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THE RADICAL LIBERTARIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY OF 19TH-CENTURY PREACHER DAVID LIPSCOMB

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THE RADICAL LIBERTARIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY OF 19TH CENTURY PREACHER DAVID LIPSCOMB*

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Abstract:
David Lipscomb (1831–1917) was an influential Tennessee preacher who edited a weekly paper from 1866–1917 and published a book, *Civil Government*, in 1889. Although few, if any, economists appear to be aware of Lipscomb, his writing includes many points that political economists, especially radical libertarian ones, make today. This article discusses some of the classical liberal influences on Lipscomb's thought and summarizes his radical libertarian views. Lipscomb argued that government is not created for the benefit of the public but for the benefit of the rulers. He believed that all governments, including democratic ones, are problematic. Lipscomb argued that self-serving politicians actually create conflict and violence and that the public should withdraw support from government. He argued that moral people should not participate in politics, should not vote, and should not fight in wars. Modern libertarian economists make arguments similar to these that Lipscomb made more than a century earlier.

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I. Introduction

Are religion and laissez-faire policies at odds? Just as many Christian thinkers argue that accepting Christianity means opposing laissez-faire (Rauschenbusch, 1912), many free-market advocates consider Christianity unscientific and at odds with their normative views (Rand, 1982; Posner, 1996). Others argue that these political economists should not be so dismissive (Rothbard, 1995a; Nelson, 1998). Western ideas and institutions are heavily influenced and may even depend on religion (Boettke, 2001), so discounting religious writers means ignoring potentially important works.

One valuable but neglected work on political economy is *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission, and Destiny, and the Christian's Relation To It* written by Tennessee preacher David Lipscomb (1831–1917). Compiled as a book in 1889, it was originally published as a series of articles from 1866–67 (Lipscomb, 1889:v). After publishing *Civil Government* Lipscomb wrote: "Nothing we ever wrote so nearly affects the vital interests of the church of Christ and the salvation of the world as this little book" (quoted in Hughes, 1992:194). After reading his book, this author understands why Lipscomb would make such a statement. *Civil Government* makes an important contribution to the understanding of Christianity, moral philosophy, and political economy.

This article makes the case that Lipscomb is a neglected figure in political economy and that radical libertarianism has an often overlooked but longstanding religious tradition in

America. Lipscomb's work features biblical references throughout,[1] but even atheist political economists may be able to appreciate its contents, especially since *Civil Government* includes many points that modern political economists, particularly radical libertarian ones, are making today.

In recent years libertarian economists have questioned whether government is created for the public good (Stringham, 2005; Powell, 2005), whether government reduces or actually increases conflict (Higgs, 2004; Rothbard, 2000), and whether peaceful human interaction depends on the state (Boettke, 2005; Rothbard, 1996; Stringham, 2003). Some libertarians have argued against voting (Watner, Smith, and McElroy, 1983) as well as against the idea that democracy serves the interests of the people (Holcombe, 2002; Hoppe, 2001), and they have discussed the importance of persuading people if one wants to change policy (Hummel 2001). None of these authors appear to have been aware of Lipscomb's writings, so they seem to have independently discovered many arguments that Lipscomb made more than a century earlier.

Many modern libertarians believe that all one needs is institutional reform toward laissez-faire policy, as opposed to moral reform (Friedman, 1989; Sowell, 2002). Other libertarians believe that certain educational or ethical reforms are also needed to achieve a free society (Capaldi, 2004; Caplan and Stringham, 2005). Human nature need not be transformed, but people's views about the world do. Lipscomb clearly fits in the latter group. One of his main influences, Barton Stone, talked about the importance of property *and* religion for restraining man (Christian Messenger, 1826). And although Lipscomb was very negative about government, he was optimistic about the possibility of beneficial changes. To quote his biographer, "that man and the world are progressing and slowly improving" (Hooper, 1979:111).

[1] This paper reprints few of Lipscomb's biblical quotes and instead focuses on his arguments and commentary. Readers interested in how Lipscomb uses biblical text to back up his arguments are referred to the original text. Unless otherwise specified, all quotes from Lipscomb in this article refer to Lipscomb (1889).

Lipscomb was part of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, whose main figures were Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. These men came from a Seceder Presbyterian heritage that believed in religious liberty as well as political economic liberty, and they were heavily influenced by classical liberals, including Thomas Reid, John Milton, and John Locke. Lipscomb took the ideas of many people in his movement and extended them to become what today would be called a radical libertarian.

This article does not contain a lengthy discussion of arguments for or against libertarianism or Christianity; rather, it highlights some of Lipscomb's political economic arguments in favor of liberty from a Christian point of view. Lipscomb believed that morality and law come independently from the state. He argued that government is not created for the benefit of the public good but for the benefit of the rulers. Lipscomb believed that all governments, including democratic ones, are problematic. He argued that self-serving politicians actually create conflict and violence and that the public should withdraw support from government. He also believed that government is not a force for good: It is a force for bad, and Christians should attempt to persuade people to follow the laws of God rather than use force to achieve their aims. Lipscomb argued that Christians should not participate in politics, should not vote, and should not fight in wars. He was not afraid to oppose civil government in all its forms, and, as such, should be considered one of the first radical libertarian writers.

The paper is organized as follows: Section II describes the figures who influenced Lipscomb; section III outlines the evolution of Lipscomb's thought; section IV explains Lipscomb's opposition to civil government; section V discusses Lipscomb's beliefs on how Christians should treat government; section VI discusses the influence of his ideas; and section VII concludes.

II. Influences on Lipscomb's thought

a. Churches of Christ and the Stone-Campbell movement

Church historian Robert Hooper (1966:240) wrote, "David Lipscomb at his death was considered to be the leading figure within the Churches of Christ. This fact was recognized by those without as well as within the brotherhood of the churches." The Churches of Christ and the related religious body the Disciples of Christ were founded by the Restoration Movement, which sought to "restore doctrinally and spiritually the church of the first century in modern times" (Campbell, 1968:7). In the first half of the 19th century, Thomas Campbell, Alexander Campbell, and Barton W. Stone advanced this movement, which was also referred to as the Stone-Campbell movement. The Churches of Christ (and the related Disciples of Christ) had more than a million members by 1900 (Collins, 1984:20–3), and has more than three million members today, making it one of the ten largest religious bodies in the United States (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001:12).[2] Although various Church historians have written books about Lipscomb (West, 1954; Hooper, 1979; Robinson, 1973; Collins, 1984), almost no political economists seem to be aware of Lipscomb's libertarian political economic views.[3]

b. The classical liberalism of Thomas and Alexander Campbell

[2] The Churches of Christ, which was centered in the South, and the Disciples of Christ, which was centered in the North, became officially recognized as distinct religious bodies in 1906 (Hooper, 1977:30). Today the Disciples of Christ has roughly a half million members (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001:12).

[3] One notable exception is Grove City College economist Jeffrey Herbener (2009), a member of this religious tradition who has written a working paper on the anti-war views of Alexander Campbell and David Lipscomb. Jeff Herbener shared his paper after the first draft of this article was written; this second draft has benefited significantly from his paper and suggestions. Another political economist to cite Lipscomb is Wilburn (1969), who discusses Lipscomb in his biography of Tolbert Fanning. Other than these two, I found no economist-written publications that mention Lipscomb.

Although modern political economists appear unaware of Lipscomb's ideas, many of the links between Lipscomb and classical liberal authors are quite direct. Lipscomb was the most influential third-generation figure in the Churches of Christ, and his teacher Tolbert Fanning was the most influential second generation figure. Before these men, however, came the founders of the movement: Thomas and Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. Harrell (1966:63) describes the main Churches of Christ thinkers from the first half of the 19th century: "Most Disciples of Christ leaders during these years accepted and Christianized the economic principles of unrestricted capitalism. Their heritage in Enlightenment optimism, Biblical primitivism, and frontier experience convinced them that if a man was honest, diligent, and frugal he would prosper." When Garrett (1981:22–25) listed the European influences on the movement, he chose Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and John Locke, the three of whom, coincidentally or not, Thomas Jefferson (1811/1900:12) called, "my trinity of the three greatest men the world had ever produced."

Thomas Campbell (1763–1854) and his son Alexander (1788–1866) were born in Northern Ireland of Scottish descent and were influenced by many Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. They were both educated at the University of Glasgow, where Adam Smith and Thomas Reid had been prominent professors there within years,[4] and Alexander Campbell (1841:69) later spoke favorably of Smith, Reid and other classical liberals: "The labors of Descartes, Locke, Hutchison, Adam Smith, Reid, Stewart, Thomas Brown and many others of these schools contributed much to the advancement of mental philosophy during the last century."

[4] Thomas Campbell was at Glasgow University between 1783 and 1786. Adam Smith was the Chair in Moral Philosophy at University of Glasgow between 1752 and 1763 and Rector of the University between 1787 and 1789.

Thomas Campbell homeschooled his son Alexander. They studied Latin, French, Greek, and moral philosophy, focusing especially on John Locke and John Milton (Garret, 2004:116). Noll (2002:242) reports that when Alexander went to the University of Glasgow, "Campbell absorbed John Locke, a Scottish commitment to Baconian method, a disillusioned assessment of traditional protestant churches, and the Bible-onlyism of the Scottish reformers James and Robert Haldane." The Campbells admired Locke's defense of Christianity and his views on government (Philips, 2004:625–626). Bollengaugh (2004:628) wrote that the Campbells were, "champions of reason, rather than 'experimental religion' (spiritual experience), as the ground of Christian faith," and that they believed that, "Faith was not divinely infused into believers apart from rational choice."

To the Campbells, religion had to be voluntary; the state could not impose it. Although Thomas Campbell was born Anglican, he became Presbyterian (a denomination that rejected employing bishops and claimed autonomy from the Church of England), and then an Anti Burgher Seceder Presbyterian (a group that also claimed local autonomy from the Church of Scotland). Thomas Campbell, who was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1798, moved to America in 1807, and in 1809 gave the address that started the Campbell movement. In his *Declaration and Address*, Campbell, following Locke, stressed the importance of voluntary association in the Church (McAllister, 2004:139–140). He also accepted the idea that the Bible alone has authority on religious matter rather than human creeds or institutions. Alexander Campbell became devoted to the cause and its primary spokesman. Both men believed that Christians should be followers of Christ and his ways rather than any specific denomination. Whitley (1959:96–97) calls their project "a reassertion of freedom principles incipient in the original Reformation, and was expressive of the spirit of Locke's famous *Letters on Toleration.*"

If one looks back to Reformationists such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Huldrich Zwingli (1484–1531), the freedom-loving Campbells shared some common influences and ideas with other Radical Reformationist groups such as the Anabaptists (the Amish, the Hutterites, and Mennonites are their heirs). But with one group arising from Scottish Presbyterianism and influenced by English and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, and the other emerging from central Europe, the two are clearly parallel and distinct. They both believed in voluntary baptism (baptism of adults who choose it rather than baptism of infants who are unaware) and they both believed in radical separation of Church and State. They had some important theological differences, but when it comes to economics the major economic difference between certain Anabaptist groups and the Stone-Campbell movement was that the latter group had little problem with the accumulation of wealth. For example, when Alexander Campbell passed away in1866 he was the richest man in West Virginia (Lunger, 1954:179) with an estate valued at $200,000 (Garret, 2004:114).[5] Thus, although both groups sought to restore the Church to its primitive roots, followers of the Stone-Campbell movement did not believe that one must live as certain Anabaptists did in "archaic, simple," and "sequestered, communities" (Ahlstrom, 2004:83). Interestingly, although some people in the Stone-Campbell movement, such as David Lipscomb, were aware of the Anabaptists (Hughes, 2004:635–636), many of the major figures were not.

Alexander Campbell founded Bethany College in 1840 and there taught rhetoric using *Elements of Rhetoric* by the classical liberal Richard Whately (1828); he also taught political economy using *Elements of Political Economy* by the classical liberal Francis Wayland (1837) (Casey, 2004:77; Lunger, 1954:180). Campbell was devoted to the "American System," believing that the role of government is "to protect life, liberty, reputation, and property" (Lunger, 1954:180, 191). He was not a pure libertarian, but certainly he was a classical liberal,

[5] In Bethany, West Virginia, the Campbell Mansion still exists as a museum.

supporting economic practices such as banking and the use of interest, opposing the central bank, and arguing that "society cannot exist without private property" (Lunger, 1954:181–182).

c. The classical liberalism and latent radical libertarianism of Barton Stone

Barton Stone (1772–1844), the other founder of the Stone-Campbell movement, was also an advocate of autonomy for local churches and of liberty in general. Born in Maryland, Stone was an ordained Presbyterian minister in Kentucky when in 1804 he published the *Last Will and Testament of Springfield Presbytery*, which maintains that congregations should not be under the authority of the presbyteries and synods (higher level organizational structures above the local congregation). Stone biographer William West wrote that Stone's beliefs about religious liberty were likely influenced by his economic freedom:

> Men on the frontier who now enjoyed political and economic liberty which they had not experienced on the Eastern seaboard desired similar freedom in religion. Such freedom found its expression no only in approval of lay preaching, but also in the voluntary character of religious organizations. Churches tended to free themselves from ecclesiastical officials who exercised control over them. (West, 1954:48)

Stone argued that Christians should be followers of Christ rather than followers of men or any specific denomination. Modern Church historian Thomas Lee Campbell (1968:28) explains another step that the Restoration movement founders took, "Repudiating priestly and Calvinistic concepts, the restorationists believed salvation was in the freewill tradition, which was essentially an achievement of the individual, who might be aided by education." Stone met Alexander Campbell in 1824, and they merged their efforts in 1832 (Ahlstrom, 1972:446–452).

Stone too was definitely a classical liberal or even a radical libertarian. Stone's second cousin signed the Declaration of Independence (Williams, 2004:702), and when Stone was young in all likelihood he heard Patrick Henry and read Thomas Paine, who was the most widely

read author in Kentucky at the time (West, 1954:1, 22). Stone later wrote, “From my earliest recollection I drank deeply into the spirit of liberty, and was so warmed by the soul-inspiring draughts, that I could not bear the name of British or Tories, without feeling a rush of blood through the whole system” (quoted in Noll, 1994:73). Stone founded and edited a periodical, *The Christian Messenger*, from 1826 to 1845. Three years before Alexander Campbell debated Robert Owen, an 1826 article in Stone’s *Christian Messenger* (likely authored by Stone) criticizes Owen for wanting to abolish property and religion. It stresses the importance of both “the restraints and sanctions of religion,” and “the influences which result from the institutions of property and domestic society” (Christian Messenger, 1826:45). In addition to advocating property rights, Stone was critical of slavery, saying that, “slavery is inconsistent with the principles of Christianity as well as civil liberty” (quoted in Williams, 2004:702).

Although he began as a classical liberal, it appears that Stone became more of a radical libertarian over time. In the 1820s, his *Christian Messenger* (1827:95) referred to “the star-spangled banner, that constellation whose rising lighted the world to freedom,” and he was not against petitioning Congress (to end slavery). But his biographer Williams (2004:718) discusses how by the 1840s Stone had become frustrated and given up on the political process, adopting “an anti-government position.” Stone was aware of William Lloyd Garrison’s Non-Resistance Society, founded in 1838, which opposed the use of force even in self-defense, and Stone seemed supportive of such views (Williams, 2004:719). Hughes (1992:182) wrote, “Because Stone and his people identified so strongly with [God’s] kingdom, they typically refused to fight in wars, to vote, or otherwise participate in political process.” In 1843, when he was 71, Stone wrote, “We must cease to support other government on earth by our counsels, co-operation, and choice.” He added, “Then shall all man made laws and governments be burnt up forever. These are the seat

of the beast." (quoted in Hughes, 1992:190). Although he did not write as much about his political economic views as Lipscomb did, Stone appears to have started out as a standard classical liberal and over the years became more of a radical libertarian.

d. The classical liberalism and latent radical libertarianism of Tolbert Fanning

After the first generation founders of the movement came David Lipscomb's teacher Tolbert Fanning (1810–1874), "the most powerful second-generation leader among the mid-South Churches of Christ" (Hughes, 1992:192). Fanning was born in Tennessee to a Baptist mother, met Churches of Christ preachers when he was 17, and when in college met Alexander Campbell. Fanning joined Campbell on preaching tours in Kentucky, Ohio, New York, Canada, New England (Moore, 1867:516) and worked as a farmer and preacher.

Like others in his movement, Fanning was influenced by Locke (Wilburn, 2004:332), and Fanning too can be considered a classical liberal. Fanning supported hard work, and approved of private organizations such as farms, schools, and banks (West, 1954:131). He also opposed slavery and was once arrested for giving a sermon critical of some of its practices. Fanning expressed anti-war and anti-political views as early as the U.S.—Mexican War in 1844–6 (Wilburn, 1969:222; Collins, 1984:36), and wrote against capital punishment shortly thereafter (Fanning, 1847a, 1847b, 1847c). In one work he (1847b:151) mentions that the only other denomination he knows that does not support putting people to death are the Quakers, indicating that the Anabaptist pacifists did not influence him. Hughes (1996:192) reports, "Fanning—like Stone before him—advised his people not to vote and espoused a consistently pacifist position." In a long essay praising Fanning, Lipscomb (1906:35) also reported this fact, stating that Fanning "never voted or took part in the political and civil contests of the country." Although Fanning did

not participate in politics, he influenced people through preaching and education.[6] In 1845, at age 35, Fanning founded Franklin College (Wilburn, 1969:77), and the following year it enrolled one of its most influential students, David Lipscomb.

III. From classical liberal to radical libertarian: The advancement of Lipscomb's thought

a. The early David Lipscomb

David Lipscomb was born in Franklin County, Tennessee, in 1831 to a religious family that had become members of a "Barton W. Stone type-congregation" in 1830 (West, 1954:27). After studying the Bible, David's father came to the conclusion that slavery was immoral, so the Lipscombs sold their farm and moved to the North to free their slaves (Hooper, 1979:21; Hughes, 1986:23). Their move to Illinois involved great personal sacrifice since David's mother and three of his siblings died of fever in 1835–6, so the Lipscombs moved back to Tennessee as soon as they could (West, 1954:30–1).[7] In 1846 David entered Franklin College, where his older brother William was studying under Tolbert Fanning. Historians agree that Fanning had a profound influence on David Lipscomb's religious and political beliefs (West, 1954:47; Wilburn, 1969:101; Campbell, 1968:35; Foster, 1987:225; Holland, 1965:54). I would add that although Lipscomb started out as less of a radical libertarian than Fanning, over time he became as or more libertarian than this teacher (depending on one's assessment of Fanning).

b. The classical liberalism of David Lipscomb

[6] Wilburn (1969:224-5) wrote that Fanning, "had taken the position that civil government was not a proper channel for best Christian influence….To him, the only influence and force which Christians were to exert was 'moral,' and this could be done exclusively in the kingdom of Christ far better than through other agencies, such as human government."

[7] Hooper (1966:99) wrote, "Most of his immediate family was lost because of emancipation ideas."

In 1855, 24-year-old David Lipscomb delivered an address at Franklin College titled "The Religious Sentiment, Its Social and Political Influence." This 36 page document is thoroughly classical liberal, although not yet radically libertarian. Lipscomb talks about liberty and freedom throughout it, employing phrases used by American classical liberals, such as "all men were created free and equal, with certain inalienable rights and responsibilities," "the right and duty of private judgment," and "the inherent, inalienable right of every human being to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" (1855:25, 23, 13). Praising the American system, Lipscomb (1855:25) wrote, "The declaration of American independence, then, with all of its logical sequences and accompaniments, is the ripened fruit of the reformation of the sixteenth century, or more emphatically of the Christian religion." Indeed, Lipscomb began as a true classical liberal who was aware of Locke, Hobbes, Voltaire, and Paine (Lipscomb, 1855:29; Campbell, 1968:79; Collins, 1984:29).

Lipscomb focused more on political economic issues than on economics narrowly defined, so assessing his views about supply and demand is more difficult, but to date I have yet to find any real animosity toward free-markets. Although he was skeptical of big business (Hooper, 1979:231), and said that money can corrupt (Lipscomb, 1889:149; Dunnavant, 1991:84), Lipscomb was not against making money per se. For example, on an 1872 trip to Texas he recommends buying land because he thinks it would be a good profit opportunity, writing: "The [price of] land [in Texas] is low, the railroad and the influx of emigration will raise it until it approximates an equality with other states" (quoted in Robinson, 1973:49). Lipscomb says to invest there if one has the means. He also speaks approvingly of the "the common quiet man, who honestly made his living by industry whether rich or poor," and makes the argument that "Labor and capital should be allies instead of enemies, because they are

essential to each other" (Hooper, 1966:92; Hooper, 1979:231). Lipscomb was a strong advocate of helping the poor, but he believed that donations must be voluntary (Lipscomb, 1886). He also argued against slavery and against war, saying that each was bad for the economy (Hooper, 1977:58; Hooper, 1966:94) another indication that he was not in favor of everyone living in a primitive way. Thus, like Campbell and others before him, Lipscomb was not an advocate of eschewing all worldly possessions. Until I read 100 percent of Lipscomb's writings, my conclusion is tentative, but based on the hundreds of pages I have read so far, Lipscomb largely fits within the Jeffersonian tradition.

c. The radical libertarianism of David Lipscomb and the influences on his thought

Lipscomb's political economic views most obviously evolved and differed from those of Jefferson, Campbell, other classical liberals, and even the younger Lipscomb was on the subject of the state. Although Lipscomb started as a classical liberal supporter of limited government, he eventually became what in modern times would be called a radical libertarian or a private property anarchist (Stringham, 2006, 2007). Like modern radical libertarians, he supported peace and order, but he opposed all human governments. Exactly how he arrived at all of his positions is impossible to say, but it appears that he was pushing the libertarian elements in his earlier views to their logical anarchist extreme. Lipscomb no doubt obtained many of his more radical ideas from others in his movement, including Barton Stone and Tolbert Fanning. In the concluding paragraph of *Civil Government* (153), Lipscomb wrote, "A number of our most studious and devoted brethren of the older class adopted and maintained this position. Among the older ones were T. Fanning, P. S. Fall and B. U. Watkins." Many statements by Stone and Fanning indicate anarchist elements in their thinking (Fanning, 1847:81; Williams, 2004: 719;

West, 1964:210–211),[8] but they did not spell out their ideas in as much detail as Lipscomb (1889).

Harrell (1962:268) reports that after Lipscomb began presenting his ideas, one of his contemporary colleagues, Elisha Sewell (1830–1924), said that, "Lipscomb was the first preacher in Tennessee publicly to take this position." Fanning was also in Tennessee during the same time; perhaps he was not as outspoken. One of Lipscomb's contemporary critics, *Christian Standard* editor Isaac Errett, claimed that Lipscomb was only anti-war because he was an apologist for the South (West, 1954:107). Although the Civil War may have matured Lipscomb's views (Hooper, 1979:97), coming to Errett's conclusion is mistaken. Hughes (1992:212) concludes, "To ascribe Lipscomb's position only to the war is to diminish the importance of a long intellectual tradition that began with Stone and of which Lipscomb was heir." Research by West (1954) Wilburn (1969), and Hughes (1992:190) shows that much of Lipscomb's anti-political views came out of the tradition "in Churches of Christ for over a century." Hughes (1992:190) wrote, "This tradition held that civil government—including American democracy—was both demonic and illegitimate and that Christians should refuse all active participation in government and politics, including voting." Fanning biographer James Wilburn (1969:101) wrote, "Lipscomb reflected and further developed Fanning's views on civil government," thus Lipscomb was evidently documenting and extending much of what was in the tradition even if it was not fully spelled out.

Furthermore, Lipscomb's wide reading may have had an influence on him. In his earlier writing Lipscomb mentions Locke, Hobbes, Voltaire, and Paine, and in *Civil Government* Lipscomb refers to various thinkers and historians, including Menno Simons, Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, Edward Gibbon, and August Neander. Based on these authors, Lipscomb (128)

[8] I thank Jeffrey Herbener for bringing these references to my attention.

documents how, "separation from the state and from all participation in civil affairs, was universal among Christians for the first two or three hundred years," and argues that, "If the church ever attains to its primitive purity and efficiency it must be by a return to this clearly established principle of the separation of all its members from worldly governments."

Lipscomb also indicates that he was aware of the anti-state position among many American colonists. Describing some of the precursors in this tradition in colonial Massachusetts, Lipscomb (127) wrote, "Some [colonists] had denied the right of the civil power to punish violation of these [commandments]. They denied the right of Christians to be civil magistrates, and the lawfulness of Christians engaging in war."[9] Lipscomb (134–135, 281) also shows awareness of the Anabaptists, "Quakers, Mennonites, Nazarenes and Dunkards, and individuals among the larger brotherhoods." who refused to participate in civil affairs and "make the 'sermon upon the Mount' their rule of life." Therefore, in some potentially important ways Lipscomb was more advanced than his teacher Fanning, who indicated that the only other pacifistic group he knew about was the Quakers (Fanning, 1847:151).

And to be sure, one of Lipscomb's most important influences was the Bible. Lipscomb believed that if people did not misinterpret it, as so many do, everyone should be able to come to the same understanding. Lipscomb (116,127) stated that his position on government simply carries on the tradition that goes back to before Christ and was especially emphasized in the New Testament. He wrote:

> Through the Old Testament this separation was taught. It was clearly maintained in the New. The church received the practice from the apostles, and maintained it

[9] Murray Rothbard (1970), who documents many individualist anarchist groups in colonial America, corroborates this account. Rothbard mentions Rhode Island as one of the freer colonies, but argues that although Roger Williams was partially a libertarian he did not go far enough. Lipscomb also praised Roger Williams in comparison to the Puritans, who placed "the sword in the hands of their rulers to enforce church censures, and discipline." But, similar to Rothbard, Lipscomb (1889:127) argued that for Williams "the temptations to take part in civil affairs were strong and all went into it. They persuaded themselves there was a difference between the despotic and republican forms of government."

> with great uniformity to the close of the third century. Corruption, worldly ambition and desire of power and place, worked their way into the church, but all through the dark ages, the purest and best of disciples of Christ, maintained the position. (127–8)

Although Lipscomb believed that many a church had been corrupted, he also thought that certain Christians had maintained a purer faith. The true faith had always existed, but it needed to be brought to the forefront. Lipscomb (128) wrote, "If the church ever attains to its primitive purity and efficiency it must be by a return to this clearly established principle of the separation of all its members from worldly governments." For this reason he wrote *Civil Government.*

d. Lipscomb as editor of and contributor to the *Gospel Advocate*

Much of *Civil Government* was originally published in the *Gospel Advocate*, a monthly and later weekly paper founded by Fanning in 1855 that he and Lipscomb co-edited after the Civil War (Wilburn, 1969:210).[10] By 1890 the *Gospel Advocate* had 10,000 subscribers (Hooper, 1979:202), and according to Hughes (1992:191–2) it made Lipscomb "clearly the most influential person among Churches of Christ from the close of the Civil War until his death in 1917." Since the Churches of Christ had no official creeds or organizational structure, Hughes (1986) claims that the periodical editors were the closest thing to bishops in the movement.

In the *Gospel Advocate* the editors and contributors discussed and debated important matters of the time. Lipscomb expressed many religious and political positions, including opposition to slavery, lynching, public schools, anti-vice laws, voting, political participation, and war (*Gospel Advocate*, various dates). While the *Gospel Advocate* was the most influential Churches of Christ periodical in the South, the *Christian Standard*, founded in 1866 and edited

[10] The periodical was founded by Fanning and David's older brother William Lipscomb, but it suspended publication during the Civil War. After the war Fanning resumed publication with David Lipscomb as co-editor. Fanning and David Lipscomb co-edited the *Gospel Advocate* from 1866 to 1870, and Lipscomb edited it from that point forward.

by Isaac Errett (1820–1888), was most influential in the North. In stark contrast to Lipscomb, Errett "made it clear that the paper was established to give voice to those who had been loyal to the government during the war" (Harrell, 2004:224). The most famous member of the northern Churches of Christ was James A. Garfield, a former preacher who became a Senator, a general in the Civil War, and eventually President of the United States. Garfield recruited hundreds of people from the movement into his regiment, and on the Confederate side many Churches of Christ members, including Barton Stone's son, also took up arms in the war. Fanning and Lipscomb were appalled to see members of the same church fighting and killing each other, and so they felt obliged to instruct church members against this.

Lipscomb was also particularly critical of attempts to create a structure in their movement for organizing independent congregations. In 1849 some church members formed the American Christian Missionary Society, yet many, including Lipscomb, were opposed since "there was no biblical precedent whatsoever for the establishment of any agency beyond the local congregation to do the work of the church" (Priest, 2004:535). In 1861, when the American Christian Missionary Society held a convention and passed a resolution endorsing the Northern government's cause (Harrell, 2004:222), Lipscomb was particularly disquieted, and he spent much effort arguing against these groups. The *Gospel Advocate* touched on other religious debates within the movement, such as the use of instrumental music during worship, but most important for the purposes of this article, "the *Gospel Advocate* issued a steady stream of anti-political and anti-war articles" (Collins, 1984:96).

IV. Lipscomb's opposition to civil government

Lipscomb published *Civil Government* as a book in 1889, but explains that the, "substance in this book was published in the GOSPEL ADVOCATE in the years 1866–67" (Lipscomb, 1889:v). Although it was written in the 19th century and much of it focuses on biblical passages, the 157-page *Civil Government* touches on many issues debated in political economy today. In the preface Lipscomb explains why he wrote the book, and in the next two thirds of the book Lipscomb presents his thesis that Christians should not participate in war or politics in any way, using Scriptural text as support. Churches of Christ members believed that the Bible is true and everyone should be able to agree on its meaning, but that achieving this requires reading, study, and contemplation (Hicks and Valentine, 2006:79–91). In the last third of *Civil Government*, Lipscomb cites historians to document others who have held similar views since the days of Christ, deals with possible objections, presents petitions he and others sent to government officials during the Civil War, and discusses issues of practical morality.

a. The state is not created for the public good

Lipscomb believed in natural justice (1889:50), a view that holds that morality is determined independently of the state. He (iii) opens the book with the statement that he "was early in life impressed with the idea that God as the Creator, and preserver of the world, was its only rightful law-maker and ruler." One of the most famous sayings of Churches of Christ preachers is a phrase from Thomas Campbell, "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." In other words, Churches of Christ members believed that one must make individual judgments about subjects not in the Bible (for example, how to run a school or farm), but on issues addressed by the Bible, the revealed law is paramount. Phrasing the issue in economic lingo: although one is free to make a wide latitude of choices, one's choice set should be constrained to what is consistent with God's laws. Another key aspect of Churches

of Christ preachers is that "the authority of the New Testament superseded that of the Old Testament for Christian thought and practice" (Springer, 2004:68). Lipscomb (133) and his colleagues placed particular emphasis on, "The sermon on the Mount, embraced in the fifth sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew, certainly contain the living and essential principles of the religion the Savior came to establish, those which must pervade and control the hearts and lives of men." These principles include: do unto others what you would have them do unto you, love your enemies, turn the other cheek, and do not judge, or you too will be judged.

Lipscomb believes that people should focus on God's laws rather than those of civil government. Throughout the book Lipscomb refers to the state as civil government or human government, which he distinguishes from the Government of God, which is not of this earth.[11] Ultimately, he believed that Christians owe their obedience to God's government, not to the state. Lipscomb (65) wrote, "[Christ] and his servants were not children of civil government. He and his servants constituted the government of God in contradistinction to the human governments of earth." Because of this, Lipscomb believed that all government legislation lacks virtue. He (41) wrote that God's government "gave room for no human legislation; God is the sovereign and sole law maker for it and he has ruled in it to guide and bless his children." If justice and laws are determined independent of government, then government lawmaking is superfluous at best and more often disruptive.

Whereas many people consider government lawmaking to be a positive good, Lipscomb viewed it as an ignoble replacement for the morality that precedes all government. Lipscomb was definitely not a follower of 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who believed that

[11] Lipscomb (7) wrote, "We use the term '*Civil Government*' in this book as synonymous with *Human Government*, in contradistinction to a government by God, or the *Divine Government*. The design in writing this book is to determine definitely the origin, mission, and destiny of human governments, their relation to God, and the relation the Church and the individual Christian sustain to them." In this essay I refer to civil government or human government as the state or simply government.

government should be created to prevent hostilities between all. Nor did Lipscomb think that the creation of government is analogous to a peaceful exchange. To Lipscomb (9): "The design and purpose of this beginning of human government on earth was to oppose, counteract, and displace the government of God on earth." Furthermore, Lipscomb argued that the creation of government was a self-serving (and immoral) act. [12]

Here David Lipscomb's writing foreshadows modern public choice more than 100 years in advance, yet it contains a much more radical perspective. He believed that government is not helpful to the citizenry; rather, government is exploitative. Lipscomb (23) wrote, "Every human government uses the substance, the time, the service of the subjects to enrich, gratify the appetites and lusts, and to promote the grandeur and glory of the rulers" and that "The rulers of the human oppress the subjects for their own benefit."

The type of government did not matter to Lipscomb; he (23) viewed all forms of government, including democracy, through this self-serving lens: "And it is not true that in democratic or any other kind of governments the people themselves are rulers. They choose the rulers, at the instigation of a few interested leaders, then these rulers rule for their own selfish good and glory as other rulers do." In other words, all governments, even democratic governments, are ruled by special interests.

Lipscomb also did not believe a good government was just a matter of getting virtuous people in power. He (23) argued that government will always be bad, even in the best of circumstances: "The picture here drawn is not that of the worst and most despotic forms of

[12] Lipscomb (9) wrote, "The institution of human government was an act of rebellion and began among those in rebellion against God, with the purpose of superseding the Divine rule with the rule of man." Lipscomb did not consider government to be a creation of God; he (89) said, "The kingdoms of the world are recognized by Christ as the kingdoms of the devil." Lipscomb (73) added, "These two institutions [heaven and hell] have their counterparts in this world. The church of Jesus Christ embodying the true servants of God, and so ruled, as to promote fidelity in God's children, by the Lord Jesus Christ. The other, human government, the embodied effort of man to rule the world without God, ruled over by 'the prince of this world,' the devil."

governments, among the ignorant and degraded, but as it would and did exist among the Jewish people, with the best rulers that could be found." Lipscomb would have agreed with the phrase that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Lipscomb was also against the idea that government can be properly constrained so that it will only serve the public. He (24) wrote, "[I]t is not in man to form government in which the selfish element will not prevail, and which will not be used to tax and oppress the ruled for the glory and aggrandizement of the rulers." Why would people who expect to be in power do anything besides maximize their well-being?

In addition, Lipscomb rejected the idea that government is good because it counteracts humans' sinful nature. Lipscomb (95) wrote, "The fact that human government is an outgrowth of perverted human nature, is a sure guarantee that its essential elements are evil, and that it is founded in a spirit of rebellion against God." Lipscomb (94) described the creation of government, stating, "All the institutions that grew out of this sinful fountain are necessarily evil. A depraved human nature can produce only corrupt and sinful institutions."[13]

b. The state increases conflict

Not only did Lipscomb question the popular assumption that government is benevolent, but he questioned whether government produces order. Although many people recognize that

[13] In contrast to human kingdoms, Lipscomb believed that the "the kingdom of heaven – the Church of God" (12) is perfect (44). This does not mean, however, that all human churches are perfect, far from it. He (121-122) wrote that the "corruption and secularizing of the churches were gradual and produced division." Reinhardt (1999:333) summarizes Lipscomb's belief that churches must accept "the full and complete gospel, and have restored the true church of Christ," and that "any variance from [the true church's] doctrines is seen as human apostasy or presumption." Lipscomb was against denominationalism, because denominations were human alterations of the church not found in the Bible. He believed that the Bible gives the ideal that congregations should strive to reach. Even though people had gone away from God, Lipscomb believed they could go back to God and restore the true church. Lipscomb (95) wrote, "All the institutions of God have been established with a view of counteracting and destroying these productions of a corrupted human nature, and of cleansing and purifying that nature itself, that it may be fitted for service in the Divine institutions, and that it may cease to be a prolific source of evil plants." On the other hand, to Lipscomb government's very existence was a sin against God, so he rejected the idea that government could be transformed into a good institution.

government is self-interested, they still believe that it produces peace. Lipscomb rejected this public interest view of government behavior, arguing that governments do not seek to minimize conflict or protect their citizens. He wrote:

> [T]he chief and necessary results flowing from the displacement of the Divine will and the establishment and perpetuation of human government, would be confusion, strife, bloodshed, and perpetual warfare in the world…The chief occupation of human governments from the beginning have been war. Nine-tenths of the taxes paid by the human family, have gone to preparing for, carrying on, or paying the expenses of war. (10)

Thus, rather than financing "public goods," government takes taxpayers' money to finance the warfare state. Lipscomb's views are surprisingly similar to those of subsequent libertarian writers who argue that "War is the health of the state."

Lipscomb was ahead of his time in recognizing that the interests of government and the people are not the same. Government officials often find it in their interest to sacrifice the well-being of the people. Describing the people of Israel's first kings, Lipscomb wrote:

> Their kings, despite an occasional good one, led them further from God, deeper and deeper into sin and rebellion; led them into idolatry, involved them continually in war and strife, brought them into frequent alliances with the rebellious and idolatrous nations of earth that supported human government, all of which brought upon them the desolation of their country, the consuming of their substance, the destruction of their cities, the slaughter of their armies the captivity and enslavement, in foreign lands, of their people. (20)

Lipscomb believed that the state destroys resources and makes the public worse off when it forges alliances and engages in war around the globe. His analysis is clearly at odds with the public interest view of government that believes militaries act to protect citizens.

Like many libertarians, Lipscomb believed that the existence of government puts the public at greater risk; without nation-states creating militaries and meddling around the globe, there would be much less cause for strife. Lipscomb wrote:

> The people of Maine and Texas, of England and India, could never become enemies or be involved in strife and war, save through the intervention of human government to spread enmity and excite to war. Individuals in contact might, through conflict of interests, or personal antipathy, become embittered, and engage in war with each other, but distinct nations or peoples could have no strife save as they should be excited and carried on by these human governments. All the wars and conflicts of earth, all the desolation, ruin and blood-shed, between separated nations, or distinct peoples, are the fruits of human government. (98)

Lipscomb (10) believed, "All the wars and strifes between tribes, races, nations, from the beginning until now, have been the result of man's effort to govern himself and the world, rather than to submit to the government of God." In modern economic lingo, militaries are not a public good; they are a public bad.

c. Christianity and the state are at odds

On Biblical passages that mention government, Lipscomb had a much different take than many others who believe the government is on the side of good. Let us consider Lipscomb's reading of Romans 13, in which Paul stated, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," and "The powers that be are ordained of God"[14] Like many others, Lipscomb (70) believed that Romans 13 was "the most complete statement of the Christian's relation to the civil government found in the New Testament." But Lipscomb interprets this passage quite differently from modern Bible translations, of Romans 13 which include: "The policeman is sent by God to help you" (*The Living Bible*) or "The police aren't there just to be admired in their uniforms. God also has an interest in keeping order, and He uses them to do it" (*The Message Bible*). In stark contrast to this view, Lipscomb (69) points out that "The letter to the Christians at Rome was written by the apostle Paul, during the reign of Nero, the most cruel and wicked persecutor of the church of God, as well as the most depraved in personal character." As such, the passage must be

[14] Lipscomb quotes from the King James Version.

understood in its context. Lipscomb argues that government is ordained by God, just as Satan is ordained by God. Throughout his book Lipscomb (48–9, 54, 56, 60, 92) refers to civil government as an institution of the devil. He (62) wrote, "the civil power and the rulers engaged in the work of persecuting the Son of God, are the ministers of Satan." Just because Satan and civil governments exist does not mean they are on the side of good.[15] Without going into Lipscomb's full discussion about Romans 13, Lipscomb basically maintains that the passage indicates that even under wicked rulers, such as Nero, Christians "must not avenge themselves, they must suffer wrong." Lipscomb (70) says, "Christians are forbidden to take vengeance," and he later (135) highlights Romans 12, which says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Lipscomb argued that all human governments are inherently immoral institutions, but Christians should not violently resist them.[16]

Although "the civil power was the minister and instrument of the devil" (62), Lipscomb said that Christ came to show humanity the better alternative. What should happen to civil governments? He stated (65) that Christ's goal "was to destroy the kingdoms of earth." Lipscomb explained what he thought should happen to government:

> All these kingdoms are to be broken in pieces, and *consumed*. They are to be destroyed and supplanted by the kingdom which the God of heaven shall set up. They are to become as the dust of the summer's threshing-floor, that is driven before the wind, no place is to be found for them, but the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands is to become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth. The mission of the kingdom of God is to break into pieces and consume all these kingdoms, take their place, fill the whole earth, and stand forever. (28)

[15] Lipscomb (1889:154) reprints a piece by one of his colleagues, B.U. Watkins, who wrote, "But the fact of civil government being ordained of God, is no proof of Divine approbation."

[16] On how Christians should treat civil government, Lipscomb appears to be influenced by Tolbert Fanning (1847:81), who wrote, "His servants were to 'pay tribute' to governments, and 'pray for rules;' not because the government and rulers existed by any special appointment of Heaven, but in order that the 'disciples might lead a quiet and peaceable life." But Lipscomb and Fanning differed in their interpretation on Romans 13 in that Fanning believes that the "powers that be" are not civil powers, but church powers. Fanning concluded, "We hope no one would conclude that the language is literal" (1847b:187).

Lipscomb was clearly not an advocate of trying to reform government. He (86) wrote, "Christ recognized the kingdoms of the earth as the kingdoms of the devil, and that they should all be rooted up, that all the institutions of earth, save the kingdom of heaven, should be prevailed against by the gates of hell."

This places Christ and his followers in opposition to government, and Lipscomb realized that such a position does not make government officials happy. He wrote: "Christ thus was recognized from before his birth as coming as the enemy of, and to make war upon the human government, and the rulers sought from his birth to kill him" (46). Despite not winning friends among the political elites, Lipscomb believed that abolishing government was a calling for those devoted to good. He (12) wrote, "The mission of this Church is to rescue and redeem the earth from the rule and dominion of the human kingdoms."[17]

d. A just society can only be achieved through voluntary means

Lipscomb's prescription was radical, but he was no violent revolutionary. In fact, he believed that a moral society could not be achieved through force. Even if government is harming its citizens, Lipscomb (70) argued that "Christians are forbidden to take vengeance." He (87) wrote, "No violence, no sword, no bitterness or wrath can he use." Lipscomb believed that one should not or cannot use force to end force. Because government is at odds with justice, one

[17] Whether Lipscomb believes that the consumption of earthly kingdoms will occur before or after Christ's second coming is a matter of some debate. Scholars disagree on whether Lipscomb believed in pre- or postmillennialism (Rollman, 2004:306). One prominent church historian, Richard Hughes, ultimately believes that Lipscomb fits in the former category, but (1996:125) writes, "Generally speaking, Lipscomb and those in his circle strongly resisted elaborating on their premillennial perspectives or engaging in speculation about 'what the millennium is or when it begins or ends.'" If Lipscomb believed in premillennialism, his message would imply that people should abandon earthly kingdoms so that they can be saved when Christ returns and implements his 1,000 year reign. If Lipscomb believed in postmillennialism, his message would imply that as people abandon earthly kingdoms, they help bring about Christ's 1,000 year reign and his subsequent return. Either way, people should abandon earthly kingdoms and accept God. In what could be interpreted in either a pre- or postmillennial perspective, Lipscomb (1889:91) wrote, "The work of conversion goes forward taking men, one by one, out of the service of the earthly kingdoms and transferring them to the service of the Divine kingdom."

cannot use the methods of government to bring about good. Lipscomb (68) wrote, “All human governments are builded by the sword…..Christ's church must be so builded as to stand forever, therefore it cannot be built by the sword.”

But eschewing violence does not imply non-action. Lipscomb (87) argued that a moral society could be achieved by spreading the ideas of peace: “The spread of the peaceful principles of the Savior, will draw men out of the kingdoms of earth into the kingdom of God.” He believed that the mission of Christianity is to convert people toward the moral, non-governmental, view.

To Lipscomb, education and persuasion are fundamental. One needs to eliminate the reasons why people support government, or government will not be curbed. Lipscomb wrote:

> Christ came to destroy human government by calling man back from sin to the rule and service of God. Man must come voluntarily at the call of Christ. Then Jesus proposed to destroy human government only as he destroyed sin and rebellion against God. If there has been a failure it is not in destroying human government, but in destroying sin and rebellion since he proposed to destroy that only as these were destroyed. (52)

The key is persuading a critical mass to withdraw its support from civil government. Lipscomb believed that as more people come to accept Christ, they will withdraw their support from and weaken the state. He wrote:

> As things now go, every individual in the world might be converted to Christ and yet the earthly kingdoms would remain in all their present strength and vigor, and the spirit of the world would be cherished in the church of God. But if every man converted to Christ withdrew from the support of the earthly kingdoms, these kingdoms would weaken and fall to pieces, for lack of supporters; ‘little by little’ giving way before the increase and spread of the kingdom of God. (90)

Even though force props up government, a government without supporters will cease to exist.

In the section of the book in which he deals with objections, Lipscomb quotes an unnamed critic who said that all civil governments could not be evil, because that would imply

that Christ has failed in rescuing man from evil. Lipscomb first quotes the unnamed critic who said that the ubiquity of governments demonstrates that they must exist for some good reason:

> If it be meant that civil government and nations were under the control of the devil, and that Christ come to rescue them from him, then Christ has failed, because we all know, civil government and nations are now more nearly universal than ever before, and that every disciple of Jesus is a subject of some nation and is subject to civil government. (Anonymous, quoted in Lipscomb, 1889:51)

Then Lipscomb responded to this line of argument:

> Suppose we were to say God declared a war of extermination against sin six thousand years ago and sin is as universal now as it ever was, therefore God has failed in his war upon sin. This is just as true as that the war against human government has failed. (51)

In other words, just because something is widespread does not mean we should support it. Saying we should not oppose government because it is so widespread is akin to saying that we should not oppose disease for the same reason (Hummel, 2001:534). The role of Christianity, and, for that matter, medicine, is to oppose that which is contrary to good.

V. Lipscomb's normative prescriptions

a. Christians should not support or participate in wars

Civil Government was not just an assessment of how God will treat the state on judgment day; it gave practical advice on how Christians should treat the state today. The overriding theme is that people should apply the same morality they use in their personal lives to the public sphere. Because morality is determined by a higher power, Lipscomb believed that government is wrong to do anything that is wrong at the level of the individual Christian. Like two of his major influences, Campbell and Fanning, he believed that government is immoral when it carries out acts that the Christian should not perform. As such, Lipscomb believed that Christians should not

support or participate in any wars, even if they are supposedly for good ends; morality forbids fighting against even bad governments. He wrote:

> God and his people are not to conquer and possess the kingdoms as one human kingdom overthrows and possesses another – that is to displace the rulers and officers appointed by the human and to rule in and through their organizations. That would be to acknowledge man's institutions preferable to his own. (28)

Because Christ did not support using violence to establish his kingdom, he certainly would not support using violence for others. Lipscomb wrote:

> Christ disavows the earthly character of his kingdom; declares that it is of a nature so different from all worldly kingdoms, that his servants could not fight for his kingdom; if they could not fight for his kingdom, they could not fight for any kingdom, hence in this respect could not be members and supporters of the earthly kingdoms. (66)

To Lipscomb, Christians are not permitted to fight in any military. He wrote:

> [Christ] had plainly declared that his children could not fight with carnal weapons even for the establishment of his own Kingdom. Much less could they slay and destroy one another in the contentions and strivings of the kingdoms of this world. It took but little thought to see that Christians cannot fight, cannot slay one another or their fellowmen, at the behest of any earthly ruler, or to establish or maintain any human government. (iv)

Although supporters of war and militarism often claim to have morality and God on their side, Lipscomb believed that killing people on the behalf of government is not a moral act. As a result, all later commentators label Lipscomb a pacifist, sometimes disparagingly (Brock, 1968:841; Cashdollar, 1997:904; Harrell, 1964:270; Hughes, 1992:192,197).

b. Christians should not participate in politics

In addition to opposing militarism, Lipscomb opposed political participation as a means of attaining change both on principle and on practical grounds. Lipscomb (21–22) wrote, “God neither permitted the subjects of his government to form alliances, or affiliate with the human

governments, or consort with their subjects, not to participate in their affairs to sustain and uphold them." To Lipscomb the political process is inherently corrupting and should not be the domain of Christians.

Lipscomb warned Christians against forming alliances with governmental groups, even if they think the alliance could bring about some good. Politics lures the participants in and undermines their goals. Lipscomb (22) wrote, "Whenever God's children sought the alliance of a human government or institution for help and for good to them, that help became the means of their confusion and the occasion of their shame." Many people believe that one must form bonds with politicians or government officials to advance one's program. In most cases, however, they end up advancing the politicians' programs.

Lipscomb believed that working with government only strengthens the state. He (133) said that one cannot work for government and follow God's law, arguing that "No man can serve two masters," or "cherish two antagonistic spirits." Lipscomb wrote:

> Christ's mission – the mission of his kingdom – is to put down and destroy all these kingdoms, and to destroy every thing that exercises rule, authority or power on earth. How can the servants of Christ and the subjects of his kingdom, enter into, strengthen, and build up that which Christ and his kingdom are commissioned to destroy. How can a Christian enter into and serve the human, how can he divide his fealty, his love, his means and his time, his talent between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one? (83–4)

By entering politics, one will inevitably have to support certain government endeavors, and Lipscomb believed this to be wrong.

Lipscomb thought poorly of those who entered politics or worked in an essential government role.[18] Although politicians and officeholders often attempt to claim the moral high

[18] Lipscomb believed that one can work in a government job so long as that position does not require doing anything coercive or essential for the state. Lipscomb (141-142) explained, "There are requirements sometimes made of persons by the government that they have difficulty in determining whether they violate the law of God in doing them. Among them is jury service. The rule determined in the preceding pages, is, the Christian should take no part

ground, calling themselves public servants and the like, Lipscomb believed that such people are going against God's will. He (49) wrote, "Every one who honors and serves the human government and relies upon it, for good, more than he does upon the Divine government, worships and serves the creature more than he does the Creator." He was especially critical of those who created government:

> [A]ll who established other governments violated the principles of natural justice, and are condemned by God, to destruction unless they repent. God has at no time in the world's history accepted a people with a human government as his people. (50)

Rather than lauding the originators of government as heroic figures, Lipscomb said that they need to repent. A moral people must turn to God rather than turning to government.

c. Christians should not vote

In addition, Lipscomb believed that the moral person should not vote. He (133) wrote, "Christians are to be supporters and partisans of none." Lipscomb believed that one should not use coercion through the ballot box, even if the goal is to bring about positive change. He wrote:

> To the claim that a Christian is bound to vote, when he has the privilege, for that which promotes morality, and to fail to vote for the restriction and suppression of evil is to vote for it, we have determined that, to vote or use the civil power is to use force and carnal weapons. Christians cannot use these. To do so is to do evil

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in the administration or support of the government. Jury service is a part of its administration, and frequently lays on the juryman the duty of determining the life or death of his fellowman, and leads into affiliation with the agencies of government. Some anxious for office say, a postmaster is not a political office. Hence he may hold it, that clerkship in the executive offices are not political – but they are part of the essential elements of the civil administration, and make the holder a supporter of the government. Yet there are employments sometimes given in carrying on government operations that a Christian it seems to me might perform. The government builds a house. House building is no part of the administration of government. A mason or carpenter might do work on this building without other relation to the government than that of employe to the government. The government wishes a school taught. Teaching school is no part of the administration of the government. It seems to me a Christian might teach a government school as an employe without compromising his position. As a rule he may work as an employe of the government but may not be an officer or supporter. As a rule the government exacts an oath of its officers, to support the government but it does not of its employees. Its employes in building, in school teaching, in surveying, are frequently foreigners who do not owe allegiance to the government, in these a Christian it seems to me might work. This work constitutes no part of the government administration and requires no affiliation with or obligation to support the government."

> that good may come. This is specially forbidden to Christians. To do so is to fight God's battles with the weapons of the evil one. To do so is to distrust God. (145)

To Lipscomb, the ends do not justify the means. A worldview that opposes the use of force should not attempt to use coercive methods such as voting to bring about one's goals.

Many advocates of voting suggest that one should vote for the lesser of two evils. Lipscomb was not convinced by such a view. Voting is likely to have unforeseen consequences, especially given that politicians are not always honest.[19] One should not support a politician or a policy if that course of action may end up bringing about wrong. Lipscomb wrote:

> But some may say, It is a Christian's duty to vote against war and against that which will produce war. Yes, but how can he know which course will, or will not bring about war? (v)

Given that policies often have unintended consequences, one can see why a moral person might not want to be involved in choosing one set of government policies over another.

Lipscomb also addressed whether voters who support bad policies are culpable. Many voters believe that individually they are not responsible when they elect a politician who turns out to be a tyrant, but Lipscomb disagreed. He says that those who voted for people who supported war are as unfit for serving God as prominent Churches of Christ member James A. Garfield, who became a war general. Lipscomb wrote:

> Then again, he who maintains and supports an institution is responsible for the general results of that institution. The general and necessary results of human government are war and the use of carnal weapons to maintain the government. Every one then that actively supports human government, is just as responsible for the wars and bloodshed that grow out of its existence and maintenance as are the men who actively wage and carry on the war. Then every one who voted to bring about and carry on the war was just as much unfitted for service in the kingdom of God as was Gen. Garfield or any other soldier in the army. The same is true of every man that supports and maintains human government. (139–140)

[19] Wilburn (1969:224) tells a story about Tolbert Fanning being asked to sit among legislators and Fanning responding, "I have four new shirts in this bundle under my arm, that cost me five dollars. I cannot risk a thing of such value among you fellows."

Lipscomb did not consider the issue of supporting bad policies a light matter. He (139) wrote, "Every man who voted to bring on or perpetuate that war [the Civil War], was just as guilty before God as the men who actively participated in it. Their souls were just as much stained in blood."

Lipscomb also addressed the issue of whether electing government to commit an act that one would not do oneself is illegitimate. Although the typical person might not pull a trigger, that same person may adopt a different ethic in the ballot box and not feel responsible when elected officials pull the trigger. In such a case, Lipscomb would place responsibility where it is due, on everyone who participates in an immoral act. He wrote:

> [I]f he cannot fight himself, can he vote to make another fight? What I lead or influence another to do, I do through that other. The man who votes to put another in a place or position, is in honor, bound to maintain him in that position, and is responsible for all the actions, courses or results that logically and necessarily flow from the occupancy and maintenance of that position. A man who votes to bring about a war, or that votes for that which logically and necessarily brings about war is responsible for that war and for all the necessary and usual attendants and results of that war. (iv)

One can understand why Lipscomb was against Christians participating on juries as well (141). He believed that voters, jurists, and politicians are culpable when their collaboration results in the innocent being punished.

Lipscomb was unequivocal that Christians should not vote, but that did not mean he believed that Christians could not or should not bring about any social change. Just because one does not participate in politics does not mean one dismisses the world. Instead of using politics, one can (and must) bring about change through non-coercive means. Lipscomb wrote:

> The effective way for Christians to promote morality in a community, is, to stand aloof from the political strifes and conflicts, and maintain a pure and true faith in God, which is the only basis of true morality, and is as a leaven in society, to keep alive an active sense of right. To go into political strife is to admit the leaven of

> evil into the church.…God has told his children to use the spiritual weapons, has warned them against appealing to the sword or force to maintain his kingdom or to promote the honor of God and the good of man. (145)

To Lipscomb, one cannot advance good by using evil, such as force or politics, so one must rely on methods such as moral persuasion. He believed that one must stay true to one's beliefs and hold justice and moral persuasion as guiding principles.[20] To sell out one's principles is to sell out one's goals, so one must eschew political participation and voting altogether.

d. Christians should put faith in God rather than the state

Lipscomb did not, as so many others do, consider the state as a savior or an institution that fixes problems. Whereas others saw a role for the state (even if limited), Lipscomb saw no role. He recognized that people would have many questions about how society would function. He wrote:

> Questions come up in the workings of society and before the voters of a country that involve moral good to the community. Such are the questions regarding the restriction of the sale of intoxicants, the licensing of race courses and gambling houses and places of licentiousness. It is strongly denied in such cases that the government that restricts and prohibits sin can be of the devil, and hence it is claimed a Christian should vote on all such questions of morality. (144)

To this Lipscomb responded:

> To the first, it is replied, the devil has always been quite willing to compromise with Christians if he can induce them to divide their allegiance and to give the greater service to the upbuilding of his kingdom. He offered this compromise to the Savior when here on earth. Was quite willing the Savior should rule, and doubtless in his own way, and make things as moral and respectable as he desired them, if it only promoted the growth of his kingdom and extended and supported his rule and dominion. ….There is no doubt the devil is willing to turn moral reformer and make the world moral and respectable, if thereby his rule and authority are established and extended. And it may be set down as a truth that all reformations that propose to stop short of a full surrender of the soul, mind, and body up to God, are of the devil. (144–145)

[20] Lipscomb's recommendation that Christians should set a good example rather than getting involved with political squabbles is similar to Richard Cobden's suggestion that peace loving nations set a good example rather than become embroiled in other governments' conflicts (Stringham, 2004).

Lipscomb did not support vice, but he opposed government laws against it because he knew that government was up to no good. As an opponent of laws against intoxicants, gambling, and prostitution, Lipscomb undoubtedly should be classified as a libertarian as opposed to a political conservative in the modern sense of the terms.

In addition, Lipscomb opposed government laws against crime. In 1887 Lipscomb wrote, "God is able to cope with this question [liquor] as with adultery, dishonesty, murder or other sins" (quoted in Hooper, 1979:201). He did not support crime; he just opposed civil government enacting such laws. Lipscomb argued against the popular view that government is on the side of good. He wrote:

> [Paul] declared the exercise of the civil authority, to be a bearing the sword to execute vengeance and wrath, he told the disciples they could not execute vengeance, and that 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strongholds,' 2 Cor. x: 4, showing clearly that the Christians could not use these civil powers to promote righteousness, morality, or good to humanity. (86)

Thus, even if a particular law seems consistent with God's law, all government laws should be opposed because the coercive tactics of civil government are incompatible with the government of God.

All too often, however, government attempts to carry out its affairs in the name of morality and portrays its critics as supporters of mayhem. If government can promote laws in the name of order, they can more easily denounce those who criticize them. Lipscomb, however, rejected the notion that order is a product of the state. He believed that peace and order come before government and that government crowds them out. Lipscomb wrote:

> The government of God breaks down divisions among those who accept it, and brings peace and complete union to all who submit to his rule. Whatever tends to wean men from this government of God, and to substitute other governments for

> it, brings confusion and strife. Then, in every way, the introduction of human government brought confusion, division, strife. (98)

He also realized that people would come up with a laundry list of hypothetical problems and then ask how they could be solved without government. Lipscomb addressed such a point of view:

> Various difficulties are presented to the position here taken. Such as, If Christians give the government up to sinners and those rejecting God, what will become of the world? What will become of Christians? If all were converted to the Christian religion, we would still need civil government. How would the mails be carried? How could the affairs of Railroads, Manufactures, and the many large corporations needful to the well-being of society be managed? (136)

Lipscomb recognized that real world problems exist, but he disagreed that government should attempt to solve them.

Furthermore, Lipscomb argued that none of the problems that government is allegedly attempting to solve should be sticking points regarding the abolition of civil government. Instead of putting faith in civil government we should put faith in the government of God. He wrote:

> To the wisdom, and power and management, of him who created and rules the heavens we will cheerfully commit the adjustment and management of all things pertaining to the world, to man, and his well-being here or hereafter. And no true believer in God can have any apprehension of failure in ought that pertains to man's well-being here or hereafter. (136)

Lipscomb (50) argued that establishing and having "governments violated the principles of natural justice," and that these civil governments should be dismantled: "Then, and only then will peace and quiet prevail on earth, and union, harmony, and good will reign among men" (28).

VI. Reception, Influence, and Legacy of Lipscomb's ideas

Lipscomb had a profound influence on members of his religious tradition during his day, but his influence in the Churches of Christ has waned in recent years. It would be an overstatement to say that all or even most of his readers agreed with Lipscomb (Hooper,

1979:117–121), but many did. Harrell, (2004:224) reports, “Many Southerners, deeply chagrined by Northern support for the Union cause, and particularly by the actions of the American Christian Missionary Society, found Lipscomb’s arguments persuasive.” The pacifist influence of Lipscomb and others in the Churches of Christ was very strong through the early part of the 20th century. In 1926, for example, 450 Churches of Christ preachers were asked, “Do you believe that a Christian can scripturally take a human life in war?” and fewer than 25 answered “yes” (Collins, 1985:174). Many of these preachers taught that Christians should avoid the military and war, and during the Civil War, World War I, and World War II, the Churches of Christ were one of the largest producers of conscientious objectors (Casey, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1997; Collins, 1985:156).

During all three of these conflicts their pacifism got Lipscomb and his associates in trouble with civil authorities. For example, when the Civil War broke out in 1861, Fanning, Lipscomb, and others maintained that Christians should not be compelled to fight in war (Lipscomb, 131). They sent letters to the Governor of Tennessee, the President of the Confederacy, and later the President of the Union stating that “there is a conflict between the requirements of worldly government and the law of God” and that committed Christians cannot “in any manner engage in, aid, foment, or countenance the strifes, animosities and bloody conflicts in which civil governments are frequently engaged” (Lipscomb, 129). Their views did not make Lipscomb and Fanning popular with the Confederate government, or with the Federal government after the North occupied Tennessee in 1862. Lipscomb received “threats of lynching from war enthusiasts from both sides” (Brock, 1968:912), and the Federal government convicted Fanning of treason, confiscated his possessions, and burnt his property (Wilburn, 1969:217–9; West, 1954:78).

Despite these difficulties, Lipscomb espoused his views with increased vitality after the Civil War; he published almost all of his anti-war and anti-state views between the Civil War and World War I. Yet, as Casey (1992a, b) and West (unpublished) document in detail, by the time of World War I, expressing such views had become even more difficult. As Fanning and Lipscomb had done during the Civil War, "In October, 1917, the faculty and students of the Nashville Bible School [founded by Lipscomb in 1891 and now named Lipscomb University] petitioned the President of the United States for a release from compulsory military service during World War I" (Hooper, 1966:241). Lipscomb's *Gospel Advocate* also continued expressing pacifist views.

Such expressions attracted the attention of the Federal Government, which had recently passed the Espionage Act of 1917, and it silenced many people associated with the Churches of Christ with, in Casey's (1992a:382) words, "brute force." The government had recently given "U.S. district attorneys…broad powers to shut down pacifist publications," and in the last year of Lipscomb's life, the government set its sights on his paper. The government threatened to close the publication, and it threatened Lipscomb's co-editor "J.C. McQuiddy, publisher of the *Gospel Advocate*, with arrest if he continued to publish articles judged 'seditious' and that discouraged 'registration of young men under the Selective Service…Act.'" McQuiddy backed down (Hughes, 1992:201), and "By mid-August, 1917, the journal dropped pacifist articles and any discussion of the Christian and civil government from its columns" (Collins, 1985:151). The U.S. government also imprisoned Churches of Christ draftees who refused to fight, stating that their religious tradition had no official creed in opposition to war (never mind the fact that the Churches of Christ was against having official creeds). The government also completely shut down one Lipscomb-influenced college, Cordell Christian College, because its president, all but

one of its board, and most of its faculty were pacifists who did not "fully support the war effort" (Collins, 1985:153–6).

This censorship and silencing of the views held by Lipscomb and others in that tradition profoundly influenced the Churches of Christ. According to Hughes (1992:201), "One observes among Churches of Christ from that date forward a gradual disintegration of the pacifist sentiment until, by the early 1960's, pacifism had almost entirely vanished from this fellowship." Hughes (1996:63–166) documents in detail the efforts against Lipscomb after his death by Foy E. Wallace (1896–1979), who in 1930 became the new editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. Wallace was extremely hostile to Lipscomb and referred to conscientious objectors as "freak specimen[s] of humanity" (quoted in Casey, 1997:97). He changed the editorial opinions of Lipscomb's former paper to "favor participation of Christians in all phases of government, including military combat, a position that caused consternation among the traditionally pacifist leadership of Churches of Christ" (Gardner, 2004:768). Without a publication or church members to continue his word, most of Lipscomb's radical views fell between the cracks. Hughes (1995:136) wrote, "There can be no doubt that Lipscomb's radical posture declined in popularity among Churches of Christ as the nineteenth century wore on." Today, despite the fact that the school that Lipscomb founded, Nashville Bible College, now bears Lipscomb's name, Hooper (1966:242) reports that there in 1965, "Probably no more than two faculty members adhere strictly to the position of David Lipscomb."[21]

[21] When I presented an early draft of this paper at a conference in 2006, I was much less certain than I am now if I was interpreting Lipscomb's views correctly. During the question and answer period, however, a gentleman in the audience stood up and said, "I don't have a question, but I have a comment. I went to Lipscomb University, and I want to say that the way you are interpreting him is exactly right. Almost nobody knows his views, but for a few people. I only know his views because the history professor I studied under was Lipscomb's biographer [Robert Hooper]" (Personal conversation, Auburn, Alabama, March 18, 2006).

In the field of political economy, Lipscomb obviously has had much less influence than preachers on the opposite side of political economic spectrum, such as Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918). Rauschenbusch and others associated with the Social Gospel movement (Marty, 1997:283–292) had a tremendous influence on economists such as Richard T. Ely, who sought to use government to reform society (Bateman and Kapstein, 1999; Rothbard, 2002). As postmillennialists, they believed both that Christ would come again after Christianity reigned supreme for 1,000 years, and they also believed that government could help bring about this world. Although scholars debate whether Lipscomb was a postmillennialist or a premillenialist (Rollman, 2004:304–307), he was undoubtedly against using government to attempt to reform society. This would put his political economic views in line with the most radical laissez-faire economists, but Lipscomb was not on their radar screen. In fact, authors such as Martin (1970) wrote entire books about radical individualism in 19th century America with no mention of preachers like Lipscomb.

VII. Conclusion.

Despite being overlooked by political economists, Lipscomb's ideas are not lost, and they are a potentially valuable source for historians of thought as well as political economists interested in liberty and Christianity today. Lipscomb's *Civil Government* is remarkable because it anticipated many of the arguments that libertarian economists have made over the past thirty years. Lipscomb viewed government as an immoral and coercive institution rather than a product of a voluntary social contract. He saw the state as a source of conflict rather a protector of peace. He believed that morality preceded all states, and he opposed the state in all forms. Lipscomb

also argued that moral people should not participate in politics, vote, or fight in wars. His arguments are surprisingly similar to those made by radical libertarians such as Murray Rothbard (2000), Robert Higgs (2004), and Jeffrey Rogers Hummel (2001).

Although some people call Lipscomb a conservative (Harrell, 1964:276; Foster, 1987:357) and others call Lipscomb a liberal (Hooper, 1979:221; Campbell, 1968:17), in the realm of political economy he is best described as a libertarian, and a radical one at that. Lipscomb believed in morality, justice, and law, just not the state. His writing is important for many reasons. It demonstrates that a Christian can be a radical libertarian, and also that a radical libertarian can be a Christian. With its many insights, Lipscomb's writing shows that political economists can learn from writers outside their field, especially those in religion. I hope this article will renew interest in David Lipscomb and encourage others to explore and write about his work on Christianity and freedom.

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