

## And Shall We Still Be Slaves

*Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)*

And shall we still be slaves,  
And in our fetters lie,  
When summon'd by a voice divine  
T'assert our liberty?

Did Christ the Savior bleed,  
Our freedom to obtain?  
And shall we trample on his blood,  
And glory in our chain?

Shall we go on to sin,  
Because thy grace abounds;  
Or crucify the Lord again,  
And open all his wounds?

Forbid it, mighty God!  
Nor let it e'er be said,  
That those, for whom thy Son has died,  
In vice are lost and dead.

The man that durst despise  
The law that Moses brought,  
Behold! how terribly he dies  
For his presumptuous fault.

But sorer vengeance falls  
On that rebellious race,  
Who hate to hear when Jesus calls,  
And dare resist his grace.

## ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

### *In the Nick of Time*

#### Seek the Peace of the City

*Kevin T. Bauder*

We all oppose something, but there's opposition and then there's *opposition*. I can think of at least three levels at which our opposition can be pursued. Which level we employ is not simply a tactical or even strategic decision. It is a moral choice.

Though the phrase seems antiquated now, we used to talk about the "loyal opposition." The loyal opposition consisted of members of the party that was out of power. They opposed on principle certain goals, policies, and initiatives of the other party. Nevertheless, the loyal opposition recognized a large sphere of common interest. This common interest was grounded in both their common humanity and community. Within the sphere of this common interest they committed themselves to work constructively with, rather than against, their opponents. Loyal opponents could cooperate to solve problems and make advances, and both parties could legitimately claim credit for any progress. It was possible to oppose some principles and policies while still to have common interests.

Then someone figured out that more votes could be gained by pointing out an opponent's failures than by pointing to one's own successes. This tactic was particularly useful for candidates or members of parties that had few actual successes. From then on, opposition became less about principles and more about making one's opponent look as bad as possible. This new level of opposition shifted the focus from opposing principles and programs to demonizing one's opponents.

For the demonizer, all aspects of an opponent's life are fair game: family activities, personal idiosyncrasies, social standing, even tangential acquaintances and loose affiliations. Failures of policy are particularly celebrated as evidence of an opponent's incompetence or even ill will. Demonizers try to portray their opponents as flatly evil, and failing that, they will depict them in the most awkward and ridiculous ways possible. In the absence of a unique positive and constructive agenda of their own, demonizers hope for their opponents' political and even personal failures.

One more level remains. Once people discover that they can flourish by demonizing their opponents, they begin to rejoice in those failures and even



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to anticipate them. Once they begin to hope for failures, they find that they can covertly sabotage their opponents' initiatives. At this point they have become not simply demonizers, but destroyers.

Destroyers promote the failure of their opponents by as many means as possible. They quietly subvert even good and useful policies so that their opponents can be presented as incompetent or malicious. They consistently deride their opponents' initiatives as pointless, wrongheaded, or even immoral, not because they necessarily are, but simply because they are advocated by their opponents.

The problem with destruction is that nobody can consistently subvert all of an opponent's policies, programs, and initiatives without subverting the common good. By attacking the persons and subverting the programs of their opponents, destroyers attack order itself. Destroyers no longer operate as the loyal opposition—they are almost by definition disloyal. Their chosen avenue to power is to make everything worse for everyone, hoping that when things get bad enough their opponents will be blamed and repudiated.

In a two-party system, each party finds itself in power only some of the time. Consequently, each party must find ways to oppose the other. Ideally, the goal is to oppose the other party's most obnoxious policies while remaining loyal to common principles and interests. In the past, demonizers and especially destroyers inhabited the extreme fringes of the parties. In recent years, however, and especially in America, the balance has shifted. Both parties have found that demonization and even destruction can disable their opponents, and so demonization and destruction have grown within the mainstream.

This situation presents an opportunity for Christians to display their commitments. When lies, half-truths, and innuendo become the medium of political exchange, Christians ought to model truth-telling. When cynicism dominates the political landscape, Christians need to model sincerity. When suspicion and vituperation are the ordinary mode of discourse, Christians must model charity; at minimum they must grant their opponents the benefit of the doubt. Most importantly, when subversion and sabotage have become powerful political weapons, Christians must model a commitment to the common good.

Joseph must have objected to elements within Pharaoh's court, but he was able to work for the common good. Daniel certainly disapproved of some Babylonian and Medo-Persian policies and initiatives, but he was able to work for the common good. When the nation of Judah was sent into captivity, Jeremiah wrote to tell the exiles to build houses, plant gardens, marry, bear children, and most importantly, to seek the peace of the city where they

were captive, for their peace was bound up with its peace (Jer 29:4–7). In other words, Jeremiah wanted them to stress the common good.

Christians in this world are no less aliens and exiles than the children of Israel were in Babylon. Like them, we live under regimes committed to some policies of which we must disapprove. Yet like them, we must also recognize that the order offered by those regimes is necessary for us to live quiet and peaceable lives (1 Tim 2:1–2). Consequently, we must pray for the success of the order in which we find ourselves. To the extent that we are able, we must work for its success—not in every policy, but with respect to the general welfare, the common good. It is permissible and even necessary for us to be loyal opponents, but we must never permit ourselves to become demonizers or destroyers.

To cite one example, my congressional representative is at the opposite end of the political spectrum from mine. She advocates many policies and initiatives that I cannot support and must oppose. I did not vote for her, nor shall I. Nevertheless, she is entitled to a level of human dignity in the way that I speak about her (1 Pet 2:17). Furthermore, she merits the respect that is due to her office (Rom 13:7). Most importantly, where her policies genuinely promote the common good (as they sometimes do), I have a duty to lend my support and to help her succeed.

Of course we can confront wrongdoing where it really occurs. Of course we ought to oppose policies that are genuinely wrong and harmful. By itself, however, opposition solves nothing and it builds nothing. Nothing permanent can be erected upon destruction, including our reputation. Let us be known, not for what we tear down, but for the good that we do (Matt 5:16).



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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