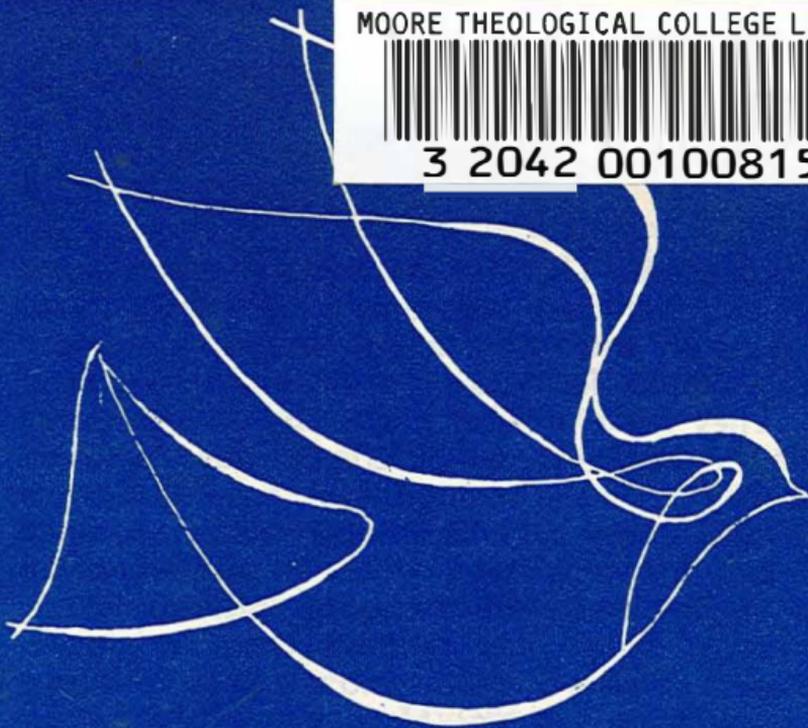


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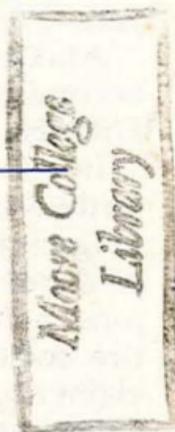
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Back to God Hour

**THE
CHRISTIAN
CLASS**

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DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES
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ZP683

THE CHRISTIAN CLASS

Our commonwealth is in heaven. . . .

Philippians 3:20

Let's be frank: There are some people who make a difference, and there are some people who don't. And there are more who don't, than do, I'm afraid.

For example, let's take the working class, as a class. They make a difference at the voting booth, but do they really make a difference otherwise? And when they go to the voting booth, one has the impression that they have been worked over, manipulated, and that what they do there is caused by other kinds of people who have tried to influence them. How many blue collar workers write articles in newspapers or have something to say about the way the news comes to us? How many blue collar workers are called in when the government needs some advice?

But take lawyers—they are influential; they make a big difference. At least it seems that way, doesn't it? Compared to workers, they shape our community and our nation a great deal. When the government needs advice it generally leans heavily on the lawyers. We may not like this, but this is the way it is.

And now we are told, there is a new class that is becoming most influential of all. It's called *The New Elite*. Have you been introduced?

In America, the new elite have recently been described in an issue of *U.S. News & World Report* magazine. They are described as a "huge community of America's educated that is now influencing opinions, policies, pleasures and the way of life for an entire society." This is becoming what some people claim is virtually a new class within Western society, a new class which we must expect will shape our lives more and more in the years ahead. These college- and university-educated young people are artists, architects, and zoo directors; and they work in "government, the media, business, foundations, think tanks, public-interest groups, labor unions" and various other places which are havens for educated talent. There are many who feel that when it comes

to making a difference, this elite class makes more difference than any other.

When we examine this new class, there are several things about them which might cause some of us to feel uneasy. For one thing, the members of this class do not seem disposed to examine the basic issues of their society and come to grips with them. The article which describes them points out that they often exhibit a strange mixture of abstract idealism and zealous self-fulfillment. They are often very cynical about the political process, and they frequently retreat from many of the great issues that must still be faced among us in favor of establishing for themselves circumstances in which they can enjoy the arts and literature—and whatever else they feel is worthy of their attention. Dr. Barrie S. Greiff, a psychiatrist at the Harvard Graduate School of Business, calls members of the new elite to examine some of the fundamental questions that face their culture—he calls their attention to the diminishing levels of productivity and the failure of people to work together to achieve common goals. But they seem uninterested in such matters.

I find this description of the so-called new elite fascinating, not only because the members of this select class of people are interesting in themselves, but especially because they apparently are going to have a direct impact on so many of our lives. Because what they do affects us, I have a more than passing interest in the way they feel about the issues that face us all, the way they feel about themselves, and about the way they intend to change my life. For evidently they do want to change my life. They are the class that makes a great deal of difference.

The new elite is a class which to a large extent has been formed by modern higher education, and that in itself creates some misgivings. For modern higher education, unfortunately, has generally been oriented to world views that I personally find unsatisfactory; they are world views which are manifestly false. I realize that my very saying this would cause some to question my judgment, to say nothing of my sanity, and the fact that such questioning arises is dramatic proof of the pervasive power of modern

secularized education. Nevertheless, there are some of us who do not believe that the evolutionary hypothesis can qualify as the foundation upon which to build our educational system. This hypothesis, however, is the mainstay of modern education, and the new elite is a class of people who, for the most part, accept the evolutionary world view without reservation.

And what disturbs some of us the most is that the new elite seem to have been given their influential role in our world with little opposition—in fact, there sometimes seems to be nothing that is able to provide genuine alternatives to their “abstract idealism” and emphasis on self-fulfillment. And with this, the thought has come to me whether or not the Christian community should begin to think of itself as a class of people, too, which has its own viewpoints and convictions and ideals, and which is zealously dedicated to the promotion of these within our community.

When I examine some of the ideas found in the Bible in the light of concerns like these, it seems to me there is ample reason for Christian people to think of themselves as being united by certain common convictions and ideals that make them a class by themselves. And if the new elite has influence, the Christian class should begin earnestly to examine ways to bring to bear upon our times the influence it could and should rightly have.

Just to give an example of an area of our common life together which Christians have their own ideas about and which will be very crucial in the years ahead, let me mention the whole matter of society's view of human life. Over the last years we have seen a virtual revolution in the way society has viewed the life of the unborn. The whole matter of birth control has been modified since abortion has become, contrary to all expectations, one of the primary methods of birth control. And what has happened in connection with this is only part of the great changes we can expect in many areas that deal with the role man will have in determining the duration and the nature of human life. We are moving into an era in which genetic engineering will become more and more of an

option. Recently we have learned of selective breeding of the human stock as women have been impregnated by sperm taken from a bank supplied by Nobel prize winners. This is just a hint of what we can expect in the future. And the question is: Will the great questions regarding these matters simply be decided by people such as the new elite, or will the viewpoints of the Christian community be heard and possibly even evaluated positively in terms of the great contribution they can bring to the thinking surrounding these kinds of things?

It seems to me, as I think about the reality of Jesus Christ's resurrection and the impact it must make on those who believe it actually occurred, that a strong case can be made for the fact that Christian people are a different class of people who must think of themselves as such and who must work for change in their society, change which moves in the direction of justice and righteousness. If the new elite is characterized by abstract idealism, the Christian class should be characterized by specific idealism—an idealism that is rooted in the Bible and that expresses the biblical description of who we are and of what our relationship to one another should be. And if the new elite is characterized by an earnest pursuit of self-fulfillment, the Christian class should be characterized by selfless giving, as its members resolutely take up their cross and follow Christ. Obviously, these two classes of people couldn't be more different from each other.

There is an interesting and instructive sentence in the third chapter of the book of Philippians in the New Testament that supports the idea of a Christian class existing in our society by way of contrast to the prevailing classes that make it up. Read some of this so that you can get the flavor of the New Testament at this point, and then I will show you how I feel this relates to what we have been talking about.

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and they

glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (vv. 17-21).

Now those brief sentences contain a strong contrast between those with "minds set on earthly things" and those who believe in the resurrected Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus are described as having a commonwealth in heaven, and that is worth examining in the light of what we have been talking about. The word *commonwealth* is a political word actually—there are other translations of the Bible, for example the New International Version, which render the original word here as *citizenship*. For our purposes that is perhaps the best word, *citizenship*; our citizenship is in heaven. This idea is worth examining more closely.

At first blush, it might seem as if the reminder to Christians that their citizenship is in heaven would tend to draw their attention away from what is going on in this world. If their citizenship is in heaven, they should not be concerned with the affairs of this world such as the kinds of things we were talking about earlier (the important developments in the coming years related to the way we evaluate life). But that is not the case when we view the biblical reminder that our citizenship is in heaven in the light of the total biblical teaching. Here in the book of Philippians there is simply no hint that we must adopt an attitude of disinterest in this world because our citizenship is in heaven. In fact the entire book of Philippians is an earnest call to strenuous, diligent, meaningful Christian performance.

When the Bible says the citizenship of Christian people is in heaven, it does so not in order to encourage Christians to forget about the world, but in order to remind them that while living in this world, they must remember that they are to receive their orders from elsewhere, from heaven itself. We see this approach, as well, in the book of Colossians, which also reminds Christians that they must live in

this world in the light of what they know about heaven. We read this from Colossians 3:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (vv. 1-4).

Now, if you noticed carefully what Colossians says there, you noticed, I suppose, that the line of reasoning is parallel with what you read in Philippians—Christians are told to remember that they have a heavenly orientation (their citizenship is in heaven), and they are pointed toward the return of Jesus, when they will be like Him. Also, when you read Colossians you discover, just as you do in Philippians, that the emphasis ensuing from this reminder is that those who follow Christ must earnestly live *today* in His service. They may not simply adopt the ways of living and the ways of viewing life that prevail in the world; they must take their orders from heaven itself and be molded by them. Thus we find in Colossians a lengthy review of the way Christian people should live, a review that talks about the bedroom, the kitchen, and the place of business. When a person is a citizen of heaven, a certain kind of behavior, expressed in every area of life, results. Because of ideas like these it seems to me that we should be willing to talk about a *Christian class*—a class of people living in our society who are citizens of heaven, who have been raised together with Christ, and who seek the things that are above. They should be distinctive. Their ideas should be different from others. And they should strive to express a Christian life-style in everything they do.

Can we expect such people to be influential in their society? Why not? There is so much about the Christian way of life that is extremely attractive today; more attractive, I might say, than an abstract idealism and a way of life that is basically rooted in selfish considerations. For example, the Christian point of view has very important contributions to

make when we talk about the way a society handles human life. The Bible is full of ideas that enable us to think usefully about ourselves, about the kind of people we are, and about the way we should view each other. I think, for example, of the declaration found in the Bible that man is the image bearer of God and that all human life is sacred. Surely this has bearing on the way we deal with human life on both ends of the spectrum, from the life of the unborn to the life of the aged. And the Bible has important things to say about the family and about parental responsibilities.

The whole area of the home and the family is in a state of continuing crisis, and one of the reasons is that parents have lost their way, have lost their moorings, and have no convictions. Robert Coles, an eminent child psychiatrist, has recently deplored the fact that many parents seem to be entirely at sea when it comes to raising their children. He writes:

Parents spend all their time trying to find out whether a child should be treated this way or that, but there is no effort to look around and say: "Hey, what do we really believe in? What do we want this child to believe in?"

And the reason for this, according to Dr. Coles, is that parents really don't have any beliefs themselves. Describing modern parents, Dr. Coles says, "Having turned away from both God and country, they are left with themselves—their own comforts."

Surely those who understand that their citizenship is in heaven have entirely different viewpoints regarding the way children should be raised. They are people who are able to help their children develop a wholesome and useful system of beliefs, for they have strong beliefs themselves. Thus they can give their children something priceless. They can provide a family setting that contrasts markedly to the family setting Coles describes when he asks: "How many children are asked in a family setting such questions as: 'What is the meaning of life?' Instead, we're too busy trying to 'adjust' and figure out what we can get today and tomorrow."

So then, if there is a new class that is making a great difference these days, a class that consists

generally of people who have been educated in the great schools of our era and have some kind of fuzzy idealistic ideas about themselves and about society but who are primarily interested in fulfilling their own satisfactions—if that is so, those who claim to follow Christ should recognize that they are in a class by themselves and that they have the responsibility to be vocal about their convictions, for they have something great to give to our time. Those who are members of *The Christian Class* and who know that Jesus lives and that He is coming again and that someday they will be like Him should be courageous. They should not be satisfied to create a little corner of safety for themselves within their world, hoping against hope that no one will bother them. Why should they be afraid?

When the Bible reminds Christians of the fact that they are citizens of heaven, it does so with language that calls them to courage. In the material we read from Philippians, the Bible says that we are citizens of heaven "from [which] we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself." Notice that carefully.

With these words the Bible reminds Christians that they believe in Jesus and that they believe Jesus will give them a glorified body someday. If you are a Christian, you believe it, too, don't you? Now, if you believe that, you must also realize that to accomplish this a tremendous miracle will be necessary. For how in the world would you expect this to happen when you will be destroyed by decay when you die? If I were to press you for an answer, what would you say? Well, if you are like other Christians you would probably say, "I know it seems impossible, but I believe that Jesus has the power to do this. After all, He has all power in heaven and earth—that's what He said Himself." And if you answered that way you would be one hundred percent correct. That's exactly the reason Christians can expect that they will be given a glorified body. Exactly. And here in Philippians we are told that if we believe Jesus has the power to do that, we must remember as well that He

is going to use this very same power to subject everything to Himself. *Everything*.

What the Bible is saying here is that ultimately it is the cause of Christ that is going to prevail. Every cause opposed to Him will finally be overcome. And so there is no reason for the Christian class to be timid or afraid. The truth of God needs to be announced, and activities that cause unrighteousness and dehumanization of humankind must be denounced. There is no reason to hide the great insights regarding man and his destiny which we find in the Bible. There is no reason to be afraid.

If people who are not able to express their own ideals in specific terms and who are basically interested in nothing more than their own self-gratification, if such people are not afraid to press their ideas on the rest of society, surely those who follow Christ should not be afraid to press their ideas. And if some, on reading this, protest that if followers of Christ were to do this, they would thereby be attempting to force their religious ideas on others, I would simply reply that the new elite is a class of people with a religious position, too, and their view of themselves and their goals for society are rooted in a religious position. If we think that we are going to be able to remove all religious ideas from our common life together, we simply do not understand the nature of religion. All views of man and of society and of the goals that we should set for ourselves are rooted in views that are essentially religious. A free society is not a society in which religious ideas are kept under wraps while other so-called non-religious views are given free play, but it is a society in which the reality of religion is freely recognized and in which all ideas are given free play, all are given equal opportunity to compete.

Today there are great issues that relate to such things as genetic engineering, that relate to education, that relate to law, that relate to the use of available energy—great issues that may not and should not be decided on the basis of the ideas that reside within the minds of those who are now apparently the new elite; in any case, certainly not on the basis of these ideas alone. There is a Christian

world view that is not being given the proper consideration, and this must be brought into the discussion as well. But the only people who will bring it there are those who believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and that He will ultimately establish His authority over everything. Those who know they are citizens first of all of heaven are the people who must serve their community and their nation with ideas that come from the biblical view of man and his world.

If you are not a member of the Christian class, I earnestly invite you to join it. People become a part of this class when they confess their sins and make Jesus the center of their lives—they believe that when He died, He died to save them. They are people who make the Word of God, the Bible that He gave them, the center of their lives; their thought is formed by this book—its ideas become their ideas. People like this have something very important to contribute to the strange times we are living in today.

And if you are already a member of this class of people, I plead with you to be courageous and to follow Christ boldly. Our day needs the witness of Christian people now more than ever before. I say that because the old Christian world view that used to be somewhat influential is rapidly being swept under the rug and forgotten. Jesus is the person with all the power, and ultimately He will bring all things under His rule. Those of us who say we believe in Him should not be afraid to press our views; God could well use us to bring a great reversal, opposing the direction that now seems to be sweeping us all toward destruction.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we thank you for the clear revelation of the great victory which Jesus Christ has secured for Himself and for all those who believe in Him. Use the knowledge we have been given of His ultimate victory to make us courageous and bold in His great cause. Especially today, when there are those who are trying to remake our society in ways that dishonor you, enable those who claim to be Christian to stand up for the truth you have revealed.

Help your people to formulate meaningful and impressive positions with respect to the great issues that confront us now. May they understand that they are a special people who may not surrender to the God-dishonoring and man-disfiguring world view that seems to be so prevalent.

Forgive us, Lord, for sometimes forgetting the great responsibilities we have, and use us whom you have renewed to bring renewal to our land.

In Christ, Amen.

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The message printed in this pamphlet was heard over the Back to God Hour, which is broadcast every Sunday in co-operation with the Christian Reformed Churches of America, in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, and by shortwave throughout the world.

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