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*God and Government*  
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# CONTENTS

<i>Prologue</i>	9
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## PART ONE

### NEED FOR THE KINGDOM

1. Kingdoms in Conflict	47
2. After the Feast	56
3. Crossing the Rubicon	62
4. Faith and the Evidence	68
5. Neither Ape nor Angel	81

## PART TWO

### ARRIVAL OF THE KINGDOM

6. King Without a Country	91
7. Politics of the Kingdom	99
8. For the Good of the Nation	106
9. The Cross and the Crown	122

PART THREE

ABSENCE OF THE KINGDOM

10. Roots of War (Part I)	141
11. Roots of War (Part II)	172
12. Year Zero	194
13. Marxism and the Kingdom of God	204
14. Conflict and Compromise in the West	232
15. The Naked Public Square	257

PART FOUR

PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM

16. Benefits of the Kingdom	267
17. Christian Patriotism	276
18. Little Platoons	286
19. The Problem of Power	300
20. Christians in Politics	313
21. Signs of the Kingdom	333
22. Perils of Politics	343
23. People Power	356
24. The Political Illusion	380
25. The Indestructible Kingdom	391
<i>Epilogue</i>	418
<i>With Gratitude</i>	422
<i>Notes</i>	425
<i>For Further Reading</i>	435
<i>Index</i>	437

PART ONE

NEED  
FOR THE  
KINGDOM



# 1

## KINGDOMS IN CONFLICT

*Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.*

**BLAISE PASCAL**

*Without Christian culture and Christian hope, the modern world would come to resemble a half-derelict fun-fair, gone nasty and poverty-racked, one enormous Atlantic City.*

**RUSSELL KIRK**

“How did we get into this mess?” Our fictional president’s anguished query echoes a cry heard across our country. For while this story of a decent, moral leader who lets the world slip to the brink of Armageddon would have seemed outrageous fiction just a few years ago, for millions today, a similar scenario looms as a terrifying possibility. Equally disturbing to many is the realization that if this nightmare came true, millions of others would welcome it as a long-awaited consummation of human history.

These tensions run deep. On one side are those who believe that religion provides the details for political agenda. On the other are those who see any religious involvement in the public arena as dangerous. Not since the Crusades have religious passions and prejudices posed such a worldwide threat—if not through a religious zealot or confused idealist whose finger is on the nuclear trigger, then certainly by destroying the tolerance and trust essential for maintaining peace and concord among peoples.

Radical, Islamo-fascist terrorists have spread fear throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the United States. In recent decades, Iraq, Northern Ireland, Sudan, India, and Indonesia are grim examples of nations deeply torn by sectarian strife. Where once people of faith endured horrific

persecution under oppressive Marxist regimes—and still do today in North Korea, China, and Cuba—today millions are persecuted under equally oppressive Islamic regimes in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Even where radical Muslims do not rule, Islamic terrorists do not hesitate to engage in murderous attacks, as we have tragically seen in England, Spain, Indonesia, Italy, and the United States—most horrifically in the September 11 attacks which killed nearly 3,000 innocents. In the West, church-state confrontations are multiplying. As one prominent psychologist observed, this strife “has little to do with whether the state espouses a leftist or rightist political philosophy”;<sup>1</sup> the fires rage amid a variety of political systems.

Diverse as they may seem, these tensions all arise from one basic cause: confusion and conflict over the respective spheres of the religious and the political. What Augustine called the City of God and the city of man are locked in a worldwide, frequently bitter struggle for influence and power.

Nowhere has this conflict been more hotly debated than in America. Throughout most of its history, the U.S. has enjoyed uncommon harmony between church and state. The role of each was regarded as essential, with religion providing the moral foundation upon which democratic institutions could function. As recently as 1954 the Supreme Court explicitly rejected the contention that government should be neutral toward religion. Justice William O. Douglas stated that “we are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being.”<sup>2</sup> But only nine years later, barbed wire was flung up on the “wall of separation” between the two as the court reversed itself in its landmark school-prayer decision. Though the expulsion of formal prayer from the schoolroom did not impede people’s ability to talk to God wherever they wished, the decision reflected the shifting public consensus about the role of religiously based values in public life. It set off major tremors along long-dormant fault lines in America’s political landscape.

At the same time the works of such writers as Camus and Sartre were enjoying enormous popularity on American college campuses. These existentialists argued that since there is no God, life has no intrinsic meaning. Meaning and purpose must be boldly created through an individual’s actions, whatever they may be.

This relativistic view of truth perpetuated a subculture whose password was “do your own thing”—which for many meant a comfortable spiral of easy sex and hard drugs. Personal autonomy was elevated at the expense of community responsibility. Even as many pursued these new freedoms in

search of fresh utopias, some acknowledged the void left by the vacuum of values. Pop icon Andy Warhol spoke for the mood of a generation: "When I got my first TV set," he said, "I stopped caring so much about having close relationships . . . you can only be hurt if you care a lot."<sup>3</sup>

Liberal theologians eagerly adapted to the powerful trends of the day. The late Bishop Robinson's book *Honest to God*, published the same year as the school-prayer decision, gave birth to the God Is Dead Movement, popularized on the cover of *Time* magazine.

By the seventies, religion was fast becoming an irrelevant, even an unwanted intruder in politics and public affairs. The Supreme Court often practiced what one dissenting justice in the school-prayer case had warned against: a "brooding and pervasive devotion to the secular and a passive or even active hostility to the religious."<sup>4</sup>

*Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision legalizing abortion, was the final blow for traditionalists. Not only was it seen as a rejection of America's commitment to the sanctity of life, but as a repudiation of moral values as a factor in court decisions. For the first time the justices excluded moral and philosophical arguments from their determination.

*Roe v. Wade* triggered a counter-reaction, sending tremors from another direction. Determined to preserve moral values in the public sphere, conservative church members who had long disdained politics began organizing furiously; the pro-life movement spread quickly across the country. By 1976 evangelicals were flexing their muscles behind a "born-again" presidential candidate. In 1979 a group of conservative Christian leaders met privately in Washington; the result was the Moral Majority and the Christian New Right. Within only six years this movement became one of the most formidable forces in American politics, registering millions of voters, raising vast war chests for select candidates, and crusading for its "moral agenda" with the fervor of old-time, circuit-riding preachers.

In 1984 the fault line broke wide open with a presidential campaign that resembled a holy crusade more than an election.

First, the Democratic candidate for vice-president, Geraldine Ferraro, questioned whether President Reagan was "a good Christian" because of his policies toward the poor.<sup>5</sup> Days later, the Catholic archbishop of New York challenged Mrs. Ferraro's Catholic faith because of her support for pro-abortion legislation. At the Republican convention President Reagan told 17,000 foot-stomping partisans that "without God democracy will not and cannot

long endure.”<sup>6</sup> His Democratic challenger, former Vice President Mondale, said that faith is intensely personal, should never be mixed up with politics, and that Reagan was “trying to transform policy debates into theological disputes.”<sup>7</sup> Governor Cuomo of New York gave a widely heralded address at Notre Dame, in which he stated that as a Catholic he could personally oppose abortion, yet support it as governor as a “prudential political judgment,” since he was following the will of the majority.<sup>8</sup>

In thousands of precincts across the country, fundamentalist ministers organized voter-registration campaigns, equating conservative political positions with the Christian faith. New Right spokesmen trumpeted the call for God, country, and their hand-picked candidates, and compared abortion clinics to the Nazi holocaust.

Civil libertarians reacted with near hysteria. Some labeled the late Jerry Falwell an American version of the Ayatollah Khomeini. People for the American Way, a group organized by liberal activists to counter the Moral Majority, launched a slick media campaign attaching the Nazi slur to the religious right.

Never had religion become such a central issue in a presidential campaign; never had the church itself been so dangerously polarized.

The fissures that broke open in 1984 remain wide and deep today. On one side are certain segments of the Christian church, religious conservatives who are determined to regain lost ground and restore traditional values. “America needs a president who will speak for God,” proclaimed one leader. Whether out of frustration or sincere theological conviction, Christian conservatives have become politicized, attempting to take dominion over culture through legislation and court decisions handed down by strict-constructionist judges.

Those on the other side are no less militant. Believing (or at any rate, claiming to believe) that Christian political activists will cram religious values down the nation’s unwilling throat, they heatedly assert that faith is a private matter and has no bearing on public life. The *New York Times*, for example, accused Ronald Reagan of being “primitive” when he publicly referred to his faith: “You don’t have to be a secular humanist to take offense at that display of what, in America, should be private piety.”<sup>9</sup>

The mainstream media took the same open-minded approach when President George W. Bush told a reporter that his favorite political philosopher was Jesus Christ. *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd sneered: “Translation: You’re either in the Christ club or out of it, on the J.C. team

or off. This is the same exclusionary attitude, so offensive to those with different beliefs, that he showed in 1993 when he said that you must believe in Jesus Christ to enter heaven.” Yet, most of the media looked the other way when the president of Iran publicly prayed at the United Nations during a visit in 2006.

Meanwhile, the 2000 and 2004 elections were extremely close, revealing a country closely (and dangerously) divided, politically and culturally, stereotyped along “Red State” (Republican, rural, church-going, NASCAR-watching, country-music loving) and “Blue State” (Democratic, urban, latte-drinking, brie-nibbling, rock-and-roll loving) ideologies. A British videogame designer had some fun at America’s expense with his Internet meme “Jesusland” map, in which “blue” voters ended up in “The United States of Canada” (California, New England, and Canada), while “red” voters lived in “Jesusland:” the Midwestern and Southern states plus Alaska. Secession, anyone?

The real tragedy is that both sides are so deeply entrenched and polarized that neither can listen to the other. Invective and name calling have replaced dialogue. Nothing less than obliteration of the enemy will suffice; America must be either Christianized or secularized. Many citizens feel that they must choose sides, either enlisting with People for the American Way and the ACLU, or joining up with one of the many evangelical activist groups, from the Family Research Council to Concerned Women for America to the American Center for Law and Justice.

However we got to this point, the fact is that both extremes—those who want to eliminate religion from political life as well as those who want religion to dominate politics—have overreacted and overreached. Richard John Neuhaus does not overstate the case when he argues that this confrontation can be “severely damaging, if not fatal, to the American democratic experiment.” Furthermore, both exclusivist arguments are wrong.

There is another way, however. It’s a path of reason and civility that recognizes the proper and necessary roles of both the political and the religious. Each respective role is, as I hope this book will demonstrate, indispensable to the health of society.

Wise men and women have long recognized the need for the transcendent authority of religion to give society its legitimacy and essential cohesion. One of the most vigorous arguments was made by Cicero, who maintained that religion is “indispensable to private morals and public order . . . and no

man of sense will attack it.”<sup>10</sup> Augustine argued that the essence of public harmony could be found only in justice, the source of which is divine. “In the absence of justice,” he asked, “what is sovereignty but organized brigandage?”<sup>11</sup>

In the West the primary civilizing force was Christianity. According to historian Christopher Dawson, Christianity provided a transcendent spiritual end that gave Western culture its dynamic purpose. It furnished the soul for Western civilization and provided its moral legitimization; or, as was stated somewhat wistfully in *The London Times* some years ago, “The firm principles which could mediate between the individual and society to provide both with a sense of proportion and responsibility in order to inform behavior.”<sup>12</sup>

The American experiment in limited government was founded on this essential premise; its success depended on a transcendent reference point and a religious consensus. John Adams wrote, “Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”<sup>13</sup> Tocqueville credited much of America’s remarkable success to its religious nature; it was later called a nation with “the soul of a church.”<sup>14</sup>

Today, many thinkers, even those who reject orthodox faith, agree that a religious-value consensus is essential for justice and concord. Polish newspaper editor Adam Michnik, a dissident during Poland’s Communist era, who describes himself as a “pagan,” applauds the church for resisting tyranny. Religion, he says, is “the key source of encouragement for those who seek to broaden civil liberties.”<sup>15</sup> To disregard the historic Western consensus about the role of religion in culture is to ignore the foundation of our civilization.

But men and women need more than a religious value system. They need civic structures to prevent chaos and provide order. Religion is not intended or equipped to do this; when it has tried, it has brought grief on itself and the political institutions it has attempted to control. An independent state is crucial to the commonweal.

Both the City of God and the city of man are vital to society—and they must remain in delicate balance. “All human history and culture,” one historian observed, “may be viewed as the interplay of the competing values of these . . . two cities”;<sup>16</sup> and wherever they are out of balance, the public good suffers.

This is why today's conflict is so dangerous. It would be a Pyrrhic victory indeed should either side win unconditionally. Victory for either would mean defeat for both.



I have brooded over this dilemma since the mid-seventies. My concerns deepened each year as the conflict intensified between the body politic and the body spiritual. A variety of questions plagued me: To what extent can Christians affect public policy? Is there a responsible Christian political role? In a pluralistic society, is it right to seek to influence or impose Christian values? How are the rights of the nonreligious protected? Are there mutual interests for both the religious and the secular? Is it possible to find common ground? What does the experience of history say to us today? What would God have us understand about this torn and alienated world—or, considering the mess we've made, has He given up on us?

Friends urged me to write on the subject since I've been on both sides—first, as a non-Christian White House official, and now as a concerned Christian citizen and the head of a Christian ministry. But the task always appeared too daunting. I couldn't sort out all the questions raised in the blistering American debate. Both sides seemed hopelessly intractable.

Oddly enough, it was on a visit to India in the fall of 1985 that I came to the unmistakable conviction that I must write this book.

At a friend's home in New Delhi, I listened to shocking stories of conflict between Indian Christians and their society. One young man who was converted to Christ after reading Christian tracts had been forced to leave his rural village by his outraged family. Another man who had been preaching on the street was cornered and beaten by an angry crowd. Many others, after converting to Christianity, had been tried by civil authorities.

The same day I was in New Delhi, opposition leader Charan Singh called upon Prime Minister Gandhi to “stamp out” all Christian missionaries lest their converts in certain states seek political independence.<sup>17</sup> Why, I wondered, is there such hostility to one faith in this Hindu culture that believes all roads lead to heaven? They should be the most tolerant of all. What is it about the Judeo-Christian message that makes it so offensive? Ironically, the Indians may understand the heart of the gospel—that Christ is King, with all that portends—better than many in the “Christian” West.

Later that day as my flight lifted off for Bombay, I looked down on New Delhi, which was shrouded in a dense smog from the open cooking fires of its crowded streets. Then, as we broke through to the blue sky above, it was as though the clouds surrounding these issues also broke open for me. I began to see the struggle in America—and around the world—more clearly than ever before.

So it was high in the skies between New Delhi and Bombay that I first wrote, “The kingdoms are in conflict, both vying for ultimate allegiance. Not just in America, but around the world. By his nature man is irresistibly religious—and he is political. Unless the two can coexist, mankind will continue in turmoil. Tragically, we have lost sight of both the nature of man and the nature of God and His rule over the world.”

To put it simply, humanists—using that term in its best sense—fail to understand humanity and Christians fail to understand the message of Christ.

I first published *Kingdoms in Conflict* in 1987. I was motivated to bring out a twentieth anniversary edition by the fact that *Kingdoms* has continued to sell briskly all these years since its first publication. In my travels, I’ve found copies of *Kingdoms*, translated into Russian, being shared by members of the Russian Parliament. When I was in Canada recently, virtually every member of Parliament was reading *Kingdoms*.

I have substantially updated the book to address the tremendous changes that have occurred in the last twenty years. While the anecdotes may be different, however, the principles enunciated in the original edition are the same.

The truths *Kingdoms* contains are even more relevant today than they were in 1987. That was the heyday of the Moral Majority and the emergence of what was referred to as the New Christian Right. Twenty years later, the term “Christian Right” has morphed into “Right-Wing Extremist”—the most pejorative term in American politics. In the view of many, the goals of conservative Christians are considered synonymous with the Republican Party (leading to the bumper sticker quip “God is Not a Republican” [in large letters] “Or a Democrat” [in small letters]—a condemnation of the Christian Right by liberal evangelical Jim Wallis). This identification is tragic, because it diminishes the role of the Kingdom of God—and it’s why the messages of this book are needed today more than ever.

Men and women have always been spiritual beings. But modern culture, in its zeal to eliminate divisive influences and create a self-sufficient, “enlightened” society, has ignored this fundamental truth. Along with denying God, today’s social visionaries have denied man’s intrinsic need for God. At the same time, Christianity has become a pale shadow of the radical Kingdom its Founder announced.

The shock waves that threaten the very foundations of our culture today, then, emanate from society’s failure to understand man’s need for God and the Christians’ failure to accurately present Christ’s message of the Kingdom of God. So before we can hope to deal with the modern religious-political conflict, we must take what at first may seem to be a digression. But bear with me. For until we understand the true nature of man and the true nature of Christ’s message, we cannot hope to understand the story of President Hopkins and why we are in the mess we are in today—or, more importantly, the way out.

The place to begin, then, is with human nature itself. We’ll start with a man who embraced the spirit of the twentieth century and lived it to its logical conclusion.