



**The Radical Libertarian Political
Economy of 19th Century Preacher
David Lipscomb**

EDWARD P. STRINGHAM
Department of Economics, San Jose State University

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

EDWARD P. STRINGHAM

Department of Economics, San Jose State University

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 David Lipscomb, Lipscomb's writing includes many points that political economists, especially radical libertarian ones, are making today. This article highlights some of Lipscomb's insights and relates them to arguments made by economists in the past three decades. 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. He 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 similar arguments that Lipscomb made more than a century in advance.

JEL classification: B19, B31, P16, Z12

I. Introduction

Despite the importance of religion in society, many, if not most, political economists disregard writers who explicitly invoke religion in their arguments. Free-market advocates from Rand (1982) to Posner (1996) consider Christianity unscientific and at odds with their normative views; they believe that Christianity and economics or Christianity and liberty are incompatible.¹ Rothbard (1995a) and Nelson (1998), on the other hand, argue that academics should not be so dismissive.² Western ideas and institutions are heavily influenced and may even depend on religion (Novak, 1982; Boettke, 2001), so discounting religious writers means ignoring potentially important works. One valuable, but neglected, work on political economy was authored by Tennessean preacher David Lipscomb (1831-1917). *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission, and Destiny, and the Christian's Relation To It*, was published as articles in 1866-67 (Lipscomb, 1889:v) and compiled as a book in 1889.³ 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 intends to show that Lipscomb is a neglected precursor of modern political economy and that radical libertarianism has an often overlooked but

¹ For example, Ayn Rand (1982:66) wrote, “Faith and force...are corollaries: every period of history dominated by mysticism, was a period of statism, of dictatorship, of tyranny.”

² Rothbard (1990:41) believes that, regrettably, religious influence on the history of thought is ignored, “Because the 20th century is the century of atheistic, secularist intellectuals.” He says, “When I was growing up, anyone who was religious was considered slightly wacky or even unintelligent. That was the basic attitude of all intellectuals.”

³ All quotes in this paper from *Civil Government* are from the edition published in 1913.

longstanding religious tradition in America. Lipscomb's work features biblical references throughout,⁴ but even atheist political economists should not dismiss it as an unreasoned statement of faith. *Civil Government* includes many points that modern political economists, especially radical libertarian ones, are making today. This article will highlight some of Lipscomb's insights and relate them to arguments made by libertarian political economists including: Boettke (2005), Caplan and Stringham (2005), Hasnas (2004), Hayek (1994), Higgs (2004), Holcombe (2002), Hoppe (2001), Hummel (1990, 2001), McElroy (1997), Powell (2005), Rothbard (1977, 1978, 1995b, 1996, 1998, 2000), Smith (1983), and Stringham (2004a, 2005).

None of these authors appear to have been aware of Lipscomb's writings, but they seem to have independently discovered many arguments that Lipscomb made more than a century in advance. 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,

⁴ This paper does not reprint any of Lipscomb's biblical quotes and instead focuses on his arguments and commentary. Readers interested in how Lipscomb uses biblical text back to back up his arguments are referred to the original text.

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.

As discussed below, 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. As such, he should be considered one of the first radical libertarian writers.

This article does not contain a lengthy discussion about arguments for or against libertarianism or Christianity. Instead, it highlights the similarities between the writings of Lipscomb and modern radical libertarians. The paper is organized as follows: Section II gives some information about the context in which David Lipscomb wrote; Section III explains Lipscomb's opposition to civil government; Section IV discusses Lipscomb's beliefs of how Christians should treat government; Section V offers two hypotheses about why Lipscomb's writings have been largely overlooked and then concludes.

II. Background/Context

Hooper (1966:240) writes, "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 grew out of the “Restoration Movement” started by Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) and Barton W. Stone (1772-1844), which sought to “‘restore’ doctrinally and spiritually the church of the first century in modern times” (Campbell, 1968:7). At the beginning of the 20th century, the Churches of Christ and the related Disciples of Christ had more than a million members (Collins, 1984:20-3),⁵ and today the Churches of Christ has almost three million members, making it one of the ten largest religious bodies in the United States (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001:12).⁶ Although some Church historians have written books about Lipscomb (West, 1954; Hooper, 1979; Robinson, 1973; Collins, 1984), few, if any, political economists seem to be aware of Lipscomb’s libertarian political views.⁷

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 time in Illinois proved fatal to David’s mother and three of his siblings, who died of fever in 1835-6, so the Lipscombs moved back to Tennessee as soon as they could (West, 1954:30-1).⁸ In 1846 David entered Franklin College which was run by Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) (Wilburn, 1969:77-101).

⁵ 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).

⁶ Today the Churches of Christ has roughly a half million members (Kosmin, Mayer, and Keysar, 2001:12).

⁷ One notable exception is economic historian Wilburn (1969), who discusses Lipscomb in his biography of Tolbert Fanning. Other than that, this author found no publications by economists that mention Lipscomb.

⁸ Hooper (1966:99) writes, “Most of his immediate family was lost because of emancipation ideas.”

Tolbert Fanning, “the most powerful second-generation leader among the mid-South Churches of Christ” (Hughes, 1992:192), 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). Collins (1984:71) writes, “Lipscomb’s views were influenced by the Anabaptist beliefs on the Christian and the state, passed through pioneer Disciples leaders like Barton W. Stone, Alexander Campbell, and especially Tolbert Fanning.” These preachers believed that Christians’ primary duty is to the Kingdom of God rather than to kingdoms of this earth and that individual morality, rather than government force, was essential for a good society. Hughes (1992:182) writes, “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.”⁹

Lipscomb biographer Hooper (1979:97) has hypothesized that Lipscomb’s anti-political views were shaped by the Civil War, and Isaac Errett (1820-1888) made the stronger claim 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, concluding that the anti-war and anti-state position was only a product of the Civil War seems mistaken. Research by West (1954) Wilburn (1969), and Hughes (1992:190) shows that Lipscomb’s anti-political views had a tradition “in Churches of Christ for over a century.” Hughes (1992:190) writes, “This tradition held that civil government—including American democracy—was both demonic and illegitimate and that Christians

⁹ In 1843, late in life, 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). Tolbert 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). David Lipscomb (1906:35) reported that Fanning “never voted or took part in the political and civil contests of the country.” David Lipscomb expressed anti-war views in 1861 (Collins, 1984:70) and anti-political views (in *Civil Government*) only five years later, when he was in his mid-thirties.

should refuse all active participation in government and politics, including voting.” This supports Wilburn’s (1969:227) account, which documents how “Fanning’s views on civil government, politics, and war did not emerge from the Civil War.”¹⁰ 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.”

Lipscomb (116,127) stated that he was simply carrying on the tradition that went back through the American colonists all the way to before Christ. 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.”¹¹ Lipscomb may be one of the most explicit expositors of this radical libertarian Christian position, but he stated that the ideas were not unique to him and rather dated back to ancient times. Lipscomb 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 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)

He (128) said that “separation from the state and from all participation in civil affairs, was universal among Christians for the first two or three hundred years” and that “If the

¹⁰ Wilburn (1969:224-5) writes, “Fanning, at great sacrifice, had held himself above strife during the war and, for many years previous to the war, 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.” Wilburn (1969:101) writes, “Lipscomb reflected and further developed Fanning’s views on civil government.”

¹¹ Murray Rothbard (1970) corroborates Lipscomb's account; he describes how radical libertarianism was an important part of American heritage among Anabaptists, Mennonites, and more. In addition, Lipscomb's teachers appear to have been aware of and influenced by the philosophy of seventeenth century libertarian John Locke (Campbell, 1968:79; Collins, 1984:29).

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.”

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Tolbert Fanning, David 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 saying that 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); the Federal government convicted Fanning of treason, confiscated his possessions and burnt his property (Wilburn, 1969:217-9; West, 1954: 78). Nevertheless, after the Civil War Fanning and Lipscomb continued to express their views. They brought back the *Gospel Advocate*, a weekly periodical that Fanning had founded in 1855 but suspended during the Civil War.¹² In this periodical Lipscomb expressed various religious and political positions including opposition to slavery, lynching, public schools,

¹² Tolbert Fanning founded the *Gospel Advocate* as a monthly periodical with David’s brother William Lipscomb in 1855, but it was shut down during the Civil War (Wilburn, 1969:210). Fanning and David Lipscomb co-edited the *Gospel Advocate* from 1866 to 1870, and David Lipscomb edited it from that point forward. The *Gospel Advocate* had 10,000 subscribers by 1890 (Hooper, 1979:202) and according to Hughes (1992:191-2) made Lipscomb “clearly the most influential person among Churches of Christ from the close of the Civil War until his death in 1917.” The *Gospel Advocate* touched on religious debates from the role of instrumental music during worship to the role of missionary societies in the Churches of Christ. 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).

laws against vice, voting, political participation, and war (*Gospel Advocate*, various dates).

III. Lipscomb's opposition to civil government

a. The state is not created for the public good

Although Lipscomb's book was written in the 19th century, it touches on many issues debated in political economy today. Analyzing all of Lipscomb's arguments in light of modern political economy would take more than just one article, but let us consider some of his main points. Lipscomb believed in natural justice (1889:50), a view that morality is determined independent of the state. Whereas many contemporary political scientists such as Berns (2001) believe that government's laws must come above everything else, including the rules of God,¹³ Lipscomb was no positivist willing to accept whatever the government declared. Lipscomb (1889:iii) said 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."

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.¹⁴ 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

¹³ For example, Berns (2001:31) writes, "Whether a law is just or unjust is a judgment that belongs to no 'private man,' however pious or learned, or, as we say today, sincere he may be. This means that we are first of all citizens, and only secondarily Christians, Jews, Muslims, or any other religious persuasion." For a critical review of Burns, see Gordon (2001).

¹⁴ 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.

to the human governments of earth.” Because of this, Lipscomb believed that all government legislation lacks virtue. He 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.” (41) Such a view parallels libertarian legal commentators such as Lysander Spooner (1882), Friedrich Hayek (1973), Randy Barnett (1998), and John Hasnas (2004), who critique the notion that government must engage in legislation.¹⁵ If just or optimal rules can be determined independent of government, then government lawmaking is superfluous at best and more often disruptive.

Whereas today's more mainstream political economists consider government lawmaking to be a positive good (North, 1990; Epstein, 1999), Lipscomb viewed it as an ignoble replacement for the morality that precedes all government. Lipscomb was not a follower of 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1668), who believed that government should be created to prevent hostilities between all. Nor would Lipscomb be a follower of modern constitutional political economists such as James Buchanan (1975) and Dennis Mueller (1996), who believe 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.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hayek (1973) was not a critic of all government legislation, but he certainly was highly skeptical (Hasnas 2004).

¹⁶ 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,

Public choice economists Buchanan and Tullock (1962) are often considered revolutionaries for analyzing government as self-interested actors (Tollison, 1998:f6), yet David Lipscomb's writing of 100 years before 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." Thus, he took a view similar to libertarian economists such as Bruce Benson (1994), Murray Rothbard (2000) and Randall Holcombe (2004), who argue that government is created for the benefit of its rulers rather than the public.

Certain contemporary political scientists such as Rummel (1997) recognize that governments are often tyrannical, but they argue that adopting democratic institutions can eliminate these problems. The type of government did not matter to Lipscomb, however; 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." Lipscomb's position is similar to that of modern libertarian economists Randall Holcombe (2002) and Hans-Herman Hoppe (2001), who criticize democracy, as well as to Murray Rothbard's (1995b) arguments about how even democratic governments are ruled by special interests.

human government, the embodied effort of man to rule the world without God, ruled over by 'the prince of this world,' the devil."

Compare Lipscomb's view to that of some non-libertarian political scientists who believe that states go wrong when the wrong people are in power. According to Berns (2001), if rulers are virtuous statesmen committed to good, the problems of bad government are unlikely to arise. Lipscomb (23), in contrast, 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 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's beliefs were consistent with the perspective of Lord Acton, who said, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." According to this view, giving people the power to govern and use force over others will necessarily lead them to abuse their power.

Some political economists, such as Brennan and Buchanan (1980), believe that one can devise a constitution that will include general rules and eliminate opportunities for self-serving behavior once the government is in place. Lipscomb rejected such a view; 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." Libertarians argue that because those who contribute to designing government almost always are affected by it, believing special interests will not surface during the constitutional phase is unrealistic. The libertarians ask why people who expect to be in power would do anything besides maximize their well-being?

Lipscomb also rejected the idea that government was constituted to counteract humans' sinful nature. In the Federalist Papers, James Madison (1788:262) famously wrote, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." Libertarian economists

such as Powell (2005), however, ask why people would want to give power to a select few if mankind is so bad. Similarly, 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.”

b. The state increases conflict

Not only did Lipscomb question the popular assumption that government is benevolent, but he also questioned that government produces order. Although many political economists such as Buchanan (1975) recognize that government is self-interested, they still believe that government 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,” taxpayers’ money is taken to finance the warfare state. Lipscomb’s views are surprisingly close to those of subsequent libertarian writers such as Murray Rothbard (1978), Robert Higgs (2004), and Randolph Bourne (1918), who argue that “War is the health of the state.” As Bourne (1918:298) wrote, “If

the State's chief function is war, then the State must suck out of the nation a large part of its energy for its purely sterile purposes of defense and aggression.”

Lipscomb was ahead of his time in recognizing that the interests of the people and the government 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. Lipscomb’s analysis is clearly at odds with the public interest view of government that believes militaries act to protect citizens. It is much more consistent with libertarian authors Jeffrey Rogers Hummel and Don Lavoie (1990), who argue that governments have an incentive to protect themselves but not necessarily the public.

The existence of government puts the public at more risk, both Lipscomb and modern libertarians believe; 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)

Similarly, Murray Rothbard (1998:193) wrote, “All state wars, therefore, involve increased aggression against the State’s own taxpayers, and almost all state wars (*all*, in modern warfare) involve maximum aggression (murder) against the innocent civilians ruled by the enemy state.” 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.” According to this view, militaries are not a public good; they are a public bad.

c. Christianity and the state are at odds

Lipcomb obviously was no fan of the status quo, but whereas many authors seek to transform or improve government through various amendments (Anthony, 1998; Bradbury and Crain, 2002; Crane and Pilon, 1994), Lipscomb believed it was incapable of reform. Lipscomb argued that all human governments are inherently immoral institutions,¹⁷ and 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)

¹⁷ Throughout his book Lipscomb (48-9, 54, 56, 60, 92) referred to civil government as an institution of the devil.

Lipscomb would undoubtedly have sided with radical libertarians such as Murray Rothbard (1996), who believe that government should be struck at the root,¹⁸ rather than moderate libertarians such as Daniel Klein (2004), who believe that government must be pruned one layer at a time.

Lipscomb (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.” Rothbard, in his essay, “Do you hate the state?” (1977) contrasted libertarians who mildly oppose government to those who hold the “conviction that the State is the enemy of mankind.” If Rothbard were to describe Lipscomb, he would have favorably labeled him “a button pusher,” someone “who would blister his thumb pushing a button that would abolish the State immediately, if such a button existed.” (Rothbard, 1977)

This would put Christ and his followers as opponents of government, and Lipscomb realized that such a position does not make government officials happy. “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.”

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

¹⁸ Henry David Thoreau wrote, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root" (quoted in Reynolds, 1987:48).

Lipscomb's prescription was radical, but he was no violent revolutionary. Lipscomb argued that a moral society could not be achieved through force. Even if the 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's view closely resembled that of another Christian opponent of government, Leo Tolstoy (1900), who argued that one cannot fight fire with fire and that one cannot use force to end force. Because government is at odds with justice, one 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." As McElroy (2003) discusses, 19th century libertarians believed that violent revolutions rarely if ever bring about positive changes.

But does eschewing violence imply non-action? Quite the contrary. Lipscomb (87) argued that the achievement of a moral society could be brought about 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." Lipscomb believed that the mission of Christianity is to convert people toward the moral, non-governmental, view. Similarly, economist Walter Williams (1999:52) wrote, "We shouldn't focus our energies on trying to change the hearts and minds of politicians. We should try to change the hearts and minds of our fellow Americans."

To Lipscomb, education and persuasion are fundamental. Whereas many supporters of markets believe that introducing political constraints such as term limits has the ability to hold back government, Lipscomb would have considered such nominal

changes in political structure to be of little use. Unless one eliminates the reasons why people support government, 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)

This position is consistent with arguments made by libertarian economists Bastiat (1964), Mises (1981), and Caplan and Stringham (2005), who believe that as long as the majority of the public willingly supports policies at odds with freedom, society will end up with statism. For a society to have a market economy, enough people need to accept the legitimacy of private property and market exchange.

The key is persuading a critical mass to support freedom. Lipscomb's views parallel those by the "voluntaryist" libertarians (Watner, Smith, and McElroy, 1983) who argue that libertarianism can only be achieved through non-violent and non-political means. Watner *et al.* argue that when enough people withdraw their support from the state, it will lose power. Lipscomb held this belief too, believing 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 government is propped up by force, a government with few supporters will have a difficult time imposing its will. Libertarian economic historian Hummel (1990)

supports this outlook; he argues that governments depend on the support of the general public and cannot persist if enough people consider them illegitimate.

Some pessimistic libertarians such as Tyler Cowen (1992), Andrew Rutten (1999), and Randall Holcombe (2004) agree that government is not morally or economically desirable, but they doubt whether it can be abolished. Holcombe (2004) believes that the ubiquity of government today proves its inevitability; thus, we might as well work with it. Lipscomb definitely would have disagreed. More than one hundred years ago, Lipscomb took on the Holcombes of his day. He first quoted an 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)

Lipscomb had a quick response 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. This nearly matches the views of economic historian Jeffrey Rogers Hummel (2001:534), who maintains that saying we should not oppose government because it is so widespread is akin to saying that we should not oppose disease because it is so widespread. The role of Christianity, libertarianism, and, for that matter, medicine, is to oppose that which is injurious to good.

IV. What Christians should and should not do

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 apply in their personal lives to the public sphere. Because morality is determined by a higher power, Lipscomb believed that government should not do anything that is wrong at the level of the individual. His view contrasts with the many authors who believe that government is morally justified carrying out acts, for example using force, that individual citizens should not perform (Nozick, 1974; Rand, 1964).

For example, Lipscomb considered engaging in war to be wrong at the individual and governmental level. He believed that individuals should not support or participate in any wars, even if they are supposedly for good ends. Even if bad governments exist, Lipscomb said that morality forbids fighting against them. 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)

Economic historian Jeffrey Rogers Hummel (1990) explains how many people take a nationalistic approach to military rule, believing that it is better to have a nation ruled by one group rather than another. As Hummel points out, however, in both cases a nation is being ruled and thus the public is not truly free.

Even if one government were more tyrannical than another, Lipscomb argued that one should not fight to support either one. 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, later commentators all label Lipscomb, sometimes disparagingly, a pacifist (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. Today, most libertarian leaning groups located in Washington, D.C., hold that one must work through the political process to attain change. In the 19th century, Lipscomb opposed such a position 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.” Some libertarians today believe that one must form bonds with politicians or government officials to advance one’s program. In most cases, however, these libertarians end up advancing the politicians’ programs: witness the libertarians now working for the government of Iraq to establish their new *public* school system (Evers, 2004).

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’s argument is akin to some made by libertarian philosopher George Smith (1983) who says that moral people should not work to support an institution that they oppose.¹⁹ Lipscomb wrote:

¹⁹ Lipscomb believed that one can work in a government job so long as that job is not 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 in the administration or support of the government. Jury service is a part of its administration, and frequently lays on the jurymen 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 employes. Its employes in building, in school teaching, in surveying, are frequently foreigners who do not owe allegiance to the government, in

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. Although politicians and officeholders often attempt to claim the moral high 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 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. Lipscomb (133) wrote, "Christians are to be supporters and partisans of none." His arguments on voting are very similar to those of radical libertarians such as Watner, Smith, and

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."

McElroy, who believe that voting is immoral. In *Neither Bullets Nor Ballots*, Watner *et al.* (1983) argue that using ballots is just as bad as (if not worse than)²⁰ using bullets to get one's way because both coerce parties who do not agree. 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 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 Watner *et al.* and 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. Some political libertarians such as R.W. Bradford (1996) argue that even if a politician is not ideal, one should support the candidate who favors freedom more. Lipscomb was not convinced by such a view. Voting is likely to have unforeseen consequences, especially given that politicians are not always honest.²¹ 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)

²⁰ McElroy (1997) argues that ballots may be worse than bullets because bullets at least can be aimed to not harm innocent third parties, whereas ballots affect all people.

²¹ Wilburn (1969:224) tells a story of Lipscomb's teacher 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."

In the twentieth century, Austrian economists Mises (1991) and Hayek (1994) pointed out that policies often have unintended consequences opposite of their intended result. As such, one can see why a moral person might not want to be involved in choosing one set of government policies over another. For example, many people believed Hitler was a godsend because he was not a communist (Mayer, 1955), but both Hitler and the communists were responsible for millions of deaths (Rummel, 1994). When faced with a vote between Hitler and Stalin, should the Christian become excited about supporting one politician over another? To libertarian political philosopher McElroy (1997), and presumably also Lipscomb, the answer would be no.

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 held a view consistent with Caplan and Stringham (2005), who argue that the majority is (at the very least partially) responsible for bad policies. 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)

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.”

Bryan Caplan (2001) argues that people usually act rationally in their private lives but irrationally when it comes to voting because the private marginal cost of voting for economically unsound policies is close to zero. Extending Caplan's model to moral values, people may act ethically in their private lives but unethically when voting because voters can vote for coercive policies without being involved (or even knowing about) the details. 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 their elected officials pull the trigger (Mayer, 1955). In such a case, Lipscomb would place responsibility where it is due, on everyone who participates in an immoral act. He would likely have had little use for excuses from executioners such as, 'I am just following orders from the voters' or from voters such as, 'I didn't know the executioner would actually do it.' Lipscomb 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). Lipscomb 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.²² 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 humanity and God rather than government

Lipscomb did not, as so many others do, consider government as a savior or an institution that fixes problems. As George Washington wrote, "Government is not reason. It is not eloquence. Government is force." But whereas Washington saw a limited role for government, 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)

²² Lipscomb's recommendation that Christians should set a good example rather than getting involved with political squabbles is similar to the Richard Cobden's recommendation that peace loving nations set a good example rather than get embroiled in other governments' conflicts (Stringham, 2004a).

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)

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.²³ He did not want to legalize crime; he just opposed civil government enacting such laws. Lipscomb argued against the popular view that government is morally ordained to enforce God's laws. 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.

²³ 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).

All too often, however, government attempts to carry out its affairs in the name of morality and portrays its critics as supporters of mayhem (McElroy, 2003). 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)

Lipscomb's view is similar to that of libertarian economist Bruce Benson (1994), who describes how government in medieval England crowded out private means of settling disputes in their quest to collect more fines. Benson explains how people originally settled their disputes through a system of private restitution, but the government officials he realized they could collect more revenue by making people pay restitution to state. Benson describes how after the government mandated that all restitution go to the king, the private system of dispute settlement disappeared, creating the appearance of a "market failure."

In the 20th and 21st centuries, scores of non-libertarians have come up with lists of areas in which they believe that markets cannot work (Stiglitz, 2002). However, this literature on "market failure" has been questioned by many libertarian economists (Cowen, 1988; Cowen and Crampton, 2002). Similarly, in the 19th century Lipscomb realized that people would come up with a laundry list of hypothetical problems and then ask how they could be solved without government. Although the economics market-

failure literature was still in its infancy, Lipscomb addressed such a point of view. He wrote:

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. As economist James Buchanan (2002:a17) wrote, “Just because something is wrong, or cries out to be fixed, does not mean that government must step in and ‘do something.’” In most cases, these problems can be solved without any government intervention at all. Modern economists have described how government need not be involved with mail delivery (Geddes, 2003), railroads (Folsom, 1988), industrial policy (Boettke, 1994), or issues of corporate governance (Stringham and Boettke, 2005a, 2005b).

Lipscomb argued that none of these problems that government is allegedly attempting to solve should be sticking points regarding the abolition of civil government. Just as Adam Smith said that we could rely on a divine invisible hand to promote the public good (Minowitz, 2005:409), Lipscomb believed that society could function without putting faith in government. Just as Smith wrote:

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, [and] his country. (1790:237)

Lipscomb 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)

Economists, especially those in the Austrian tradition of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, focus on how spontaneous order can emerge without government planning all the details in advance (Stringham, 1999). They have documented how public goods can be produced without government and how civil society can emerge without a state (Foldvary, 1994; Boettke, 2005; Stringham, 2002, 2003, 2005, forthcoming; Stringham and Boettke, 2004). Like these libertarian economists, Lipscomb (28) argued that the one way to achieve a system of natural justice is by dismantling civil government: “Then, and only then will peace and quiet prevail on earth, and union, harmony, and good will reign among men.” Rather than putting faith in a deeply flawed government, instead we should be putting faith in the invisible hand.

VI. Conclusion

Over the past century, political economy has made many significant advances, but political economists should recognize that many advances are not unique to them. Lipscomb’s *Civil Government* is remarkable because it anticipated many of the arguments that libertarian economists make today. Lipscomb viewed the state as an immoral and coercive institution rather than a product of some 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. He argued that moral people should not participate in politics, vote, or fight in wars. His arguments are

surprisingly similar to arguments by radical libertarians from Murray Rothbard to Jeffrey Rogers Hummel.

Nevertheless, libertarian political economists seem to be unaware of Lipscomb's writings. The first possible reason is sociological: For some reason, many libertarians are atheists who would never consider reading a book invoking religion or the Bible. Some atheist individualists such Ayn Rand (1982:66) and James J. Martin (1970:ix) make such extreme statements that liberty and Christianity are incompatible. Such a view is not only wrong for neglecting the fact that libertarianism has a longstanding religious tradition (Rothbard, 1995a; Liggiio, 1996; Capaldi, 2004), but it also unfortunate because it means that academics like Martin (1970) can write entire books about radical individualism in 19th century America with no mention of preachers like Lipscomb. Today libertarian academics are often aware of 19th century individualists like Benjamin Tucker or even relatively obscure authors such as Voltairine de Cleyre (McElroy, 2003), but they seem to be unaware of someone who not only was a better writer but whose ideas were in many ways much more developed.

The second possible reason why Lipscomb's writings have been neglected is political. Government often recognizes that a people who follow a higher power may be less likely to go along with government as it oversteps its bounds. For example, in 1926, 450 Churches of Christ preachers were asked, "Do you believe that a Christian can scripturally take a human life in war?" and only 24 answered yes (Collins, 1985:174). Many of these preachers taught that Christians should avoid the military because they could not fight in war. 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] petitioned the President of the United States for a release from compulsory military service during World War I” (Hooper, 1966:241). According to Collins (1985:156), one of the largest groups of religious conscientious objectors during World War I came from the Churches of Christ.

Such non-obedience did not make government happy. At the onset of World War I, the U.S. government imprisoned many of the conscientious objectors and shut down one Lipscomb influenced school, 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). In the last year of Lipscomb’s life, the government also set their sights on Lipscomb’s paper. The government 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’,” and McQuiddy backed down (Hughes, 1992:201). Collins (1985:151) writes, “By mid-August, 1917, the journal dropped pacifist articles and any discussion of the Christian and civil government from its columns.”

These threats had a profound influence on the church. 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.”²⁴ Without people in his church to continue his word, Lipscomb’s radical views have fallen off many people’s radars. Hughes (1995:136) writes, “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

²⁴ Only thirteen years after Lipscomb’s death, a critic of Lipscomb who rejected pacifism became editor of the *Gospel Advocate* (Hughes, 1992:204).

that a Lipscomb University bears his name, Hooper (1966:242) reports that in 1965 “Probably no more than two faculty members [at Lipscomb University] adhere strictly to the position of David Lipscomb.”

Nevertheless, Lipscomb’s ideas are not lost, and today many political economists hold similar ideas. 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 libertarian²⁵ 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 article will renew interest in and encourage others to explore and perhaps write about Lipscomb’s work.

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²⁵ In fact, the implication of Lipscomb’s argument is that supporters of civil government are not good Christians (Lipscomb, 1889:16).

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