

Session 1: Faith & Politics – A Spectrum of Perspectives

Rejection: Christ against politics

- Many fundamentalists view the culture as inherently evil and the domain of Satan.
- This is an exclusive one-kingdom approach advocated by Tertullian.
- Christians are citizens only of the heavenly kingdom.
- The Gospel is limited to the personal life and the world is left to the devil.
- Politics is rejected and the faith community seeks to insulate itself from its corrupting influences.

Paradox: Christ and Politics

- Christianity and culture are seen as a paradox with no resolution in sight.
- Therefore, the Christian lives in the world as best as he or she can.
- In this separate-kingdoms approach, politics is seen as evil, yet necessary.
- As a Christian, one should play no significant role in politics, participating in government only when required by law and even then trying to avoid its contaminating influence.
- The Church remains only in the religious sphere.

Critical Collaboration: Christ above Politics

- Thomas Aquinas maintained that though the Christian and culture must coexist, Christianity is superior to culture.
- This is a higher-and-lower-kingdoms perspective where politics is viewed as basically good or neutral, but still deficient.
- Though compromise may be necessary in certain areas, the Christian's role is primarily one of critique, (evaluating political policies from the framework of the gospel.)
- Careful involvement with social issues is allowed providing gospel priorities are not compromised.

Synthesis: Christ of Politics

- Government is seen as basically good.
- Government is an element of the divine plan for humankind.
- This is an inclusive one-kingdom view where there is little or no tension between the Christian and politics.
- Foundations for this mindset can be found in the writings of Justin Martyr and have been reinvigorated by liberalism.
- Christianity is identified with politics at its best.

Imposition: Christ through Politics

- Some Christians, (best exemplified by liberation theology and the Christian Right), maintain that Christianity must dramatically reshape the culture.
- Through the political process, evil must be opposed and divine standards established as the law of the land.
- The world is viewed as fallen yet redeemable in this revolutionary-kingdom perspective.
- Christians are God's agents for dramatic renovation.
- Christians are to realign the government according to God's political agenda.

Session 2: Insights from Old Testament Characters

Joseph

- Joseph is brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams.
- Joseph does not stop with mere interpretation, but proposes a plan of political action including political appointments and taxation. (Gen 41:33-36)
- In Genesis 45:9, Joseph tells his brothers that it was "God who . . . has made me lord of all of Egypt" and that this has occurred in order "to save lives."
- Joseph considered his position in government as a direct intervention of God in order that he might assist others through times of hardship.

Moses

- Moses is a political activist without peer.
- In Exodus 2:11-15, he takes immediate action after seeing an Egyptian taskmaster abusing a Hebrew. (*This did lead to 40 years of exile.*)
- Through God's intervention, Moses initiates a second attempt to help his oppressed people.
- He confronts Pharaoh eventually resulting in the freeing of the Hebrew nation. (*Exodus 2:23-14:31*)
- He then instituted a well-developed system of government.
- Cf. Hebrews 11:24-27 to see Moses advocacy for downtrodden and marginalized people.

Saul

- In 1 Samuel 14:24-45, there is an interesting incident of civil protest.
- King Saul, in a fit of rage, vowed to kill his son, Jonathan.
- The king's soldiers protested and rescued Jonathan.
- This passage shows that political intervention/activism can alter a course of affairs and result in favorable outcomes for citizens.

David

- Following God's order, Samuel anointed David as the next king of Israel. King Saul was aware of David's popularity and relentlessly pursued him and tried to kill him.
- Later, when Saul is in David's power and David's men urge him to kill Saul, David replied, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master...seeing he is the anointed of the Lord." (*1 Samuel 24:6*)
- David seemed content to leave the removal of a corrupt leader in God's hands.
- Years later (*1 Kings 1*), Adonijah proclaimed himself king without David's knowledge.

- Nathan, the prophet, aware that David had promised Bathsheba that her son, Solomon would be the next king, notified her and urged her to petition David.
- Furthermore, Nathan offered to intercede in her favor.
- Here, we find a religious leader trying to hold the political process within ethical and moral parameters.

Ahab *1 Kings 21:5-13*

- Ahab coveted and Jezebel conspired to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.
- They sent a secret communication to local officials directing them to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy.
- Elijah, a religious leader, rebuked Ahab for this crime.
- However, the city leaders did what Jezebel asked, and Naboth is convicted and stoned to death.
- If these men had taken a position of moral integrity, in opposition to the immoral political directive, things may have ended differently.
- Both citizens and community leaders have a moral responsibility to resist the devastating impact of a corrupt government on innocent lives.

Daniel & Nebuchadnezzar

- Nebuchadnezzar appoints Daniel ruler over the province of Babylon – (& Daniel accepted.)
- At Daniel's request, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are appointed as provincial administrators.
- Daniel, a prophet, did not think it inappropriate for believers to occupy positions of civil responsibility in a secular government.
- Daniel 3 records how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were present at the dedication of the golden image as Nebuchadnezzar had ordered, but refused to bow down.
- They submitted to civil authority and did not resist punishment, but refused to compromise moral principal.

- This model is seen again in Daniel 6 when Daniel doesn't hesitate to engage in civil disobedience. Neither does he resist the consequences of his convictions.

Esther & Mordecai

- Although God is never directly referenced, the book of Esther portrays the controversy between good and evil played out in the domain of politics.
- Esther is selected to be Xerxes queen and her cousin, Mordecai, is a civil servant who refuses to pay homage to Haman, a high official.
- The extended narrative describes:
 - 1) Civil disobedience by Mordecai by refusing to bow and Esther's entering the King's presence uninvited.
 - 2) A plan to lobby civil authority to avoid genocide
 - 3) A report to authorities of criminal activity
 - 4) The enacting of new legislation
 - 5) Granting a threatened people the right to defend themselves.

Session 3: New Testament Characters

John the Baptist

- Matthew 14:3-4
- Luke 3:19
- It seems there is an obligation to speak out against corruption and immorality.
- Christians cannot excuse what rulers do simply because of who they are.

James & John

- Matthew 20:21 In order to gain influence and occupy key positions in the anticipated kingdom James and John enlisted the aid of their mother to petition Jesus.
- When the other disciples heard what had transpired, they were indignant!

- **Matthew 20:25-28 is Jesus' response.**
- **Seeking political office for the sake of position and prestige is contrary to the spirit of Jesus.**

Peter & the apostles

- **Brought before the Sanhedrin, a religious-civil government, the apostles were given strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus.**
- **Acts 5:29 is Peter's reply**
- **When members of the council urged that the apostles be put to death, Gamaliel intervenes persuading the council and securing their release.**

This episode clarifies that ...

- **The Christian must maintain loyalty to a higher Authority than civil government.**
- **Civil disobedience can be an appropriate response.**
- **When in a position of civil authority, as was Gamaliel, one may then exert influence on the side of good.**

Paul

- **Throughout his ministry, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to further the gospel and work for his own protection.**
- **The episode in Acts 16 detailing his arrest in Philippi is an example of this.**
- **In essence, Paul requested a public admission that the government position was wrong and that the Christian community posed no threat to Roman law.**

Concepts illustrated by Paul's life

- **When knowledgeable about its laws, the believer may appeal to the state for justice and protection of the well being of its citizens.**
- **Christians may use their legal rights to maintain freedom and advance the gospel.**
- **A Christian must be submissive to civil authority but refrain from participation in its corruption.**

Jesus

- After his baptism, Christ was tempted by the devil. The final temptation (Matthew 4:8-9), involved a political dimension.
- Jesus successfully resisted the allure of worldly power.
- Luke 4:18ff
- When Jesus announced his ministry, he outlined far-reaching political principles, suggesting that fundamental changes would be needed in the basic structures of society.
- While Christ clearly dealt with socio-political issues, he was not interested in holding political office or revolutionizing the political order.
- His goal was to change society one heart at a time.
- The final hours of Jesus' life speak persuasively regarding the Christian's relation to government and politics.
- In Gethsemane, Christ prayed that his followers, although in the world, might not become "of the world." John 17:16
- When confronted by a mob sent to arrest him, he did not resist or escape.
- Although Jesus would not defend himself against false accusations, when the high priest charged him, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say." Matthew 26:64 NIV
- Later, when Pilate asked, "Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you . . .?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above." John 19:10-11
- Although Jesus was accused of being politically subversive, Pilate declared him innocent of political resistance to Roman power.
- Falsely condemned on political charges as "the King of the Jews," Christ died on a cross, a sign of political execution.

Session 4: Biblical Principals Regarding the Relationship between Christianity and Politics

Foundational Principles

- **The equality of humankind
(Genesis 1:26-27, Acts 17:26)**
- **Stewardship of the environment
(Genesis 2:15, Revelation 11:18)**
- **A moral government results in prosperity
(Psalm 33:12, Proverbs 14:34, 29:2)**

God's Role in Government

- **God establishes civil government
(Gen. 9:6, Exod. 21-23, Num. 35:12, Rom. 13:1)**
- **God speaks out regarding corruption in government.
(Prov. 17:15, Isa. 1:23, 10:1, Mic 3:9)**
- **God is ultimately in control of earthly government.
(Ps. 22:29, Prov. 21:1, Jer. 18:7-10)**

Relationship to Government

- **God expects citizens to respect and submit to civil authority.
(Deut. 17:12, Rom. 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, 1 Pet. 2:10-12, Jude 8-10.)**
- **Christians are not to blindly obey civil authority. (Acts 4:19, 5:29)**
- **God enjoins believers to pray for secular rulers.
(Ezra 6:10, Jer. 29:7, 1 Tim. 2:1-2)**

Action in Politics

- **Christianity must permeate society. (Matt. 5:13-16)**
- **Christians have a responsibility to critique government. (Ezek. 3:17-19, Eph. 5:11)**
- **God encourages active involvement in social causes. (Isa 58:6, Mic. 6:8, Matt. 25:31-46, James 1:27)**
- **Christians must overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:14-21)**

Tensions with Politics

- **Political relationships involve inherent risks.**
(2 Corinthians 6:14-17, 2 Tim. 2:4, 1 John 2:15)
- **Christians are Christians first** (Matt. 6:24, 33, John 17:15-16)
- **Heavenly citizenship carries both limitations and responsibilities.**
(2 Cor. 5:20, Phil 3:18-21, Col. 3:1-2, 1 Pet. 2:9-11)
- **Christians must answer to a higher standard.** (2 Cor. 8:21, 10:3-4)

It would seem that an all encompassing model should guide the Christian in his or her relation to politics.

Lordship

- **Jesus is Lord of all and human society must be cognizant of his sovereignty.** (Col.3:17, 1 Cor 10:31)
- **Believers see themselves as citizens of the encompassing kingdom of God.**
- **Christians recognize that humankind is embroiled in the cosmic conflict between good and evil, Christ and Satan.**
- **This perspective acknowledges manifestations of both good and evil in each aspect of society, including politics.**
- **In such a Christian worldview, evil is opposed yet human culture is affirmed and elevated.**

A position of Lordship may call for involvement in social causes:

- **Caring for the suffering and anguish of others.**
- **Speaking out for social justice.**
- **Non-violent activism, particularly where moral issues are involved.**

Other Implications:

- **Casting one's vote in favor of specific issues rather than partisan alignment.**

- It may lead a Christian to hold political office to better address injustices or enhance the well being of others, (providing one does not compromise Biblical principles.)
- While the Christian should respect earthly government, there may be occasion for civil disobedience when the requirements of the state conflict with those of the kingdom of God.

Closing Thoughts:

- There are perils and opportunities for Christians in the political sphere.
- There are dangers of compromising principles and of a corruption of values as well as a consuming involvement with politics.
- At the same time there are opportunities to be “salt of the earth” & “light of the world.”
- Our Christian commission involves furthering the kingdom of God through our witness and service.

- I am grateful for the work of Dr. John Wesley Taylor V who is the associate director of education for the General conference of Seventh-Day Adventist. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2012/09/faith-and-politics>
- It was the above article that I converted into four PowerPoint presentations
- H.R. Niebuhr, Christ and Culture
- N.E. Thomas, “Church State Relations and Mission” in Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission, edited by James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coates.