democrat at that!) to support Barry Goldwater for President, way back in the fifties. In fact, he published *The Conscience of a Conservative* when no one else would. We corrected the galleys right on our dining room table during my spring vacation from high school.

In those days, my father and other conservatives of the First Generation were very concerned about the liberalism that was rampant in the land—politically and economically—under Lyndon Johnson and the Great Welfare State Society. Today we can see the sad results of that political heyday, with Washington sunk lower than any time in memory, and the woeful economic consequences: Because of federal spending, today the dollar is worth about 25 percent of what it was in those days. Members of the Third Generation might find it hard to believe, but back then the average middle class family could live quite well on a single income.

Conservative concerns back then were political and economic, sure, but moral degeneracy caused by the liberal agenda was already visible on the horizon. The sixties were the liberal's dream—they celebrated sex, drugs, and rock and roll—but their dream has become our nightmare. Just observe what the liberal lies of the sixties have bequeathed to our own time: Free sex has given us both a deadly national epidemic and the elevation of perversion to the level of principle; free drugs (then) have given us a disastrous criminal class which is now in its own "third generation"—and which has just shown once more the impact of its misguided muscle on the streets of Los Angeles. And, of course, when Marlin Fitzwater correctly calls this disaster the direct result of liberal failures, the liberal chorus intones T. S. Eliot's Prufrock: "That's not it at all, that's not what I meant, at all."

Country Music Truths. Rock and roll is more elusive as an issue, but as one who is a rock and roller, not a Holy Roller, I have this observation: American country music, which has been enjoyed consistent popularity for eighty years and more in this country, deals in truth about real human situations. If you cheat on your spouse, it's wrong and you suffer; if you hang out in bars, you're gonna get in trouble; and if you're a drunk, you'll go to jail.

Rock and roll, on the other hand, celebrated the excesses of the passions of the sixties, every political, sexual, and hallucinogenic cause. Note also that rock and roll was made to order for the scenario where the parents, who can't take it any longer, stalk up to Johnny's bedroom and slam the door, shouting, "Why do you have to play that stuff so loud?"

Country music, on the other hand, is usually intergenerational; it is often played by families—the Carter family, the Cash family, the Judds, the Whites. The themes are often spiritual—so much so, in fact, that gospel constitutes an entire genre of country music. So I consider country

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music to be primarily pro-family. Every bluegrass festival I go to features families singing and playing together. I've never seen that at a rock concert.

Well, these were the concerns of the First Generation, back in the fifties and the sixties; the Second Generation went to work with the remnants of the Goldwater platform and coalition and built the Reagan team; and the Third Generation, including most of you—most of us—arrived here after 1980.

Tonight I want to address specifically our shared experiences of the past twelve years—because I think, in that time, the Third Generation has grown up. I think it's time now to reflect on those years with a view toward what we might offer the next generation—for indeed there will be a Fourth Generation, whether or not a conservative administration ever makes an appearance here in Washington.

For that reason, bearing in mind the possibility that the Fourth Generation might spend its whole life on the outside of politics, I want to address tonight not the realm of the political, or, more properly, the governmental, but the realm of the rest of our lives—what some (most of them politicians) refer to as "the private sector." I choose to call this the free sector, as opposed to the government sector, because I think this distinction is much more helpful when addressing the problems I want to focus on tonight.

This free sector, however, includes much more than the private sector that we all know so well. Much of what we today consider the public sector concerns our neighborhoods, our schools, our work place—but should not concern the government. Yet the government has, over the years, come to occupy much of the territory and the activity that was once performed by free, non-governmental institutions that were nonetheless public in the best sense of the word. After all, public should not be synonymous with government.

Clearly, the government has taken much of the ground in this formerly free sector, and one of my arguments tonight is simple: We should take back this public ground from the government and make it free again.

Christian Model. In addressing this point tonight, you will hear me speaking specifically of the plight of the Christian in politics. Don't let that mislead you: This reflection is not only for Christians; rather, this is an analysis, not a homily, and anyone whose religious principles propel them to political activity will find that it addresses their experience as well as mine. And I aim to use a framework that is equally intelligible to the believer and the doubter. I choose to investigate the Christian model because it has been the most interesting dimension of politics since 1980, and because it has been the focus of my analytical work as well as of my personal experience.

In that spirit, then, permit me a brief reflection on the past twelve years. Since the end of the Reagan Administration, many Christians who had become active in the "New Right" have been pondering anew the relationship between religion and politics that had emerged since 1980. Many of those who had formed the "Christian right" during that decade became disillusioned, some more quickly than others; most noticeably, several groups, which had been formed to manifest the Christian political presence in national politics, actually dissolved. But many individuals had their heartaches, too.

During the 1980s many of these individuals had invested their political activities with a great deal of faith, energy, and enthusiasm. The disillusionment they have now experienced merits at least a brief analysis, which asks two questions: First, what went wrong? And second, what is to be done?

The religious right's political program prevailing in the 1980s encouraged Christians to capture political power and to persuade politicians to follow Christian principles by adopting specific programs or legislation. But politics in those days was a liberal game (in fact, it still is). In order to qualify, we had to play by the liberal rules: we had to find secular goals, secular means, and secular language with which to articulate these programs. If our proposals reflected a Christian character, either in substance or in language, they were called offensive, unwelcome, and, all too often, illegal. If we look at the elements of this experience with an analytical eye, we can find a good deal of the explanation for the failure of so much of our high hopes. Let's look at some of those experiences.

Throughout the Reagan years, many Christians properly resisted a politicization of their beliefs, especially when they realized they were conceding something by adopting secular logic and language in the process. That is, many people who had in the past had little faith in politics had a healthy skepticism about changing their minds just because of an election. As the 1980s went on, in fact, an increasing sense of discomfort emerged among Christians who had supported political programs aiming at all sorts of social goals; the trouble was, all of these goals had to be dressed up in secular labels. A few of these programs were praiseworthy—I have in mind the adolescent chastity programs adopted in HHS run by Nabers Cabaniss and then Wrenn Archer—but these programs were accepted begrudgingly by the government sector and have to compete in an almost asphyxiating atmosphere of condom distribution programs and the celebration of "alternative sexual lifestyles" which almost defeats their purpose.

Frustration with Government. An interesting aspect of this uneasiness might be explained in terms of two concepts which reflect the Christian's approach to politics. Anyone coming from a Christian natural law tradition would be much more comfortable appealing to language that Christians and others had in common; and those Christians whose sense of history recognized the importance, even the necessity of politics, and the impossibility of gathering the City of God and protecting it in some political way from the City of Man, would have an easier time accepting roles in programs where the results might have been less than perfect. But many Christians came from traditions where results, like salvation, were expected to be achieved almost instantly; thus, frustration set in much more quickly among them. I have noticed, however, that many from the first category found themselves slowly drifting over into the second, even though their traditions spoke loudly of the dangers of such an approach. Thus, Christians of all stripes are now burdened by frustration with the gridlock in government.

What about those folks we supported in getting high government positions, bearing in mind that "personnel is policy"? Well, sometimes it seemed that the more Christians "succeeded" in getting various positions in government, the less Christian the result seemed to be. It wasn't just a co-opting of good men and women, although there was undoubtedly some of that; it was the nature of the political experience itself. Many Christians felt muzzled in their new political positions because they thought they had actually to repress their Christian vocabulary and logic and replace it with one that could be understood and accepted in the secular sphere. I do not refer here to the need to express realities in philosophical terms, perhaps those of the natural law, instead of terms of religious belief. It goes a lot further: it refers to the fact that one could not say anything that offended the secular sphere either. And the adoption of this guideline in practice made the Christian government leader or employee indistinguishable, except for some "personal convictions," from any other. This is the tough problem I want to focus on tonight, elusive as it might appear.

Now this imposed silence under which the Christian must operate in government—you might call it the spiritual gag rule—leads to another consequence: Programs conducted by government at any level—federal, state, or local—have been so affected by the mythical wall of separation

between Church and State that no Christian, working anywhere in government, can perform his duty with Christian love in an open fashion without (at least technically) breaking the law. That is to say, all government welfare or education or health programs, for instance, have been hermetically sealed from the Christian virtues of those charged with carrying them out. The results are as unavoidable in fact as they are in logic. And they are disastrous.

How does this happen? Well, it's simple—at least to those of the ACLU (often referred to as the "Anti-Christian Liberal Union"): Like faith and hope, Christians understand charity to be a theological virtue. A Christian, of course, is motivated by this charity (a word taken from the Latin *caritas*, meaning love—the love of Christ). Well, the Christian is motivated by this love when he serves his fellow man, in all sorts of ways that we today label as charitable.

The liberal community, of course, takes note of the existence of these virtues, just as the founders of our republic did. However, the founders took note of them in order to assure the voters of the state of New York (in the *Federalist Papers*, especially numbers 49 through 55 or so) that our government would be limited, and they took for granted the fact that the source of American virtue was outside the government (as de Tocqueville observed, it is in our churches). The founders also observed that governmental power, if anything, would continually tempt the politician to abandon these virtues—something which goes down very badly with contemporary politicians.

As an aside, this is why Mother Theresa, for instance, insists that her Sisters of Charity are not "social workers": far from it! She knows the difference between a bureaucrat making a living and a Sister of Charity giving her life for Christ.

Charity Freely Given and Received. But there is more to it even than that. Consider the individual acts of charity which make up our daily lives. In the Christian view of charity, both the donor and the recipient must act freely: The donor, recognizing his duty to God as witnessed by countless accounts throughout both the Old and the New Testaments, gives freely, of his own accord; the recipient, with equal charity, accepts his plight, thanks God for this brother who has shared with him, and thanks the donor as well, even as the donor gives thanks to the recipient and to God for giving him the opportunity to be needed, to be helpful.

Note that there is no hostility, no "class struggle," to divide the giver of charity and the recipient. Christian charity unites them. The recipient, knowing that he has no right to charity (for charity is different from justice), knows too that he must avoid the sins of envy and resentment—which are just as dangerous as the greed we hear so much about today—and instead be thankful for God's blessings. Thus to the Christian the poor offer a constant invitation to exercise charity, one person at a time, in a spirit of freedom common to the donor and to the recipient.

(By the way, there is a tangent here: Christians don't abort babies, even if they are retarded, physically handicapped, or if they are going to grow up poor or unwanted, because we recognize our solidarity with them in Christ and their creation in the image of God. Imagine a world where everybody had everything he needed. Who would need the love of Christ, as expressed in charity? For that matter, who would think they needed redemption? We should count our blessings; but remember, even in such a world, the liberal would find some reason for expanding government programs.)

Now contrast this Christian view of charity exercised in freedom with government programs that claim to have the same nominal goals. In the case of programs for the needy—of any stripe—we are confronted with the liberal notion of entitlement: Thus the recipient has a right that he can assert, free of any gratitude (and thus free of a spirit of charity), and the taxpayer is deprived of the opportunity to give freely of his own earned income in a spirit of charity—at least insofar as government programs are concerned. Instead, the taxpayer must give under the threat of force. How "good" would the Samaritan have been if he'd been forced by Roman soldiers to fish that

poor crime victim out of the ditch and take care of him? How generous would he have been if he had drawn on taxpayer funds to pay the innkeeper for nursing the poor fellow back to health? It's a point worth pondering—as I'm sure many have already suggested.

It is clear, then, that a governmental charity program—especially one conducted by a government which is based on a fundamental separation of church and state—cannot be motivated by religious principles of charity. Instead, humanist virtues are conjured up, as easily endorsed by the Gorbachevs of the world as anyone else, and programs are conducted in their name.

It would be fair to object that, surely there are people who undertake their governmental duties with truly ~~Christian virtue, and I admit that this is true—and I encourage~~ it. But we must recognize that, from the point of view of the system, if a government program happens to be administered in the spirit of Christian charity, with a closet Christian exercising true *caritas*, it is clearly by accident, and probably illegal. Thus the system prevents the Christian from manifesting the most valuable virtue of all to his work. What a waste!

Is it any wonder that one government program after another fails when it attempts to do work that was once the province of religious endeavor? We have seen it happen thousands of times before. A certain endeavor needs "aid." The government moves in, first with an almost benign presence—but not for long. Soon the wall of separation is imposed, someone is offended by a prayer, or a creche, or a teaching, or a crucifix (displayed in reverence, not in urine). And because the state practices the Brezhnev doctrine—never retreat once you have taken new territory—religion must make its exit. When it does, the result is, invariably, disaster. Here are some examples:

- ✗ **Education, when taken out of the hands of religious parents and handed to the political hacks of the NEA, becomes our worst national scandal.** Today you can hang pictures of condoms or loving homosexual couples on the wall, but not the Ten Commandments.

- ✗ **Hospitals and health care, once the realm of charitable organizations whose intention was charity, now offer endless opportunities to self-enrichment by ripping off the government.** Meanwhile, the more the government is involved, the higher health costs soar.

- ✗ **A program designed to provide affordable legal services to the poor is perverted into a political campaign machine for homosexuals, illegal aliens, and radical ideologues.**

- ✗ **A program designed to aid poor families instead encourages the destruction of families, and has proven especially destructive to the black family,** a point that Robert Woodson recently tried to make on a Sunday morning show, to the astonishment and indignation of everyone else on the program.

- ✗ **Foreign aid programs designed (we are told) to help countries out of poverty instead seem to entrench oppressive elites in those countries, even as population programs are frantically applied to stem the births of the "undesirable poor."** (Remember, studies show that families reaching middle class status seem to choose to limit the size of their families voluntarily; so our population programs are aimed solely at the foreign poor.) Thus, U.S. aid programs which insist on the required population portion of the package send a message to the poor, often religious, people in those countries that they are the problem, and that we are merely trying to keep them from being born. (Contrast that with the Christian view of man.) Meanwhile, not one of these "developing" countries has ceased being "underdeveloped" in over twenty years.

✗ **A program designed to provide art for the people at large, not just the elite, instead encourages works that trashes every commonly held principle, symbol, and virtue in the culture.** Dare to raise your voice and you are against "free speech"—but please don't ask us to support any religious art, because that's proselytizing.

Last year I was in Moscow, and saw a most remarkable and beautiful exhibit of religious art in the Russian White House. That's the building where Boris Yeltsin mounted the tank on that fateful day of the coup. While he was outside, there were 150 linear meters of beautifully portrayed scenes of the suffering Christ, at least a dozen depictions of Saint George slaying the dragon, St. Joan of Arc, and other historical and contemporary renderings of striking religious themes. Frank Shakespeare, our former Ambassador to the Holy See, was with me, and we remarked then that, while that exhibition was permitted in what was then still the Communist Soviet Union, it would never have been permitted in the National Endowment of the Arts grantee list.

Now many of the principles I'm discussing here were obviously known to conservatives twelve years ago. Today there are lot more data to prove their worth. Perhaps we are now more sober about politics. But, in the light of all this, why did conservatives, and especially Christians, become so enthusiastic about politics in the first place?

Truimph of Politicians. Clearly many of us were so excited about the Reagan "victories" in 1980 and 1984 that we were willing to put great faith in politics—as long as we had a shot at winning. We transferred much of our religious enthusiasm and our most fervent energies to political activity. Sadly, this has heralded the triumph of the politicians—the government sector—over the rest of American life. And here's the key: People who once knew that government could not possibly perform certain tasks (properly reserved by the Tenth Amendment to the states and to the people) now believed that government could do the job—if only they were in power.

Now for the philosophy majors, that position reflects a Kantian, not a Christian, approach; it is clearly anti-Augustinian and anti-Madisonian. It appears to be the position of not only the liberal community, but also of the "no-nonsense" types like Ross Perot of Texas or John Silber, formerly of Texas but now President of Boston University. The notion of limits on governmental power has not yet emerged in the rhetoric of contemporary political animals; in fact, while they constantly intone the mantra of "greed" and the "rich," we never seem to hear them speak of the evils of the lust for power, or the deadly sin of envy. But no Christian can ignore the perils of those temptations.

At the foundation of this fundamental error that has caused so much damage to our body politic lies the denial of what our nation's founders knew were self-evident truths: that all men are created—equal, yes, but only in view of their creation—and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that all this flows from the laws of nature and of nature's God.

I assure you, I am not speaking in the terms of the Declaration and of natural law only because I think you might thus find the rest of my analysis tonight more persuasive. Rather, I am focusing on those foundations of our liberties because I sincerely believe that their rejection, in theory by liberal ideology and in practice by liberal programs, has been the ruin of this country.

And no government program is going to get this country going again. Only the free people of America can do that, and they must do so first by recognizing that our government, so long as it celebrates the "wall of separation," denies everything that our nation's founding affirmed. When our government takes our founding documents and removes references to man as created, then the rights with which he is endowed by his Creator disappear as well. There is simply no other source for such fundamental rights—certainly not wishful liberal thinking. So Christians live on in that contradiction, while our efforts to sanctify our community are frustrated by the

government's perversion of everything we stand for. The result is a national schizophrenia: a godly people, a godless state.

Clearly, the state is subject to the natural law, and thus government programs can seek the common good, but not under the recipe offered by advocates of the radical separation of Church and State. To them, all truths are equal and the "celebration of diversity" (usually the celebration of the worst, or, almost as bad, the celebration of no standards at all) is the only option.

Modest Proposal. So, with this preamble, I come to the modest proposal which constitutes the programmatic, rather than the analytical, portion of my remarks tonight. I have made my preamble so long, ~~perhaps, because I have no extensive point-by-point agenda~~ to recommend. Instead, let me offer some principles which might guide the work of the Fourth Generation—and those of us who are left from the First, Second, and Third Generations as well—in the future. Starting now.

First of all, I think the record shows that a lot of people in Washington are very, very tired. And the rest of the country is certainly tired of Washington. Moreover, people are frustrated, for the reasons I outlined above: They expected politics to deliver what it could not deliver. But Nikos Kazantzakis used to say, "You should not curse the apple tree because it does not bear cherries."

Perhaps many good folks are not truly exhausted; maybe they're just tired of politics. So I suggest that we return to the free sector—in fact, that we take back the free sector. This is the unique challenge to all of us in the 1990s.

Of course we should go first of all to our strengths—to education, to health care, to welfare—truly the focal points of the failure of politics in the last generation, and the pride of the charitable works of all religions in our nation's tradition. Frankly, many of us have lost our energy and dedication to these institutions because we thought the government could do it. Well, the government can't do it. So let's roll up our sleeves and do it ourselves.

We all know what kind of schools we can build in the free sector—free of politicization, free of tenured bureaucracies (unless we want them, of course), and free of secular curricula. Let's build them—we can do it at half the cost of the government schools, with much better results. We can't wait for the government schools to fail—as if they haven't already; instead, we have to take this Administration at its word and say, "Give us the choice that is promised in America 2000, and we will build schools that Americans everywhere will want to choose. And by the year 2000 we will guarantee you a better America."

The same goes for health care. I was talking with Stuart Butler earlier this week and I know how much Heritage could offer to private organizations interested in revivifying the religious community to enter the health care field. So I won't go on about details because I think they're obvious to all of us.

Re-ordering Priorities. Another obvious area is welfare, which was once the province of religion, and, as I tried to point out, which is much better off in the hands of the free sector. But the real problem here is the re-ordering our priorities, and I want to address the difficult dimension which that imposes.

I think we need to make the free sector our first priority today, even if we work for the government. We must be prepared to give much more of what the papal encyclicals call our "excess"—determined by our own conscience, not by some bureaucrat from the IRS—and we must use that excess to build the institutions in the free sector that have fared so badly under government rule.

Now, this excess doesn't mean only money—yes, it means money, but it means taking on an entirely new approach to free institutions: it means that we really have to spend a lot less time

watching reruns of *Casablanca* and a lot more time working not only in individual acts of charity, but to build institutions that will embody and perpetuate these labors.

Examples: schools. We should tell every parent in every town where the schools encourage promiscuity that we're opening schools here that will teach real morality. We'll do everything possible to make room for your kids and we'll go the extra mile to pay their tuition, not out of philanthropy but out of charity—in the proper sense of the word. We would have to draw on a community to do this, but it would be a community based on voluntary cooperation—remember that charity by definition cannot be mandatory. We should build good schools and recruit people to teach in them and one or two people to run them—we don't need 50 percent administrative staff like the government schools. We need to instill a missionary spirit in our fellow Christians and the reason is obvious: This is mission country, and the policy analyst has to recognize that the future of public policy lies in the realm of public freedom, not in the realm of government.

What about the government? Ignore it as much as possible. Where possible, find people there who understand and ask them kindly to begin their retreat back within the proper limits of the Tenth Amendment. Once our schools are up and running—and we're willing to make them affordable to everyone, and to sacrifice (another Christian virtue) enough to make them that way, then the government schools will collapse of their own weight, or radically reform themselves.

The same formula should be applied to health care. I know it's demanding a lot, but we have to begin, first one person at a time and then in solidarity—another Christian term, by the way—to make this work. It will take great strides in charity, hard work, sacrifice—it will truly constitute a revolution. But it will be genuine, because it will be voluntary, based on an appeal to freedom in both the recipients and the providers of each of these services.

Welfare is another area where charity provided in freedom is so much better than anything that government can provide. Local charity, shorn of the bureaucracy and affording the opportunity for people to help people they know, in areas they're familiar with, can be much more effective than government giveaways of other people's money; and the possibility of graft, waste, fraud, and abuse will be reduced to virtually zero.

Reasserting Freedom, Standards. Please note that I'm concentrating here not on the particular aspects of the programs, thank goodness, because the folks at Heritage have worked so many of those out. I'm calling on the good, free people of this country to reassert their freedom, to reassert the standards of education, health care, and welfare that our country is worthy and capable of, and tell the politicians to leave us alone.

That is an essential ingredient. We don't need a government grant. We cannot ask for government help or the whole vicious cycle will start all over again. I think that this is what President Bush might have meant with his insistence on a "thousand points of light." Just remember that, for us Christians, it's the light of Christ that we're reflecting. That work can be done best in freedom. The secret is that people of all faiths, and even people with no faith at all, will immediately see how much better this approach can be. And then they might have a little less faith in government and a little more faith in the laws of nature and Nature's God, from whom all blessings flow. And that's what it's all about.

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