

THE REFORMATION PARTY

NEW PLYMOUTH PROJECT

One of the goals of the Reformation Party is to work towards the establishment of Reformed Christian communities. Christians today (particularly Christians in the western world) have tended to adopt an individualistic attitude that permeates much of western culture in general. Fueled also by Dispensationalist-type views about the law of God that lead to a pietistic form of Christianity that sees the Christian worldview as primarily manifested in one's individual spiritual life, or at the most in a church community that avoids civil and political issues, many Christians, even Reformed Christians, have ceased to desire to see the whole counsel of God worked out in every area of life. The Word of God speaks to all areas of human life, both private and public. It tells us not simply how to worship, how to run an ecclesiastical institution, or how to manage family affairs, but it also gives us instructions regarding social and political affairs. The essence of Christianity and of the people of God can survive in a pagan land, just as the Jews survived under pagan Babylonian rule in Old Testament times. And yet Psalm 137 remind us that the people of God did not see their exile in Babylon as ideal: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion..."

In the New Testament dispensation, there is no reason to believe our attitude should be fundamentally different. In 1 Peter 1:1, the apostle refers to Christians spread abroad across the Roman Empire as "the pilgrims of the Dispersion," the same terminology used to describe scattered Jews. God has sometimes scattered his people throughout pagan lands, just as he has often brought other kinds of trials and difficulties on his people, and yet this situation is a cause for sadness as a symptom of the fallen condition of the world and of God's people, not something to be rejoiced in as good in itself, however much it is true that God can and does use such less-than-ideal situations for his good purposes.

As God gives us opportunity, it is our duty to work for the application of God's Word to all areas of life, and that certainly includes working for the recovery of biblical Christian communities. As there are degrees of dispersion in the Christian world, so there are degrees in terms of healing this state of dispersion. Perhaps the easiest way to begin to recover biblical communities is to encourage a parish model of church membership and fellowship. It is not always possible for Christians to live near each other and near to the place where they fellowship and worship together as a body; but when such opportunities arise, is it not wise to take advantage of them? When Christians live close to each other, they are able to better engage in regular fellowship, gather for worship and for teaching, help each other when in need, and in general to be involved in each other's lives. Therefore, the Reformation Party wishes to encourage Christians to find ways to build up Christian communities by living in close proximity to each other.

As Christians begin to live close to each other, other opportunities for building Christian communities will arise. As the church, and therefore the local Christian community, grows, there will naturally be more and more Christian influence on social and neighborhood affairs. Christians will more and more be able to apply biblical principles to these affairs and to exhibit such principles in new ways as a model for others.

Eventually, Christians who are living together in a local community will be able to have influence and even, to a great degree, dominance, over the social and political affairs of the local community. They will be able to influence local secular arms of governance to adopt more biblical ways of governing, and they will be able to provide biblical alternatives to secular institutions. For example, the Apostle Paul (in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8) discusses the impropriety of Christians going to court against each other in secular law courts. He raises the question, "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?" Christians living in close proximity to each other will be better equipped to provide alternative civil courts, as the law permits, that are grounded in biblical rather than secular principles. There are already precedents in this country in which religious groups have been able to unite together into a local community and to establish an astonishing degree of control over the social and political affairs of the community. One example of this is the Hasidic Jewish community in Kiryas Joel, in which many of the tenets of Hasidic Judaism have been able to become, to an extent, the law of the land. (See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-n-myers/kiryas-joel-theocracy-in-america_b_1124505.html). The vision of the early Puritan settlers of New England--to establish Reformed Christian communities rooted in biblical law and existing as a model for less biblical societies--may not be as far from attainment in our age as may seem to be the case. Of course, as the referenced article attests, there are difficult questions regarding what is and is not permissible under American law (and the same would likely be the case in other nations, particularly western nations, today). It is certain that a fully biblical society, without any influence from the foreign ideology of secularism, is not possible currently in western societies. It is also certain that God's Word requires us to pursue our goal of growing Christian communities in full and conscientious compliance with the laws of the land and in ways that are peaceful and fair to all, careful to avoid abuses. But it is also clear that we can advance further in our goal than many of us have previously been inclined to think. The Reformation Party is committed to pursuing this goal, encouraging us all to do what we can now and to think through remaining questions, working towards more full expression of the social and political implications of Christianity. This, we believe, is our duty, as God requires us to live out his Word as fully and consistently as possible and to seek to model all aspects of the Christian worldview to the watching world, showing not just what Christianity means for private lives but what it means for social and political life as well. The goal of establishing Reformed Christian communities, we therefore see, is not, as some would have it, contrary to the Great Commission, but is an important part of it. Christians should seek to be a city on a hill shining in the sight of the world, and to provide communities that can not only model Christianity themselves but can also serve as bases from which to maintain a strong outflow of missionaries to go into all the world, seeking to make disciples of Christ who will be taught to "observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). And we are grateful for the promise of Christ (in the very same verse) that in pursuing the goals he has set for us, he is with us "always, even to the end of the age."