

All too often modern Christians portray Jesus Christ as a meek, harmless friend of the world. But that is not the picture found in the Gospels or the book of Revelation. Far from being passive or meek, Jesus Christ was both controversial and dogmatic.

Jesus Christ was not 'broadminded' nor did he regard multicultural beliefs as being of equal value. He was not prepared to accept as valid all views on every subject. Nor was Jesus Christ politically correct. He was not afraid to dissent from official or popular doctrines that He knew were wrong.

Jesus Christ was on the offensive, with a message that offended those around Him so much that they killed Him. Christ told His disciples that if they followed His example, they could likewise expect rejection and persecution. Unfortunately, many contemporary Christians don't understand that standing up for what is true means rejecting what is false. Rather, he reasoned in the synagogue, disputed with the philosophers, and calmly addressed a meeting of the Areopagus. In other words, Paul was able to argue effectively because he spoke the truth and also because he knew the minds of the listeners. He even quoted their own poets to them. Some of the Athenians ridiculed Paul, but others found his message challenging and asked him to speak again. If Paul had tried to indoctrinate his audience and force them to listen to him, they probably would not have given him a hearing at all.

Christians, if they practice their faith consistently, should not be afraid to challenge the modern secularistic culture. The present "air raid shelter" mentality embraced falsehood as truth, but they have also of many Christians will not alter the course of failed to realise the impact of that choice, society. Likewise, timidity will not bring about change. As C. S. Lewis writes in "God in the Dock":

namely the emergence of secularism.

If Christians intend to resist this, we must be willing to be the Christians that Jesus Christ told us to be. What does this mean?

Being Controversial

First, it means that you must be controversial. You must understand that controversy flows from the collision of truth with falsehood. Professor Glenn Tinder notes that "Christian ideas place one in a radical that is, critical and adverse – relationship to established institutions." He writes:

"The Kingdom of God is a judgment on existing society; and a symbol of its impermanence' Jesus was crucified because his presence and preaching were profoundly unsettling to reigning religious and political groups. Jesus did not seek the violent overthrow of these groups but neither did he show much concern for their stability."

Controversy however, should not result from the manner in which truth is presented, rather from the truth itself. In other words, in a confrontational situation, controversy should be the result of the message, not the messenger. For example, when the Apostle Paul was in Athens, he was distressed by the idolatry he saw. However, he did not rant and rave or harangue the Athenians about their pagan re

"As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith. We give in too much We must show our Christian colours if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent and concede everything away."

The battle cry of faithful Christians should be that Jesus Christ is Lord of all things in Heaven and on earth. He is not simply Lord of Heaven above and impotent on the earth. He is Lord of the entire cosmos. The misinterpretation of Jesus Christ's words in John 18:36 3/4 that His kingdom is not of this world 3/4 should finally be given the burial it deserves. In this verse, Jesus Christ was asserting to Pilate that His "source" of authority, human sovereignty, and Lordship was not earthly, but heavenly. This misinterpretation fails to acknowledge the reality of Jesus Christ's authority over all things.

Too many Christians believe that they can retreat (note that Christian seminars are often called retreats) into a zone of social and political impotence and, therefore, social and political irresponsibility. Just as they have done for over a century).

As a whole, modern evangelism, at least in the Western world, has had little effect on contemporary cultures because of its pietism.

As a consequence, the enemy is at the gates. Humanism is at the end of the road spiritually, and nothing is left to hold society together except brute force.

There are no safety zones in the combat of faith. The only way to be effective is to consistently apply Christianity to culture in all its aspects. As underground evangelist Brother Andrew has written:

"The first principle for any Christian work is this: the Lord Jesus Christ, who crushed Satan and conquered death, commands us to invade this enemy occupied world and reclaim it for God. We march under his exclusive authority and are forbidden to make any deals with the foe. No compromises. No concessions. And no excuses!"

A Comprehensive Message

Second, your Christian message must be comprehensive; it should speak to all of life, not just to theological or so-called religious concerns. The comprehensive nature of the truth expressed by the Apostles, especially Paul, must be restored if Christians are to be effective in preaching the Gospel.

Many people compartmentalise their faith because they simply don't understand how it should affect all parts of their lives. The church has contributed to this compartmentalised mentality by failing to give its people a Christian worldview.

Christianity today, on both a personal and institutional level, has put God in a box and delegated religious activity to just a few hours on Sunday morning. As a result, Christians are intellectually paralysed. They are unable to think critically about the world around them or to use the Bible to make sense of it. The Bible seems irrelevant, a book of stories with characters that have little more relation to us than Mr. Roger's "make-believe" world.

Instead of providing a real alternative to the secular public education system, many seminaries and "Christian" colleges have become soft in their teaching. Christian schools today often mirror the secular schools of ten years ago. They parade the same ideas as the secular schools, except they are always a little behind. These institutions are often places

Christian thought such as radical feminism, Darwinism or Naturalistic Humanism are purported as great truths and incorporated into Christian theology. The relaxed standards of many Christian schools do not adequately prepare young Christians to think critically and engage the culture. Christian seminaries and Bible colleges must become institutions that equip Christians for the intellectual combat necessary to confront the world with truth.

Outside of their institutions, Christians have a massive educational task facing them. Education in contemporary society, however, must come in many forms: writing, speaking, protesting, picketing, defending, and even suing in court.

However the comprehensiveness of the Christian message will not be understood by non-Christians until Christians understand it themselves. Thinking Christians often find a one-dimensional view of spiritual reality, the idea that the church building was the center of the religious experience and Christian duty. There is, of course, a sense in which this is true, but it seemed that the local church should not hoard the truth within four walls. Are we as believers just to attend church services? Or is there something more?

It is true that Christianity is essentially internal. Christianity is internal because the Holy Spirit inhabits the believer. However, this spiritual power is for an external purpose: to create a moral

and faithful life that people can see and experience, just as they experience Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ said that believers are to love God with their entire being. Such love is not the unctuous, emotional product that many modern evangelicals associate with what they call love. Rather, it is obedience and a direct act of the will. "If you love me", Jesus Christ says, "you will keep My commandments." Hence, Christian love is both internal and external; it is living according to the principles of the Bible.

Believers are also to love their neighbours as they love themselves. It cannot be denied that self-love permeates all of society, ranging from the athlete who exalts in the skill that has brought him victory to the institutions and monuments that Christians build and name after themselves. Jesus Christ drew on this self-love and commanded the believer to treat others with equal amounts of love, care, and compassion. The term "neighbour" includes homosexuals, women who have had abortions, the homeless, AIDS victims, and so on.

A Christian experience that is only internal stands against human experience and reason. It also stands against the authority of the Bible. A purely internal experience would be tantamount to putting one's light under a basket. In the biblically externalised experience, true Christian belief shines out like a beacon.

Why hasn't this happened? Why aren't Christians salt and light? Christians can't preserve what they don't have, and, sadly, when it comes to ethics, many Christians are as lost as the rest of society. In fact, instead of leading society out of its problems Christians are following it down a moral abyss. From the grassroots Christian to the well known "star" televangelist, many modern Christians seem to have an immense difficulty telling the truth or living by any moral code, let alone the standards set for believers by Jesus Christ.

Third, Christians must engage in what I call "cautious radicalism" and, if necessary, civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is a very serious and frightening matter. This is even more true today because technology has globalised the impact of civil disobedience and, as a result, attracted diverse groups to its possibilities.

This includes some who may be mentally or ideologically imbalanced. Any concept or proposed action can, and most likely will, be extended to its illogical extreme by someone. Even movements that have advocated pacifist acts of civil disobedience have found themselves sometimes embroiled in violence. In a fallen world, this is to be expected. It must be remembered that civil disobedience has been an important part of Australia's heritage. Civil disobedience has been practiced by Vietnam War protesters, and anti-abortion clinic protest groups. Indeed, civil disobedience has provided a means for significant changes in the law and policies of Australia with no need to resort to armed rebellion or anarchy. Civil disobedience and resistance to the state are subjects about which there is wide disagreement even within the Christian community. However, civil disobedience has a long tradition in Judeo-Christian history and is sanctioned as a form of protest against certain governmental acts. Christians have accepted, and sometimes actively supported, slavery, poverty, and almost every other common social evil.

Often the Christians who did oppose such evils merely whispered their objections privately rather than shouting them publicly. Christianity compels the believer to act on its truths. Sometimes that means facing failure. As the late Francis Schaeffer writes:

"The early Christians died because they would not obey the state in a civil matter. People often say to us that the early church did not show any civil disobedience. They do not know church history. Why were the Christians in the Roman Empire thrown to the lions? From a Christian's viewpoint it was for a religious reason, but did not care what anybody believed religiously; you could believe anything, or you could be an atheist. But you had to worship Caesar as a sign of your loyalty to the state. The Christians said they would not worship Caesar, anybody, or

anything, but the living God. Thus to the Roman Empire they were rebels, and it was civil disobedience. That is why they were thrown to the lions."

The Bible provides clear guidelines for resistance to illegitimate acts of the state. A basic text for such resistance is the thirteenth chapter of Romans. It is interesting that this chapter is often cited by those who claim the state has the authority to mandate anything and that Christians must blindly comply. This argument can be advanced only if Romans 13 is misunderstood. In Romans 13, the Bible instructs that the state (or state official) is a "minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The Greek noun for the word minister in Romans 13 is diakonos which means a servant, attendant, or deacon. Diakonos is used by Christ when He states, "whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister" or servant. It is used by Paul to refer to "a good minister of Jesus Christ."

In Romans 13, Paul again uses the term minister to describe a state official. The Greek word used in this verse, however is leitourgous, which describes the earthly rulers who, though they may not consciously act as servants of God, discharge functions that are the ordinance of the Creator.

These particular Greek words are used in the Bible for a specific reason: to indicate that legitimate state officials or civil rulers are to be servants under God, not lords or sovereigns. As the Bible says: "For there is no power but of God." When the civil authorities divorce themselves from any responsibility to the Creator, they often become self-styled lords, lawless and predatory toward the citizens under their control. In St. Augustine of Hippo's opinion, such civil rulers are no more than bands of robbers.

In Chapter 13 of Romans, the Apostle Paul describes the authority and limits of civil government. The Creator has appointed civil magistrates to perform a twofold function that reflects the general purpose of the state. First, the state must protect and promote, not destroy or subvert, the good of society. Second, the civil government must deter crime and punish those who foster evil in society.

Paul states very clearly in Romans 13:1 that all government is ordained and established by the Creator.. The Bible states that parents, pastors, civil authorities, employers, and others have received their authority to govern from Law (as based upon Judeo-Christian principles). If so, cruelty to people is most often the result.

Paul makes it clear that the state is to create an atmosphere where knowledge and truth prevail. If the state commands or permits actions contrary to the Judeo-Christian principles of justice and the sanctity of human life, then, as Francis Schaeffer noted: "there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state."

Some seek to justify their failure to stand against illegitimate state acts by asserting that Christ and the Apostles were pacifists. This is not true. The question of pacifism did not arise, but Christ was certainly not silent on matters of government. Jesus felt free to criticize not only the Jewish civil leaders, but also the Roman-appointed ruler Herod Antipas.

Also, Christ overturned tables and whipped the money-changers from the Temple. Christ is ultimately portrayed in the book of Revelation as exercising vengeance on the secular state. It must not be forgotten that the majority of Paul's epistles in the New Testament were written from jail cells. Paul was not considered a model citizen; rather he was in jail because he was considered a perpetrator of civil disobedience.

But there is no chance of resisting the enemy successfully unless Christians manifest Christian love. Without this element, even the most vibrant faith, the most fearless posture, the most brilliant apologetic, and the most selfless service are incomplete.

Grounding It All in Love

When a lawyer asked Him which was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus Christ replied that it was to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus Christ also said:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Christian love requires an “otherness,” a focus away from oneself, a total respect for others as a way of reflecting Jesus Christ. This is the kind of expression and action that draws people toward the truth. It concerns what we may call “humanness.” Indeed, a primary task for this generation of believers is keeping humanness in the human race, that is, to upgrade and then maintain the high and esteemed place of people in the universe.

All people bear the image of God and have value, not simply because they happen to be believers, but because they are God’s creation culture further degrades and depersonalises, people; or if it is perceived that the “quality” of life is insufficient (according to society’s standards), they are, for example, killed – in the case of unborn babies – or – in the case of the aged or chronically ill-urged to die.

The Christian believer, however, should know the value of people as God’s creation and act on that knowledge. All people are our “neighbours”. We are to love them as ourselves, even if they are not believers, and even if the cost of such love is great.

Several years ago an ardent pro-life activist said that it would be biblical to bomb an abortion clinic, even if there was a pregnant woman inside who was seeking or having an abortion. This pro-lifer said that the pregnant woman could not be a Christian because she was seeking an abortion. She determined that it was biblical to dispose of her along with the abortuary.. This type of thinking must be absolutely rejected by Christians. Compassion is an important aspect of love. True compassion must start with assisting those who need help the most. For example, why aren’t more believers on the front line assisting the homeless? Why aren’t more believers working with AIDS victims? Why aren’t more believers visiting nursing homes? Why aren’t more Christians battling for the rights and lives of the unborn infirm, and aged? Christians should know that helping with physical needs is a condition precedent to meeting spiritual needs. Indeed, the Apostle Paul admonishes: “Now we who are strong ought to bear the weakness of those without strength and not just to please ourselves.”

However, true compassion often has an emotional companion: outrage. Outrage is a legitimate reaction for believers who see inhumanity. Unfortunately, the lack of outrage is a striking characteristic of modern Christianity which allows some of the most heinous crimes in history – terrorism, abortion, genocide, and oppression – to be committed before its very eyes. John the Baptist spoke out against corruption in the court of Herod, and his actions cost him his life. Believers can expect the same, or even more, tortured treatment since modern technology provides persecutors with a variety of new and terrifying alternatives. And believers in foreign lands might find persecution heightened by nationalistic prejudice or the hostility of non-Christian religions.

Western Christians have it easy. They do not compare well with the first Christians, nor with those solitary souls throughout the world who are persecuted simply because they are believers who will not be silenced. Unfortunately, Christians will often tell you that they would not fight for their freedom to speak the truth. Jesus Christ foretold that the true believer would be hated. And He specifically noted that suffering and persecution would follow. Christ said: “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Practicing true Christianity and living consistently as a believer is a difficult task, which at times seems impossible. The believer is told to run the race of life “in such a way that you may win,”

but failure is a definite possibility. In fact, we air fail This is the human dilemma; this is reality. However, success is just as likely.

Who would have thought that a rag tag band of Jewish radicals from an obscure Roman colony could have changed the course of history? And yet, that is precisely what happened. Today, Martin Luther would be considered an upstart, and the University of Wittenberg would be shrugged off as an insignificant junior facility, only fifteen years old, whose professors were mostly in their twenties.

But truth is what Christianity has to offer. Curiously it is sometimes the non-Christian who understands this. For example, the French existentialist Albert Carmus claimed to believe in nothing and to consider everything absurd. But he was an honest thinker and perhaps because of this honesty, along with his absence of belief, Camus was able to see the needs of the age in a way matched by few of his peers. He wrote:

“The world expects of Christians that they will raise their voices so loudly and clearly and so formulate their protest that not even the simplest man can have the slightest doubt about what they are saying. Further, the world expects of Christians that they will eschew all fuzzy abstractions and plant themselves squarely in front of the bloody fact of history. We stand in need of folk who have determined to speak directly and unmistakably and come what may, to stand by what they have said.”

Notice that there is no doubt in the mind of Camus that Christianity is inherently opposed to the spirit of the age, what he calls the “bloody face of history.” By his standard, the posture of non-involvement in the world is fatal. Camus expected Christians to spurn abstractions and hold clear, well-defined beliefs. They must not only raise their voices, but do so loudly, and in such a way that there is no doubt as to what is being said. That done, Camus says, they must stand by what they have said. One could hardly put it any better.

Adapted from Engaging the Culture by Dr John W Whitehead – President, The Rutherford Institute, an international religious liberties body.