

NEO-CALVINISM: NOT CONSERVATISM

Written by Calvin Fox

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Conservative Republicans, and especially Tea Party members, rail against Big Government and continually are heard to say they want less government in their lives and affairs. The Bible is very clear that God instituted civil government as such and that it exists to serve Him. Civil Government is essentially good. The problem is not the size of civil Government. The problem is that God has limited the function of Government and those limits have been breached. Christians need to learn about "Sphere Sovereignty". It provides a Biblical basis for Social or Public Policy and should be the basis of our attitude toward Civil Government.

This Biblical Social Policy begins with the Sovereignty of God- that He is Lord of all and that as such His Word provides the Norms by which He expects all to live or function. Every sector or sphere of life is meant to be lived *coram Deo*, Latin- "before the face of God"- living all of life accountable to God.

Beginning from the creation account in Genesis, we learn Human life is divided into 4 sectors or "Spheres". There are three basic "Spheres" and a fourth is derived from them. They are Marriage, Family (which includes Education), Church and Civil Government. The fourth Sphere is Civic Community which includes Commerce and Culture. They all exist to enable Humanity to obey the God-given Mandate to be stewards of the Earth for God's Glory.

Each of these four Spheres has specific functions and limits, as well operational Norms. . Each Sphere has its own inner working or system, with members fulfilling various functions or roles. The forms they each take in practice and the actual members of each Sphere at any specific time and place may vary according to circumstances.

Because God is sovereign, none of the Spheres can be. All are limited. Each Sector has its own authority or what is called "sphere sovereignty" in relation to the other Spheres, but none of them are absolute or autonomous. They must cooperate with each other but must not interfere with the other's responsibilities. The emphasis is on local. The more local the better. The emphasis is also on voluntary cooperation between Spheres in the Community and between Communities. The more of that the better.

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Respect for Sphere Sovereignty especially applies to Civil Government. This is obviously the area of greatest contention and controversy. Civil Government is to respect and not usurp or curtail the responsibilities of the other Spheres, i.e.- Marriage, Family, which includes Education; Church and Civic Community, which includes Commerce and Culture.

For example, this Doctrine of Sphere Sovereignty gives the responsibility for welfare and the care of the sick, the widowed and orphaned, the unemployed and the homeless to the Family and Church and to the local civic Community. The State has no business to interfere with or usurp these God-given responsibilities nor to take money (taxes) from citizens for programs that do. Therefore, Biblical Christians oppose the concept and many programs of what is commonly known as the "Welfare State" and why they oppose the popular entitlement mentality.

The various Associations in a Community are not to forgo their independence and look to the civil government for support. These groups, whether for business or the arts, are extensions of the Family and Church. The State has no right to interfere with them in any way. In practice, this Doctrine leads to a rejection of many "tax breaks", as well as much government funding and most subsidies and grants. In our Society, it means advocating for privatization (or at least, the localization) of just about everything. The emphasis is on local. The more local the better. The emphasis is also on voluntary cooperation between Spheres in the Community and between Communities. The more of that the better.

The only legitimate, God-given function for Civil Government is Justice, i.e.- the enactment of Law (laws in harmony with the principles of Biblical Law), Law enforcement, Courts and a legal system guaranteeing due process- all to maintain peace and to protect citizens, Communities and the Nation from injustice, physical harm and danger from any quarter. The latter includes maintaining and using Armed Forces. Taxing the people for this work is not theft. It is the obligation of citizens to pay for such services by its Civil Government.

Working out and applying this neo-calvinist (neo-kuyperian) Social Theory in our pluralistic Society is, granted, a great challenge. Evangelicals should accept it. One organization that has this Mission is the Center for Public Justice <http://www.cpjustice.org/content/about-center>