

FOREWORD

This book is an important but neglected classic in moral philosophy and political economy. Its author, David Lipscomb (1831-1917) was an influential Tennessee preacher who published the contents of this book as articles in 1866-67 (Lipscomb, 1889:v) and compiled them book in 1889. Although few people appear to be aware of the ideas in this point, this book includes many points that political economists, especially radical libertarian ones, are making today. 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. He 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 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 using force. He argued that Christians should not participate in politics, should not vote, and should not fight in wars. Lipscomb was not afraid to oppose civil government in all its forms. One can view this book as a biblical defense of a voluntary society.

Libertarian legal philosophers (Hasnas, 2004; Hayek, 1994) have questioned the idea that government needs to engage in legislation. Libertarian economists (Stringham, 2005; Powell, 2005) have questioned the idea that the government was created for the public good. Libertarian economists (Holcombe, 2002; Hoppe, 2001) have questioned whether democracy serves the interests of the people. Libertarian economists (Higgs,

2004; Rothbard, 2000) have argued that governments may actually seek to increase conflict in order to increase their power. Libertarian political philosophers (Watner, Smith, and McElroy, 1983) have argued against voting, instead supporting change through non-coercive and non-political means. Libertarian economists (Caplan and Stringham, 2005; Hummel 2001) have discussed the importance of persuading people if one wants to change public policy. Libertarian economists (Boettke, 2005; Rothbard, 1996; Stringham, 2003) have argued that peaceful human interaction does not depend on the state. In the 19th century, David Lipscomb made all of these points.

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 modern political lingo he is best described as a libertarian, and a radical one at that. Lipscomb believed in morality, justice, and law, just not the state. Lipscomb's 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 so many insights, Lipscomb's writing shows that political economists can learn from writers outside their field, especially religion. I hope this reprint will renew interest in Lipscomb's ideas. After publishing *Civil Government* Lipscomb (quoted in Hughes, 1992: 194) 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." I agree. This book has the potential to change the world.

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