

Too Many Hills, Not Enough Dying: Notes

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I

As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side (*The Great Controversy* 608).

We have all heard the saying, "That is not a hill I'm willing to die on." This is a very seductive thing. Probably, we've all used it. It says, yes, there are issues worthy of being definite about, but that one must pick them selectively. We say this when we are claiming that we are moral people, that we are heroic people, that we are indeed willing to take a stand, but that we are also clever people, and we have reasons for not making an issue out of the current issue, whatever that is. We are claiming that when the magnitude of the matter warrants it, we will stand up and fight.

What is the seductive part? The claim that we are moral people, that we will resist error and tyranny, but we are not choosing to resist error or tyranny today. We have evaluated this issue and this issue is not a big enough issue to fight for.

II

Authority comes in one variety, yet one might say it is seen in two forms:

- o Legitimate, actual, right authority
- o Usurped, seized, illegitimate (no actual authority)

Rights

o Natural rights are rights which are "natural" in the sense of "not artificial, not man-made", as in rights deriving from human nature or from the edicts of a god. They are universal; that is, they apply to all people, and do not derive from the laws of any specific society. They exist necessarily, inhere in every individual, and can't be taken away. For example, it has been argued that humans have a natural right to life. These are sometimes called moral rights or inalienable rights.

o Legal rights, in contrast, are based on a society's customs, laws, statutes or actions by legislatures. An example of a legal right is the right to vote of citizens. Citizenship, itself, is often considered as the basis for having legal rights, and has been defined as the "right to have rights". Legal rights are sometimes called civil rights or statutory rights and are culturally and politically relative since they depend on a specific societal context to have meaning.

Law

In America, laws originate in the legislative branch. The executive branch cannot create law.

Martin Luther King Jr on Just vs Unjust laws:

“One may well ask: ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’”

Selected EGW:

Let the Principle once be established in the United States that the church may employ or control the power of the state; that religious observances may be enforced by secular laws; in short, that the authority of church and state is to dominate the conscience, and the triumph of Rome in this country is assured. GC 581

Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected. GC 592

To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion. Every secular government that attempts to regulate or enforce religious observances by civil authority is sacrificing the very principle for which the evangelical Christian so nobly struggled. GC 201

III

Scenario:

What would your church do? What position would you take? Why would you take that position?

Local authorities in your city or state have declared a public health crisis. There are a series of measures they are requiring businesses and churches to take. Under the authority of the state governor, they threaten to close the business if the steps are not taken. They have closed businesses that refused to comply. For the sake of this exercise, assume that possible Constitutional and legal protections are being ignored.

The authorities state that for safety reasons, they require that a camera be installed inside the church so that they can have a record of persons who enter. They state that the record is for health or safety purposes. In your church this would mean the church cooperating with the authorities so that the authorities are able to acquire this record of attendance.

Would you advocate installing the camera, declining to install it, or even removing it if it is installed? Why? How would you determine whether the proper principle to employ is deference to state authority, or resistance? Is this a question of legal rights, moral rights, both, or neither?