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Is neutrality ever an option?

Our Lord Jesus declared:

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters." Matthew 12:30

The prophet, Elijah, asked:

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal is God, follow Him." 1 Kings 18:21

Joshua challenged the people to:

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15

We live in an age of compromise and tolerance of evil where neutrality has been deified and raised up as an idol.

INTERNATIONAL NEUTRALITY

As Slovenians and Croatians struggled for freedom from the communist government of Yugoslavia, Western nations declared neutrality while continuing to aid and trade with the

Serbian aggressors in Belgrade.

While the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia courageously opposed the Communist Party dictatorship in Moscow and sought freedom from the Soviet Empire, Western governments declared neutrality. But by refusing to aid the brave Baltic republics, and by continuing to pour billions of dollars of loans, trade and technology into the Soviet Union, the effect of their neutrality was to betray the forces of freedom and bolster the socialists. The Baltic republics are now well on the road to independence — but this is in spite of the actions of the West.

When the Kurds were being massacred and stampeded from the land of their birth, the West claimed neutrality. They ‘could not get involved in the internal affairs of an independent nation’ (except, of course, South Africa). However, that argument wore a bit thin in the light of the West’s war against Iraq to free Kuwait (or at least to restore the Islamic dictatorship that continues to persecute Christians in Kuwait). What made the Kuwaitis more important than the Kurds? For that matter, why was Lebanon (for centuries the only nation in the Middle East with a Christian majority) betrayed into the hands of Syria in exchange for Syria’s support in fighting Iraq? Is international neutrality a reality or a farce?

“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.” James 4:17

ECUMENICAL NEUTRALITY

The celebrated National Conference of Churches (NCC), held near Rustenburg, S.A. (5th-9th November 1990), brought together church leaders from Roman Catholic, Reformed, Charismatic, Evangelical, and ecumenical backgrounds.

Despite the theme of the Conference being: “A United Christian Witness in a Changing South Africa”, the NCC refused motions from the floor to condemn child abuse, abortion or violence. Claiming that the motion to include a clause upholding “the right to life of the unborn” would be controversial, the Conference chose to be neutral on the issue of abortion.

The Conference was so preoccupied with condemning apartheid that it found no time to speak up for the unborn victims of abortion, the innocent victims of terrorism and the young victims of child abuse. Moreover, while the Conference refused to bring itself to address controversial

issues such as the abuse of children for political purposes, murder as a political tool, or sanctions, it did advocate a socialist programme of nationalisation, and redistribution of wealth.

A major problem with the Rustenburg NCC was that it was a human attempt to organizationally unite unbelievers with Bible believers. Even more tragically, Rustenburg attempted to bring about conformity to a political programme.

Much was made of our Lord's prayer that "We may be one". However, the context of our Lord's prayer in John 17 seems to have been ignored. Our Lord prayed: **"I have revealed You to those whom You gave me out of the world... they have obeyed Your Word... for I gave them the Words You gave me and they accepted them... they believed... I pray for them. I am not praying for the world but for those You have given me... so that they may be one as we are one."**

John

17:6-11.

It seems hypocritical for those who do not hold to the infallibility of Scripture to selectively quote it for their own ends. It is inconsistent for theologians who do not believe that Jesus and the Father "are one", to pray that we may be one.

Christians may only seek unity in Christ and on the basis of the Bible. And unity is not for unity's sake — but a unity of purpose to fulfil the Great Commission to **"make disciples..., teach obedience to all things I have commanded."**

Matthew 28:19.

Considering the drunkenness witnessed at Rustenburg, the low attendance at devotions, the refusal to condemn violence or uphold the right to life of the unborn, many Christians cannot agree with the assertion that the Rustenburg Declaration was "an evidence of the moving of the Spirit of God in Church and Nation." For some to claim that the Rustenburg Declaration was the voice of the Holy Spirit seems blasphemous. And to claim that it was the voice of all South African Christians is fraudulent.

The Conference was not as representative as claimed (initial reports seem to have counted ears instead of heads). Nor was the document adequately discussed. It wasn't even voted on! And considering that other Christian conferences have produced very different documents (for

example: “The Manifesto for Christians in Southern Africa” issued by the Conference for Christian Action, and the “KwaSizabantu Affirmation 1991” of the ministers Conference), it seems dishonest for the NCC to continue to promote their humanist declaration as the sole voice of South African Christians. Upon reflection, the Rustenburg Declaration was an essentially humanist document advocating a socialist programme.

Nevertheless, the most disconcerting aspect of the Rustenburg NCC was not how radical the liberation theologians were, but how silent the evangelicals were. I was amazed that no-one publicly supported my call from the floor to declare the right to life of the unborn, or to condemn political violence, or child abuse. Even more amazing has been how so many evangelicals have come out in support of the Rustenburg Declaration.

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?... Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.” 2Cor.6:14-17

RELIGIOUS NEUTRALITY

The 7th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) took place in Canberra, Australia, (7th-20th February 1991), with characteristic pagan ritual. The opening procession to the large worship tent on the campus of the Australian National University were made to symbolically pass through the fire. The smoke made by burning gum leaves was described by the Ecumenical Press Service as “a traditional cleansing process for Aborigines in Australia” and was thought to signify “the cleansing and refining fire of the Holy Spirit.”

One of the keynote speakers of this recent Canberra Assembly, South Korean feminist theologian, Professor Chung Hyun Kyung, took off her shoes amidst the aboriginal dancers and called up “the spirits of the many people in history who had died at the hands of the oppressors”. She linked these “Han-spirits” with the Holy Spirit. Holding up a list of names of these spirits, she ritually burned it and solemnly let the, ashes drift upwards as a prayer.

Professor Chung also rejected the concept of “an omnipotent, macho, warrior god who rescues all good guys and punishes all bad guys.” She called for a “new liberation theology” based on “poorest of the poor... the birds, the waters, the air, the trees and the mountains Chung Hyun Kyung also claimed that the Holy Spirit resembles the East Asian Goddess of Pity, Kwan In,

who “makes it possible... to reach enlightenment” and reach Nirvana. “Could she not be symbolic of a female Christ,” she asked, “a woman who is first-born among us, who goes before us and takes others with her?”

According to World Council of Churches official, Wesley Ariarajah: Mission work has become unnecessary for “We must not take God somewhere — He is everywhere already.” All claims of uniqueness, he added, are harmful in a world of religious pluralism. (Ecumenical Press Service)

The Archbishop of York, George Austin, described his shock at pornographic literature being sold at the WCC conference with pornographic sketches of “unnatural sex-deeds” displayed to help sell the book. Despite his efforts, Archbishop Austin failed to have the material withdrawn. Several women complained of being molested by delegates and one Canadian delegate claimed to have been raped by a WCC minister at the Assembly.

“They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.” Titus 1:16

Nevertheless, while several Anglicans and Orthodox delegates complained of the “naked blasphemy” and WCC campaign to create “a world religion without Christ”, most of the evangelical observers came back from Canberra with inexplicably favourable reports urging closer ties with the World Council.

“Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.” Revelation 18:4

MISSIONARY NEUTRALITY

At several recent missions conferences I have been shocked to find the red flag of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union prominently displayed. Conspicuously absent was the white, blue and red flag of Russia or the flags of the Baltic republics or Ukraine. To raise the hammer and sickle standard of a political party that has murdered millions of Christians at a missions conference is incredible. To omit the flags of those republics that have been

oppressed by the Soviet Empire is cowardly.

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.” Ephesians 5.11

NEUTRALITY ON THE ISSUE OF PERSECUTION

More believers have died for Christ in the 20th Century than in all the other 19 centuries combined. The World Evangelisation Database has calculated that since AD33 at least 40 725 000 Christians have been martyred. Of those, 26 625 000 were killed for their faith between 1900 and 1990 — most by communist governments. Every day an average of a thousand believers die for Christ worldwide — mostly at the hands of Muslim or Marxist persecutors.

The most disgraceful aspect of recent church history is the neutrality of much of the Western Church during this war against God. It is not just that most Western Christians have been guilty of silence during the decades of vicious persecution in over a third of the world, it is the enthusiastic way many church leaders have publicly supported communist dictators.

Romanian, Polish, Angolan and Mozambique Christians have often complained to me of the treachery of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the World Council of Churches (WCC). “They sympathise with the communist persecutors — not with the persecuted Christians.” “They seek to make collaborators out of the Church.” “They betray the uncompromising believers and collaborate with our persecutors.”

Ecumenical and denominational church conferences regularly refused to speak up against the persecutors of the Church. Evangelists visited the Soviet Union, China, Romania and Mozambique during intense campaigns of persecution and declared that there was no persecution. Then they were wined and dined by the atheist persecutors. Recent research has confirmed that almost without exception, while they shook hands, laughed and exchanged pleasantries with the Marxist rulers, fellow believers were being imprisoned, tortured and killed by their hosts.

“Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.” Psalm 1:1

NEUTRALITY ON THE ISSUE OF ABORTION

Every year in the USA about 1,5 million young lives are ended by abortion. The USSR records over 7 million abortions a year. China and Europe account for even more. Worldwide, this sophisticated child sacrifice of abortion claims 55 million victims — every year. Now there are pressures to legalise this holocaust on the unborn in South Africa.

*“I tell you the truth, as you did it to one of the least of these my bretheren, you did it to me.”
Matthew 25:40*

You would think that all Christians would be in the forefront of the fight for the right to life of the unborn. Yet I have been astounded to find prominent Church leaders “neutral” on the issue of abortion.

One example is a popular evangelical speaker and author, in America, who claims neutrality on the abortion issue. Yet he has a pro-abortion feminist pastor on staff, church buses have been used to transport members to “pro-choice” rallies, and some church funds have been diverted to the radical abortion advocates of “Planned Parenthood”.

*“Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers ?”
Psalm 94:16*

NEUTRALITY IN EDUCATION

The Evangelical Fellowship of South Africa recently sponsored a conference on “Education in the New South Africa”. An EFSA document circulated before the conference advocated a non-Christian, religiously neutral, form of education for South Africa.

Anyone who believes that education can be neutral is mistaken. Ideas have consequences. Actions flow from thought patterns.

Parents are not faced with a choice between sending their children to a religious school or to a non-religious school. All schools are religious. Parents must rather choose which religion will be taught to their children. Will it be Christianity, Islam, Humanism or something else? Will it be the Secular Humanism of American state schools — where prayer is illegal but pornography can be part of the sex education syllabus? Where Evolution is an article of faith, a sacred cow, and scientific evidences for Creation are outlawed. The facts that one in ten violent crimes in the USA now occur in schools, and that each year over 700 000 high school graduates cannot even read their diplomas, have led 6 million Americans to pull their children out of government schools. Secular Humanist education has proven to be the most effective way to produce illiterates, lower moral standards and proliferate venereal diseases.

Will your children receive the revolutionary Humanism of the failed Socialist experiments of Eastern Europe, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Nicaragua and Mozambique? The wrecked economies and wasted potential of these countries and their killing fields and concentration camp gulags hardly serve as recommendations for “scientific” or revolutionary socialism.

Perhaps it will be the “Peoples education” of the ANC/SACP comrades? An education of politicisation, cheap slogans, cliches, parrot cries, “freedom songs”, raised fists and the “toyi toyi” zombie dance. The endless boycotts, strikes, marches, riots, stone-throwing, vandalism and violence has produced a lost generation of 5 million untrained, unemployable thugs, thieves, beggars, rioters terrorists and “political activists”.

Are your children perhaps already receiving some mystical humanism or new age occultism under the guise of education?

The point is that all education is inherently religious because it presents a certain perspective and selection of history, values, practices, and it prescribes a world view.

*“See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”
Colossians 2:8*

BLASPHEMOUS NEUTRALITY

When the Hollywood film, “Jesus Christ Superstar”, was first released in the mid-1970’s it was

banned in South Africa. However, in 1983 a group of (SACC-affiliated ministers saw the film at a special showing, and urged that it be released. Many Christians were astounded that religious ministers could endorse a film that portrayed Christ as a hippie, involved with Mary Magdalene, and with a denial of the resurrection.

Like the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the American National Council of Churches (NCC) considers itself neutral on pornography and blasphemy. However, the NCC has gone even further and has spent much of its time and church funds promoting abortion (especially through its Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights — RCAR) and even the blasphemous “Last Temptation of Christ”, which, in pornographic scenes, portrayed Christ as a coward and an adulterer.

“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world yet loses his own soul?” Matthew 16:25

PORNOGRAPHIC NEUTRALITY

Every day Christians shop in “family stores” that promote pornography. Apparently neutral on this destructive trade, Christians push their trollies past magazine racks displaying morally offensive publications. That “family stores” should market anti-family “adult” magazines or videos is inexcusable. That Christian parents should silently support stores that sell sex is inconsistent with our calling to be the salt of the earth and light to this world (Matthew 5:13).

The recent proliferation of immoral magazines and videos has been accompanied by an inevitable escalation of crime, rape, murder and child abuse throughout the west. The increase in “massage parlours” and “escort agencies” has similarly encouraged a multiplying of prostitution. Pornography and prostitution are two sides of the same coin. All pornography is hostile to morality and law. It is anti-family and advocates adultery. Pornography is the theory — rape is the practise. No society can afford the lawlessness, rape and child abuse, which are the result of tolerating pornography.

Nobody can justify pumping raw sewage into a public street or swimming area. Neither is the moral sewage being pumped into our minds through videos and magazines justifiable.

Environmentalists are concerned about the pollution of our environment. Christians should also be concerned about the pollution of our social, mental and emotional environment.

Doctors are concerned to halt the spread of infections and disease. Surely we should also seek to limit the spread of moral disease?

Firemen seek to protect lives and property from fire. So too Christians need to starve the fires of pornography by depriving it of fuel (availability) and oxygen (advertising) and extinguish the destructive flames of lust.

Policemen seek to protect the law-abiding from the law-breakers. We all condemn rape and child abuse. Should we not work to protect women and children by freeing our society of those exploitative publications that help to form and fuel the thought patterns that can lead to such crimes?

Accordingly, pro-family, moral groups in the U.S.A. brought such economic pressure to bear that 26 000 family stores which used to stock “adult” magazines resolved never to stock such offensive publications again.

Large chains such as K-Mart and Eckerd now refuse to stock any “adult” magazines. There are moves afoot to ensure that all family stores in South Africa be similarly cleaned up.

The Bible teaches us that we are our brother’s keeper. Christians need to use their free market choices to influence economics — by avoiding shops that peddle porn and by supporting pro-family stores that are not only concerned with profits but also principles.

“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him.”

Luke 17:1-3

NEUTRALITY IS NOT AN OPTION

When the exiled people of Israel were facing a time of great crisis and danger, Mordecai reminded Queen ESTHER that she dare not choose to be neutral:

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” Esther 4.13-14

Our God is sovereign over the affairs of men. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. His ultimate victory is certain. We can choose to be part of his victorious army or perish in disobedience.

Our Lord made it clear through the parable of THE GOOD SAMARITAN that neutrality is not an option. You cannot pass by an accident victim who is bleeding by the roadside and claim neutrality. Even if we decide to neither pass by on the other side nor to make an effort to help, we cannot pretend to be neutral. Standing by while a person bleeds to death is not neutrality. Our very inactivity can cause harm (Luke 10:25-37).

The Biblical doctrines of THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD and the SINFULNESS (or fallen nature) OF MAN prove that neutrality is not an option. Jesus is Lord over all areas of life. In a fallen world there can be no neutrality between the will of man and the Word of God. In our Lord’s letters to the seven churches of Revelation this point is emphasised time and again.

Our Lord commends the Christians at EPHESUS because:

“You cannot tolerate wicked men, ... you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are

not, and have found them to be false ... You have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.” Rev. 2:2-6

The Nicolaitans taught that you could sin in the body yet remain pure in the spirit.

The Church at PERGAMUM is rebuked by the Lord:

“I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.” Revelation 2:14-16

To the Church in THYATIRA the Lord declared:

“I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent.. I will cast her on a bed of suffering and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.” Revelation 2:20-22

The key message in these letters is a demand for loyalty and obedience. Compromise and tolerance of evil is condemned. Any possibility of neutrality is ruled out by the Lord.

Those who seek to be neutral in the battles of life inevitably degenerate to the level of the lukewarm LAODICEANS whom the Lord rebuked:

“I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were either one or the other! So because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.” Revelation 3:15-19

It is time for us to ask some serious questions:

What issue am I trying to be neutral on?
What battlefield is God calling me to enter?
What stand is God calling me to take?

“Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33

Peter Hammond