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The Christian and Politics (I)

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THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

—| *This article is the first of two parts.* |—

**The role of a Christian in issues
pertaining to government has generated
great discussion and debate.**

Historically, the Mennonites, a Christian faith community descended from the Anabaptists of the Protestant Reformation, have avoided any involvement in political issues. The increasingly global reach of the denomination, however, and its involvement in mission and service activities have brought about significant changes in the Mennonite understanding of the place of politics.

Administrators and constituents alike have come to recognize that “all service is woven into social and polit-

ical structures” and that “our service cannot escape the realities of power in the world system.”¹ Formerly insulated, Mennonites have been catapulted into the world as their understanding of the divine mission has brought them into contact with the cataclysmic events of revolution, war, famine, deprivation, racism, injustice,

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violence, and repression. The net result has been a dramatic shift in the way Mennonites think and act in the political realm.

* * *

Tired of being viewed by religious voters in the United States as too secular or even hostile toward religion, the Democratic Party has launched a determined effort to win their votes. This focus was evident on the 2008 primary campaign trail, where many of the Democratic candidates spoke openly of God and of religion. Senator Hillary Clinton described how faith carried her through the turmoil of Bill Clinton's infidelity. Senator John Edwards spoke candidly of his "deep and abiding love for [his] Savior, Jesus Christ."²

In a message to a multiracial evangelical congregation in Greenville, South Carolina, candidate Barack Obama stated that Democrats are not "fearful of talking about faith."³ Obama's campaign, in fact, soon launched a grass-roots effort called "40 Days of Faith and Family," intended to reach out to voters through a series of faith forums and gospel concerts. Senator Obama concluded his remarks in Greenville by saying, "We're going to keep on praying together. I am confident that we can create a Kingdom right here on Earth."

* * *

What do these vignettes have in common? Each, in essence, raises the

issue of how a Christian should relate to politics—a matter increasingly relevant in a world of growing polarization and political agitation.

A Gamut of Perspectives

While there are probably as many nuanced perspectives on politics as there are faith communities, one might classify these positions in certain conceptual clusters. These categories could be defined as 1. rejection, 2. paradox, 3. critical collaboration, 4. synthesis, and 5. imposition.

Rejection—Christ Against Politics. Many fundamentalists view culture as inherently evil, the domain of Satan. In this 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 separate and insulate itself from its corrupting influence.

Carl Knott,⁴ for example, asserts that politics is a prohibited arena for the Christian, a web of worldly entanglement. There is an underlying assumption that government is fatally flawed and incapable of solving even the most basic problems of humanity. The greater concern, however, is that involvement in politics will result in "wasted hours, wasted funds, [and] wasted lives." With politics seen as hopelessly inept and the end of all things at hand, Knott

questions: “Who would go into a condemned building and start painting the walls and replacing broken windows? Who would stay on a sinking ship washing dirty dishes in the galley? . . . The ship of this world is sinking like the *Titanic*, and our job is to get people in the lifeboat, to safety in Christ, not to paint the *Titanic* or elect a new captain or look-out because the old ones failed!”⁵

Though acknowledging that Christian revivals in the time of Whitefield and Wesley are attributed with averting civil war in England, Knott also maintains that the impact came through preaching and prayer meetings, not by canvassing, campaigning, or getting out the vote.

Similarly, Robert Saucy argues that “believers are here to witness to the coming kingdom, not to inaugurate the kingdom rule.”⁶ The rationale is that the Christian at present is but a pilgrim traveling to the heavenly kingdom. As a “foreigner,” the believer should not engage in politics, apart from desiring freedom to serve God, and should have no concern about who runs the territory wherein he or she temporarily resides. A pamphlet produced by *The Testimony* magazine contends: “Neither does the Christian participate in the processes of democracy to select a new government, nor in political protest against the existing arrangements. The Christian will abstain from supporting political groups by

voting or by membership. A Christian’s vote has already been given to the Lord Jesus Christ as King.”⁷

Kerby Anderson notes that many evangelical Christians—especially premillennial evangelicals—have developed a “psychology of eschatology,” withdrawing from social and political involvement because they feel that political systems are evil and a fulfillment of prophecy. Believing that the current social, economic, and political systems are headed for destruction, they see politics as “worldly and ultimately a culmination of the Antichrist.”⁸

Other Christian denominations, including the Amish, historic Mennonites, and Christadelphians, have taken a similar stance. Christadelphians, for example, maintain that the Bible teaches that believers should avoid all involvement in politics. They hold that God, not humankind, is in control, and that God will work out His plan and purpose in due time. Consequently, non-involvement in politics is a deliberate statement of allegiance to God, of full submission to His will. How, they ask, are we to know which of our leaders is the one God wants to be in power? How shall we be sure, if we cast our vote, that we are voting for the person who is the right one in God’s eyes? Christadelphians consequently believe that God has His own perfect political agenda and that all the believer must do is rest in

The stance of minimal involvement is predicated upon the concept that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that we look for a city "whose architect and builder is God," and that we already have a full agenda with the gospel commission. Furthermore, we must repress the urge to pull up the tares that we find in the political field and instead allow the wheat and tares to grow together until the final judgment day, when God Himself will be the Judge.

full confidence that God's purpose will "be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).⁹

Paradox—Christ and Politics. For others, the Christian lives in the world as best he or she can. Christianity and culture are in paradox, with no resolution in sight. 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, endeavoring meanwhile to avoid its contaminating influence. The church, as an institution, withdraws into the sphere of the religious.

Such "passive identification"¹⁰ espouses three fundamental premises: (1) that the Christian should "give to Caesar what is Caesar's"; (2) that a Christian's political involvement should not extend beyond those matters clearly required by law; and (3) that in matters of conscience, the believer's stand may include civil

disobedience, which may, in fact, be proposed and supported by church leaders.

This stance of minimal involvement is predicated upon the concept that Christ's kingdom is not of this world, that we look for a city "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10, NASB), and that we already have a full agenda with the gospel commission. Furthermore, we must repress the urge to pull up the tares that we find in the political field and instead allow the wheat and tares to grow together until the final judgment day, when God Himself will be the Judge.

Critical Collaboration—Christ Above Politics. Thomas Aquinas maintained that though the Christian and culture must coexist, Christianity is superior to culture. In this higher-lower kingdoms perspective, politics is viewed as basically good, or perhaps neutral, but still deficient. Though accommodation and

In the changing Mennonite view, moral responsibility shifted away from a strict two-kingdom approach toward a perspective that called for action within the social arena. The ethical norm of nonresistance changed to a concern for justice, and the posture of separatism was traded for that of cooperation with the larger society.

compromise may be inescapable in certain areas, the Christian's role is primarily that of 1. critique—evaluating political policies from the framework of the gospel, and of 2. judicious involvement in social issues—without compromising gospel priorities.

In the changing Mennonite view, for example, moral responsibility shifted away from a strict two-kingdom approach toward a perspective that called for action within the social arena. The ethical norm of nonresistance changed to a concern for justice, and the posture of separatism was traded for that of cooperation with the larger society. Mathies notes that the major theological forces forging these changes were ecumenical conversations and liberation theology.¹¹

Other Christians have likewise focused on the “cultural mandate,” seeking to improve living conditions and address moral corruption. Pratte, for example, maintains that while churches should not officially

endorse candidates or finance political campaigns, Christians and their leaders should nevertheless speak out on social issues, such as abortion, gambling, pornography, homosexuality, contraceptives for unmarried teens, and an educational system that justifies these.¹² He views this engagement as fulfilling one's God-given duty to preach truth and rebuke error.

Peter Flamming, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Richmond, Virginia, similarly draws the line between personal and institutional involvement, maintaining that though there ought to be a separation of church and state, there need not be a separation of citizen and state. He warns, however, that pastors, as church leaders, should not themselves engage in politics. Further delimitations in this perspective include an over-emphasis on sociological issues to the abandonment of evangelistic priority and aligning the cultural mandate with a particular political party or philosophy of government.

Synthesis—Christ of Politics. In the tradition of Justin Martyr and reinvigorated by liberalism, government is viewed as inherently good, an element of the divine plan for humankind. In this inclusive, one-kingdom view, there is little or no tension between the Christian and politics. Christianity is, in fact, identified with politics at its best.

Hugo Zorrilla, for example, contends that the question is not whether the church is involved in politics, but rather what kind of political position should be taken. “Every Christian, every church, is involved in politics. . . . Every Christian activity—interpretation, preaching, prayer, singing—is carried out within a political framework. . . . Whether we like it or not, we are at the service of human beings in society for the glory of God.”¹³ Similarly, Paul Marshall, from a Reformed perspective, asserts that “political authority is not an area apart from the gospel, but can be an area of ministry just as much as any office in the church. . . . The state is what God through Jesus Christ has set up to maintain justice. Its officers are as much ministers of God as are prophets and priests.”¹⁴

Supporting this position is the rationale that civil government was instituted by God and that throughout the Bible, godly leaders, such as David, Moses, Daniel, and Nehemiah, were engaged in the politi-

cal world and proved to be valuable assets in God’s plan. Based on this understanding, Craswell warns that the privatization of the Christian faith could result in the complete secularization of government and that this would be “an affront to a Holy God.”¹⁵ Christians are seen to be the salt and light of the world, and consequently cannot opt out of the political process. This “active identification” perspective¹⁶ has, in fact, yielded leading politicians who seek to be known as practicing Christians and even political parties that include a Christian descriptor in the party name.

Certain parameters, however, are proposed within this perspective, namely that the Christian’s involvement in politics must be peaceful, lawful, and honorable; respectful of other people’s opinions; and concerned for promoting righteousness.

Imposition—Christ Dominates Politics. Some Christians, perhaps best exemplified by liberation theology and the Christian Right, maintain that Christianity must dramatically reshape culture. Through the political process, evil must be opposed and divine standards established as the law of the land. In this revolutionary kingdom perspective, the world is viewed as fallen, yet redeemable. Christians are God’s agents for dramatic renovation, realigning government according to God’s political agenda.

In this perspective, political involvement must go beyond merely speaking out on social issues. A Christian worldview implies a Christian world order. Christians, in fact, have a right and responsibility to help determine who runs the country and to install a Christian platform. Votes and political activism can make a difference. To sit back and do nothing but pray would, in this perspective, be failing God, duty, and country. “Our nation” can be “turned around only through the dedicated, unswerving, relentless involvement of true Christians.”¹⁷

Christianity’s main task, then, is to work toward creating a Christian political order that will result in establishing the kingdom of God on earth. In essence, this is a move from quietism to militant activism, a mandate to bring the values and priorities of Christianity to government, to ensure that the “righteous are in authority” (Prov. 29:2).

Biblical Principles

As noted, differing perspectives on the relation of the Christian and politics appeal to particular biblical passages in formulating an underlying rationale. Indeed, it is vital to consider biblical principles when formulating a Christian position on any issue.

Foundational Principles:

1. The Equality of Humankind. Any politics that takes the Bible as

foundational must begin with the account of Creation, in which humankind is created in the image of God. Consequently, all individuals, ethnic groups, and nations are created on a par, in the divine image. This becomes the basis of the legal and ethical system, in which all members of the community are considered equal in the eyes of the law. In the New Testament, we find this concept of the equality of humanity reiterated by Paul to the Athenians, when he observed that God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). This concept of divinely endowed human potential gives purpose, direction, and optimism to Christians serving within society.

2. Stewardship of the Environment. The Genesis account assigns to humanity the task of caretaker of the creation. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15)—a stewardship mandate that has never been rescinded. Revelation 11:18, in fact, indicates that, at the end of earth’s history, God will “destroy those who destroy the earth”—those who have been negligent in caring for the domain over which they had jurisdiction.

3. Morality and Prosperity in Government. Scripture provides ample evidence that a government founded upon divine values results

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in national prosperity (Ps. 33:12; Prov. 14:34). Individuals with a Christian perspective and commitment can contribute to this well-being of society: “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice” (Prov. 29:2). The implication seems to be that Christians can be placed in positions of government, and that this involvement is beneficent.

God’s Role in Government:

1. God Establishes Civil Government. After the Flood, God instructed Noah regarding civil penalties, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6). In Exodus 21–23, God gave Moses a detailed plan for civil government, which addressed manslaughter, premeditated murder, assault, kidnapping, abortion, infanticide, property crimes, criminal negligence, and robbery. This divine plan also indicated that justice must be provided in court for the underprivileged and that checks must be established to ensure that the innocent are not condemned.

Similarly, Leviticus 13 and 20 address public health laws, and the first chapter of Deuteronomy describes a judicial system established jointly with cities of refuge, “so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial” (Numbers 35:12, NIV). In subsequent chapters (Deuteronomy 17–22), laws are delineated regarding violation of a court order, perjury, malicious accusations, building codes, juvenile delinquency, and rape.

Given this Old Testament backdrop, Paul declares, “There is no authority except from God” (Rom. 13:1). One should note, however, that along with specifying the responsibilities of civil government, God also delineated qualifications for its leaders. These criteria stipulated that political leaders should be those who “fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness” (Ex. 18:21).

2. God Speaks Out Regarding Corruption in Government. God does not simply ignore political corruption; He directly confronts evil in government. “Woe to those who de-

Peter's instruction to submit to authority does not mean that the believer must mindlessly obey government demands that are contrary to the Christian faith. Peter himself clarified that in such situations one must "obey God rather than men." It is perhaps significant that when Paul asks, "Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?" he does not say, "Then do what the authority says," but rather, "Do what is good."

cree unrighteous decrees" (Isa. 10:1). "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). Similarly, those who accept bribes, who distort justice, and who do not defend the cause of weak and marginalized members of society are reproved (Isa. 1:23; Micah 3:9). In biblical times, God spoke out against corruption in government through the voice of His prophets. So today, Christians can serve as channels of the divine perspective and take their stand against injustice, corruption, and oppression.

3. God Is Ultimately in Control of Earthly Government. "Dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations" (Ps. 22:28, NIV). If God is indeed "Lord of heaven and earth" and has given all authority to His Son, then it stands to reason that Jesus Christ is Lord of the political realm. Both politicians and political processes should therefore be willing to recognize His Lordship. Moreover,

God, in the biblical view, is actively engaged in placing and removing rulers. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1).

Government, however, is influenced, but not predestined, by God. "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it" (Jer. 18:7-10).

The Believer's Relationship to Government:

1. God Expects Citizens to Respect and Submit to Civil Authority. Believers are not to revile rulers, de-

spise authority, nor show contempt for a judge. Ezra 7:26, for example, warns that “whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether it be death, or banishment, or confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.” Christians consequently are to respect the state and to submit to civil authority. Peter writes, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:13-15).

2. Compliance With Civil Laws Is the Christian’s God-given Duty. Despite the shameful treatment he had often received at the hands of the Roman government, Paul wrote: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. . . . Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes *are due*, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Rom. 13:1, 5-7). Neufeld notes that Paul’s counsel may have been rather difficult for a Jewish Christian in

Rome to accept, particularly at a time when the empire was brutally oppressing and dominating the land of Palestine, the Promised Land.¹⁸ To heed Paul’s advice would mean placing obedience to instituted authorities ahead of love for race and homeland.

3. Christians Are Not to Blindly Obey Civil Authority. God orders the powers, but this does not mean that rulers will always do God’s will. Consequently, it is not by accident that the imperative is not literally one of obedience, but rather of subordination. A conscientious objector, for example, who refuses to bear arms despite the command of his government, still remains under the sovereignty of that government and accepts the penalties that it imposes. He is subordinate, even though he is not obeying.

Similarly, Peter’s instruction to submit to authority does not mean that the believer must mindlessly obey government demands that are contrary to the Christian faith. Peter himself clarified that in such situations one must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). It is perhaps significant that when Paul asks, “Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?” (Rom. 13:3), he does not say, “Then do what the authority says,” but rather, “Do what is good.” The implication seems to be that there is a reflective intermediate step of discerning whether the demand

of government is good or not, in light of divine requirements.

Finally, we should note that Jesus warned that true believers would be arrested and brought to trial before governors and kings. Implicit in this passage is that Christ did not expect His followers to obey every authority, but to bear witness to those authorities. Thus, for the Christian, the state is not the highest authority.

4. God Enjoins Believers to Pray for Secular Rulers. God's chosen people are urged to "pray for the well-being of the king and his sons" (Ezra 6:10, NIV) and for the peace of nations. When the Jews were captive in Babylon, for example, the prophet Jeremiah sent a directive indicating that they were to pray for the empire's peace and prosperity. Similarly, in the New Testament, Paul urged that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Tim. 2:1, 2). As Christians, we must not underestimate the power of prayer in politics.

Action in Relation to Politics:

1. Christianity Must Permeate Society. In His inaugural address, Christ indicated that believers should be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." Salt does not properly flavor, however, unless it permeates its subject matter; light is

not effective if cloistered. Given that government is a dimension of the larger society, it would seem to follow that Christians have a strategic responsibility to be socially and politically involved.

2. Christians Have a Moral Responsibility to Critique Government. "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: when I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul" (Eze. 3:17-19).

The concept of "watchman" does not appear to be limited to individuals, but to society, as well. Psalm 12:8 notes, for instance, that neglecting to address societal wrongs can result in the proliferation of evil. Furthermore, Paul writes that we, as Christians, are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11).

3. God Encourages Active Involvement in Social Causes. Christians are admonished to "act justly and to love mercy" (Micah 6:8, NIV). They are encouraged to be-

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come actively involved in the issues facing society. “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?” (Isa. 58:6).

In a dramatic parable, Jesus outlined the standards by which individuals and entire communities would be judged: “I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (Matt. 25:35, 36).

Clearly, those who inherit God’s kingdom are actively involved in bettering the lives of those around them. These concrete acts of compassion for the less fortunate members of society are linked to attaining a personal relationship with God—“as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (vs. 40). Similarly, James notes that the “religion that God our Father ac-

cepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27, NIV). In essence, as Paul observes, “All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*’” (Gal. 5:14).

4. Christians Are to Be Advocates of Peace. Implementing God’s plan for humanity, nations “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4). The passage suggests that Christians are to be advocates of nonviolence. Paul reiterated this concept on various occasions: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). “Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (14:19). As “Prince of Peace,” Jesus Christ instructed His followers: “To him who strikes you

It seems evident that the Scriptures provide guiding principles for each facet of life, including politics. These include an understanding of God's role in government, the believer's relationship to government, and the Christian's relation to politics—both in terms of tension and action.

on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either” (Luke 6:29).

5. Christians Must Overcome Evil With Good. In Romans 12:14-21, Paul calls believers to a life characterized by nonstandard behavior—“bless those who persecute you,” “associate with the lowly,” and “do not repay anyone evil for evil.” He then continues with reminders to “live peaceably with all” and to “never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God”—a divine vengeance which involves the “public righting of wrong.”

He then provides a directive to “heap burning coals on their heads” (12:20, NRSV). At first glance, this might seem manipulative, a form of psychological revenge to get an enemy to say “I’m sorry.” In reality, it may be a reference to an ancient Egyptian reconciliation ritual.¹⁹ In early civilizations, fire was a valuable commodity for cooking and heating. Consequently, it was a life-giving act to heap coals into a person’s pot so that he might carry them on his

head back to his campsite. In this way, the Christian community is not passive, but overcomes “evil with good” (vs. 21).

Tension in the Relation to Politics:

1. Political Relationships Involve Inherent Risks. Throughout Scripture, the believer is repeatedly warned of worldly entanglements. “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). “No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Tim. 2:4, NIV). Passages such as these suggest that political relationships may involve potential risks.

2. Christians Are Christians First. Christians cannot live dualistic lives—“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Nevertheless, Christ’s believers are both “in

the world” while not “of the world.” This tension can be resolved by seeking “first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (vs. 33), and then all other aspects of life, including one’s relationship to politics, assume their proper place.

3. Heavenly Citizenship Carries Both Limitations and Responsibilities. Describing the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18), Paul notes that “their mind [is] on earthly things” (vs. 19). By contrast, he states, “Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 20). The implication is that the Christian’s primary focus cannot be on “earthly things”—on politics from a purely secular perspective, for example.

Paul reiterates this concept in Colossians 3:1, 2: “If then you were raised with Christ, . . . set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”

In a similar vein, Peter adds, “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV), although “aliens and strangers” (vs. 11) here on earth.

While there are clearly limitations for heavenly citizens, there are also responsibilities. Paul notes, for example, that “we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20). As an ambassador, each Christian is an official representative of another kingdom,

seeking to establish positive relationships and to favorably influence decisions in the nation to which he or she has been assigned.

4. Christians Must Answer to a Higher Standard. Paul observes that as Christians we are to align ourselves with that which is honorable “in the sight of the Lord,” and not merely what is legal “in the sight of men” (2 Cor. 8:21). Certain political strategies, for example, may be inappropriate for the Christian—“Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power” (10:3, 4, NIV).

In essence it seems evident that the Scriptures provide guiding principles for each facet of life, including politics. These include an understanding of God’s role in government, the believer’s relationship to government, and the Christian’s relation to politics—both in terms of tension and action.

It is necessary, however, to consider context in applying biblical principles. Historical and political circumstances can create important differences in the relevance and applicability of a given principle. The Old Testament state of theocracy, for example, is quite distinct from the New Testament situation of a marginalized and often despised Christian community. Furthermore, the

incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth provides an expanded ethical framework and clarifies the Christian stance regarding politics. Consequently, it can be particularly enlightening to examine how individuals throughout Scripture, under a variety of circumstances, applied the divine principles in their relationship to politics. □

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