



Fellowships Founded on the Rock

By Dan Kim

During a recent conference, I ran into a young attorney I had known from his law student days. We met at my visits to his school and our regional conferences. For more than two years, we had gotten to know each other through a mixed bag of conversations ranging from personal testimonies to the horrors of law school to bad relationship breakups. At the conference, we recognized each other right away. After about five minutes of small talk (to gauge how comfortable we were with one another), we delved into a more personal conversation. We bounced easily from topic to topic before finally settling into his opinions of the Christian Legal Society. As a law student he had never become a student member, and his school's fellowship never affiliated as a chapter, so his connection with CLS was through his attendance at our regional retreats and his relationship with me. While I do not recall whether I asked him directly or if he volunteered the information, I do recall why he chose not to associate himself with CLS.

His complaints were threefold. First, CLS, to his mind, was a politically conservative organization (read "Republican"), and others also believed this. He did not want to be labeled, since he did not hold typical conservative views. Additionally, he believed that this type of association would only hinder his witness in his workplace, where most of his co-workers are of a liberal bent. Finally, he said that CLS presented only the politically conservative view on legal topics.

This was not the first time I had encountered a student or young attorney who held this view. My response is always

something like, "You are mistaken, but I can see how you arrived at the opinion you have."

I want to take this opportunity to explain both why I believe this perception is wrong and why I think it exists.

In disagreeing with this view, I do not cast it aside as a mere misperception, flippantly thinking to myself, "they just don't get it." It is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, it is not the goal or mission of CLS to be affiliated with one political party. So how does this happen? Are we victims of ill-informed gossip blawgs, and liberal groups and student organizations who do not like our stance on abortion or gay marriage? Or are we really just a bunch of Christian lawyers who are proud to be part of the Republican Party but are in denial? The answer—and the problem—centers on this: law and politics are fused together. They are inseparable. They also have strong independent aromas, which, when mixed with religion, often cause normally sturdy people to develop very weak stomachs. As Christians, however, we cannot compartmentalize our faith from our daily lives.

We need to understand the close relationship between politics and the law and learn how to faithfully integrate them—beginning by engaging our faith with the law as law students. We also need to understand that we all take stands or make missteps that may tend to color us a reddish or bluish hue, whether we intend it or not. More often than not, we either do not admit to ourselves the intimate relationship that exists between politics and law, or we do not care. Both stands result in our substituting our own

political leanings for real integration on legal issues.

The relationship between law and politics is analogous to Siamese twins. The union is one in which both beings share the necessary organ of government, and thus "surgery" to remove one from the other is practically impossible. In addition, the union is not a rare abnormality (as the medical community considers conjoined twins), but rather, a relationship inherent in the nature of both "beings." Law has always involved government, and the gears of government have always been lubricated and moved by politics. As my friends like to say, "It is what it is." Students, in their desire to integrate their faith and the study of law, must at the very least be mindful of this intimate relationship.

Unfortunately, most law students do not recognize the connection. More often than not, their view on the study of law is entirely utilitarian. Law students generally view the study of law and their pursuit of a law degree as a highly practical decision. Yet pursuing a law degree is like taking care of a very irritable baby whose appetite for time, attention and energy are all consuming and can be such a drudgery that students often lose sight of why they sought the "baby" in the first place. Thus, they rarely see or pay attention to the attached twin of politics.

When a student is passionate about a given issue, his or her personal view is often inserted, and the question of how the gospel should inform that view goes unanswered. Furthermore, anything that we are not passionate about is neglected, and if we address it all, we passively accept popular opinion. By not considering this relationship carefully and faithfully, we are

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not allowing our faith to inform some of the more difficult issues that we face. We then in turn do not avail ourselves to God as his instruments for good. Of course, the gospel is, by its very nature, redemptive, so being married to one political party or another is not a gospel-centered approach to either the law or to politics. Therefore, instead of being politically affiliated, students should seek to be issue oriented. If this approach gets us thrown into one political camp or another from time to time, it should not be something we are afraid of.

In practical terms, a gospel-centered approach to the study of law is not to be so closely married to one organization or another, whether the ACLU or the Federalist Society, that the organization completely informs our view of the law. All too often, I run into law students who have made their group an extension of the

Federalist Society or the ACLU, or one that leaves legal issues untouched by their faith. The results: Bible studies that do not speak into their lives, are irrelevant to their current studies and future vocations, and end up as Christian self-help groups. This is a twisted misinterpretation of the true purpose of a Christian fellowship on a law school campus.

A fellowship should seek a gospel-centered approach to the study of law, one that unapologetically seeks to find out how that good news informs those issues without fear of being painted as one political animal or another. Our identification should be with Christ and Christ alone. Our membership is as brothers and sisters adopted into God’s family. In this sense at least, the Christian Legal Society is apolitical—CLS is not an organization of Republicans or Democrats.

It seeks to be filled with those who would faithfully pursue their legal vocations with integrity, taking stands on the issues as compelled by our shared faith.

CLS desires, through its LSM chapters and fellowships, to be a place where students from any background, social or political, may actively engage one another in seeking truth, and likewise engage their campuses and other student groups with that truth. All this simply means is that we must work out and walk out—in word and deed—the consequences of orthodox Christian doctrine in law and politics.



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