Administering nations in the public good

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- January 2011 -

The highest of distinctions is service to others - King George VI



The Faithful Centurion (Luke 7)

Godly civic service in the nations

The trusty endeavour of civic authorities and public servants is a largely forgotten aspect of God's plan to bring peace and blessing to the nations. While civil administration is often taken for granted and lacks prestige in Christian thinking, social systems rely on prudential public servants - since *the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure* (Ecclesiastes 8:5). Especially during a crisis, a Godly public servant will follow the instruction: *... do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest* (10:4). But nations lacking prudent, accountable and faithful governance are at serious risk of collapse. So it is crucial for Christians to enlarge our thinking, so that we esteem, encourage and enable diligent civic and social administration.

Reliable bureacracy in many nations has been shaped as Godly people have embraced civic management as a noble cause. Their work upholds the value of civil service detailed in Romans 13, where Paul described the authorities as *God's servants* - who *commend ... bear the sword ... give their full time to governing* and receive *taxes ... revenue ... respect* and *honour*. Hence the mission of God's people has included the provision of civic leadership and administration in pagan lands, as we see in the work of Joseph and Daniel.

Joseph gave prudential civic service in Egypt, as a slave who supervised Pharaoh's prisoners: He was placed *in charge of all those held in the prison and he was made responsible for all that was done there* (Genesis 39:22). He then advised Pharaoh (41:33) and became governor of Egypt (41:40).

Daniel excelled as a trainee public servant in Babylon (1:19). Then as *ruler over the entire province* (2:48) he enabled the appointment of his friends as *administrators over the province* (2:49) and *in his conduct of government affairs ... he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent* (6:3-4).

Applying the wisdom of God to the governance of nations

While Joseph and Daniel were required to serve pagan leaders, they gladly shared wisdom, and glorified God in the process. So Joseph spoke of God's goodness when helping the king: *"I cannot do it", Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires"* (Genesis 41:16). By the same approach, Daniel (2:27) said: *"No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."* Whether administering civic systems, or revealing mysteries, Christians may provide wisdom to the people and the leaders of nations, while publicly testifying to God's wisdom.

Personified in the Book of Proverbs as "Lady Wisdom", Godly counsel is essential to sustainable civic leadership within the nation. So she cries aloud: *"By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth"* (8:15-16). Accordingly, God's wisdom for civic authority is to be given by his people. So in ancient times, *men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world* (I Kings 4:34). God's purpose is that his people give influence at the highest level of civic leadership. Therefore *he who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend* (Proverbs 22:11) and *a man skilled in his work ... will serve before kings* (22:29).

In fact God's people may share wisdom in all contexts within a nation. So his people can exercise influence in the *street* and in the *public square* where *wisdom calls aloud* (1:20) and also at the *city gate* - a place of civic *assembly* (24:7) where the public-spirited nobleman *is respected* and *takes his seat among the elders of the land* (31:23) to resolve civic and administrative issues, and enable people to *live peaceful and quiet lives* (I Timothy 2:2).

With that aim, Paul urged prayer for *all those in authority* (I Timothy 2:1) and encouraged Titus (3:1-2) to *remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good* .... In a similar way, Peter upheld the worthy idea of *authority instituted among men* (I Peter 2:13) and urged God's people to *honour the king* (2:17) - the pagan emperor. Greetings from Christians in civic leadership were conveyed by Paul, including from *those who belong to Caesar's household* (Philippians 4:22) and from *Erastus ... the city's director of public works* probably in Corinth (Romans 16:23). With such biblical warrant, God's people should pray for the authorities, and may encourage their work, and participate accordingly.

Restoring the biblical ideal of devotion to duty

Society has greatly lost the ideal of long-term dedication and faithful civic service exhibited by Joseph and Daniel. In fact, loyal participation in church, a volunteer association, union, political party, or service club was previously usual, but has become less so. Yet in the twentieth century many nations in the Westminster tradition upheld the biblical concept of long-term dedicated servant-leadership and long-suffering devotion in the public good.

So in 1901, after surviving seven murder attempts, Queen Victoria reached the natural end to her life's work (begun at the age of only 18) and at the end of her reign (of nearly 64 years) she enabled the formation of the Australian nation.

During the Second World War, King George VI and his Queen gave remarkable strength to the free nations by staying in London under bombardment. Risking death by visiting bombed areas, they gave great support and encouragement. Refusing to take her daughters to the safety of Canada, the Queen stayed and took revolver lessons, saying: *The Princesses would never leave without me, and I couldn't leave without the King, and the King will never leave.*

Then in 1947, Princess Elizabeth (on the occasion of her 21st birthday) stated: *I declare before you all, that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service.* She re-affirmed this prior to Australia's centenary over 50 years later in 1999: *I shall continue faithfully to serve as Queen of Australia under the Constitution to the very best of my ability ....*

As well as upholding diplomacy, discretion and devotion, the Crown shares obligations arising from instructions given at each Sovereign's Coronation: *Be so merciful that you be not too remiss; so execute justice that you forget not mercy.* Similar obligations accrue to all officials, and especially to those who have pledged allegiance to the Sovereign: such authorities must *obey the king's command* ... having taken *an oath before God* (Ecclesiastes 8:2).

Accordingly, the Crown has encouraged and prompted authorities such as: **governors** - to supervise diligently; **parliamentarians** - to legislate wisely; **public servants** - to administer the state prudently; **police** - to ensure peace and security; **prosecutors** - to initiate valid action; **jurors** - to determine true findings in court; **justices** - to apply laws rightly; **prison officers** - to isolate and reform offenders; **customs officials** - to protect border integrity; **militia** - to ensure national security; **diplomats** - to gain international cooperation; and **electoral officials** - to facilitate fair and free democracy.

Service, excellence and Christian ideals



Esteeming Jesus *as one who serves* (Luke 22:27) and who *has done everything well* (Mark 7:37), Christian-based nations uphold the cross. Thus in 1953 Queen Elizabeth II chose the Crown of King Edward the Confessor to be the symbol of her reign. Surmounted by the Maltese cross ✠ that Edward Crown was featured on each **Commonwealth Games medal** in 2008 to denote the unifying headship of Queen Elizabeth over the various Commonwealth nations (of which there were 54 as of 2011).

Upholding King Edward's aim to receive advice and administer law without imposition, his crown became the highest icon of servant-leadership and civic duty in each nation under the Queen's sovereignty. On the badges of police, MPs, and the military in such nations, his crown gave a reminder to help civic leaders and the civil service resist all corruption, promote peace, and apply justice with neutrality, impartiality, discretion and grace.

Unlike officials who ignore social need or a desire to excel, servant-leaders seek the common good and the continuity of governance (despite ministerial or political discontinuity). Their *diligent hands will rule* (Proverbs 12:24) since servant-leaders *make plans by seeking advice* (20:18). But in the absence of clear counsel or precedent, officials must operate to *apply sound judgement and discernment* (3:21) and *maintain discretion* (5:2) - which relies upon God's wisdom that is *pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere* (James 3:17).

The great value of wisdom in civic administration and governance may be encouraged by God's people in the nation. This requires restoration of a belief that God can be served as his people provide public service, recognising the awful truth that *for lack of guidance a nation falls* (Proverbs 11:14). Above all it requires faith in Christ - who *did not come to be served, but to serve* (Matthew 20:28). His favour towards the Faithful Centurion (Luke 7:1-10) upholds the value of civic authority and servant-leadership within public duty, especially as that soldier rightly declared his own legitimate usage of civic power to be an example of our Lord's own rule and reign.

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