

# THE CHRISTIAN AND POLITICS

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*Part Two.*

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**Scripture case studies provide some clear guidelines with regard to the role of a Christian in politics and government.**

**W**hile biblical principles provide relevant guidelines for the Christian's relation with politics, orientation can also be gained from the lives of Bible characters. In fact, throughout Scripture, principles are repeatedly illustrated in the actions and priorities of individuals.

## **Joseph**

When called to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph makes clear reference to Jehovah as the One who is in control of history (Gen. 41:25,

28, 32).<sup>1</sup> Joseph, however, does not stop at mere interpretation. He also proposes a plan of political action, including political appointments and taxation (vss. 33-38). Recognizing the value of a spiritual perspective within government, Pharaoh asks, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of

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God?” (vs. 38, NIV).

Some years later, in the midst of the famine, Joseph tells his brothers that it was God who “has made me lord of all Egypt” (Gen. 45:9) and that this occurred in order “to save lives” (vs. 5, NIV). Joseph, in essence, considered his position in government to be a direct result of God’s intervention, in order that he might assist others through times of hardship.

### Moses

As a political activist, Moses may be without peer in Scripture. Spotting the abuse of a Hebrew by an Egyptian taskmaster, for example, he took immediate action and killed the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11-15). This act aborted his early political career and led to 40 years of exile.

By God’s direct invitation, however, Moses initiated a second attempt to help his oppressed people, confronting Pharaoh and freeing the Hebrew nation from slavery (Ex. 2:23–14:31). He then instituted a well-developed system of govern-

ment for the Hebrew nation. As recorded in Hebrews 11:24-27, his work as an advocate of a down-trodden, marginalized people places Moses in the select group of heroes of faith.

During the years in which Israel journeyed through the wilderness, an insurrection arose, spearheaded by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These individuals criticized the leadership of Moses and Aaron and defied their authority. Moses replied, “If the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord” (Num. 16:30). In essence, this rebellion against an established government was viewed as an insurrection against God Himself and was quelled by God’s direct intervention.

### Saul

Although not in His preferred plan of a direct theocracy, God nev-

ertheless instructed the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as a political “commander over my people Israel” (1 Sam. 9:16). Some years later, however, when Saul had rejected God, Samuel informed him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you” (15:28). In both instances, it is evident that God becomes directly involved in setting up and deposing civil rulers.

In the story of Saul, we also find an intriguing incident regarding civil protest. One day, in a fit of rage, King Saul vowed to kill his son, Jonathan. The king’s soldiers, however, protested, “Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day” (1 Sam. 14:45). Their political intervention was effective, and Jonathan was spared, illustrating that political activism can alter a course of affairs and result in favorable outcomes for citizens.

### David

Samuel had secretly anointed David as the next king of Israel. King Saul, well aware of David’s popularity, pursued him tenaciously, determined to kill him. By a strange turn of events, however, Saul was found in David’s power and his men urged

him to kill Saul. David replied, “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord” (1 Sam. 24:6).

On yet another occasion, Abishai requested David’s permission to slay Saul. Again, David refused: “But David said to Abishai, ‘Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless? . . . As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord’s anointed’” (1 Sam. 26:9-11). In both situations, David seemed content to leave in God’s hands the removal of corrupt leadership, at least in terms of a situation in which it would serve his own political career.

Years later, one of David’s sons, Absalom, began engineering for the throne. “He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would . . . say to him, ‘Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you. . . . If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice.’ Also, whenever anyone ap-

proached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. . . . So he stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (2 Sam. 15:2-6, NIV). The result of this political ambition and underhanded campaigning was an ill-fated rebellion.

Fleeing the rebellion, David left Jerusalem. Zadok and Abiathar brought out the ark of God, determined to follow the king loyally. When David realized what was happening, he said, “Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace” (2 Sam. 15:27). From his reaction, David apparently assumed that religious leaders should not engage in partisan politics.

At a later date, Adonijah proclaimed himself king without David’s knowledge. Nathan the prophet, aware of David’s promise to Bathsheba that her son, Solomon, would be the next king, notified Bathsheba of the development and urged her to petition David. Furthermore, Nathan offered to come before the king and intercede in her favor (1 Kings 1:11-30). In this case, we find Nathan, a religious leader, endeavoring to guide the political process within ethical and moral parameters.

#### **Ahab**

As recorded in 1 Kings 21:5-13, Ahab and Jezebel conspired to take possession of Naboth’s vineyard. They sent a secret communication

to local officials, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, “You have blasphemed God and the king.” Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die” (vss. 9, 10). As might be expected, Elijah, a religious leader, reproved Ahab for this base crime.

The most tragic part of the story, however, is that “the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them” (1 Kings 21:11). If they had taken a position of integrity, in opposition to the immoral political directive, the tragic course of the nation might have been altered. It seems evident that both citizens and community leaders have a moral responsibility to resist the devastating impact of a corrupt government on innocent lives.

#### **Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar**

Finding himself unexpectedly in an alien land, Daniel soon distinguished himself as an individual of ability, conviction, and integrity. Shortly thereafter, furious with his wise men’s inability to resolve a dream, Nebuchadnezzar ordered his guards to round up the magi for execution. Daniel requested Arioch, commander of the guard, for a brief stay in order to enable him to interpret the dream. Meeting Arioch the

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next morning, Daniel’s first concern was for the well-being of the magi, who served as political advisors to the king.

Delighted that his dream had been interpreted, Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over the entire province of Babylon, a political position that Daniel accepted. Furthermore, at Daniel’s request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as provincial administrators. Daniel, a prophet of God, did not view as inappropriate that believers should occupy positions of civil responsibility in a pagan government.

Daniel 3 records that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were present at the dedication of the golden image, as Nebuchadnezzar had directed, but refused to bow down to the image. In essence, they submitted to civil authority—presenting themselves and not resisting punishment, but refused to compromise moral principle by worshiping a false god. God approved of their

stance by joining them in the fiery furnace.

As is tempting for powerful political figures, Nebuchadnezzar came to believe that the success of his empire was the result of his own acumen, and this resulted in a period of personal insanity. Three times in Daniel 4, which records Nebuchadnezzar’s reflection on the experience, the principle is repeated that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, [and] gives it to whomever He will” (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). It seems clear that God is ultimately in control, even of secular government.

Under the Medo-Persian empire, Daniel was again appointed to a high government position. Because of political intrigue, a law was passed that no one should worship any god but the king for 30 days. “When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his

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God, as was his custom since early days” (6:10). When confronted with an edict contrary to his commitment to God, Daniel did not hesitate to engage in civil disobedience, but at the same time, he did not resist the consequences of his convictions.

### **Nehemiah**

Nehemiah held a position of responsibility in the court of Artaxerxes. Although a contingent of Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild, news reached Nehemiah that little progress had been made. His face mirroring his despondency, Nehemiah was asked by the king what the problem might be. When Nehemiah explained, Artaxerxes asked, “What do you request?” (Neh. 2:4).

Nehemiah writes, “I said to the king, ‘If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it’” (Neh. 2:5).

When the king agreed, Nehemiah

courageously presented a further request: “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors of the region beyond the River, that they must permit me to pass through till I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, that he must give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel which pertains to the temple, for the city wall, and for the house that I will occupy” (Neh. 2:7, 8). Artaxerxes not only granted this second request, but provided an escort of army officers and cavalry. With divine blessing, Nehemiah used his position in the court of a civil ruler to extend the work of God.

### **Esther and Mordecai**

Although God is never directly referred to, the Book of Esther presents a vivid portrayal of the great controversy between good and evil, played out in the domain of politics. The story begins with Esther, a young Jewish girl, selected from ob-

scurity to be the queen of Xerxes, and her cousin, Mordecai, a civil servant, refusing to pay homage to Haman, a high official in the court.

Enraged, Haman sought revenge, intending not only to annihilate Mordecai, but to exterminate his entire race. When news of the intended genocide reached Mordecai, he asked Esther for assistance. When Esther demurred, Mordecai responded, “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Esther replied, “Gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!” (vs. 16).

Cleverly, Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet, but left the king in suspense as to her motive. Unable to sleep that night, Xerxes requested that the royal records be read. Providentially, a portion was selected that recorded “that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes” (Esther 6:2, NIV).

As Mordecai had not been re-

warded for this act of loyalty, the following morning Xerxes instructed Haman to honor Mordecai publicly. That evening, at the king’s urging, Esther presented her request, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated” (Esther 7:3, 4). She then identified Haman as the perpetrator of the sinister plot.

After Haman’s death, Xerxes instructed Mordecai to write a new decree to neutralize the original law. Mordecai wrote an edict granting the Jews “the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies” (Esther 8:11, NIV). An ethnic cleansing was thus averted.

This extended narrative describes: (1) civil disobedience—Mordecai refusing to bow to Haman and Esther entering the king’s presence uninvited; (2) a plan to lobby civil authority and avert genocide—inviting the king and Haman to a series of banquets; (3) a report to authorities of criminal activity—Mordecai revealing the assassination plot; (4) the enacting of new legislation to counteract the effects of a damaging law;

and (5) the granting to a threatened people group the right to defend themselves.

### **Deborah, the Prophetess**

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites were oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Deborah, a prophetess, summoned Barak, instructed him to lead a revolt against Jabin, and personally joined the military campaign. Some Israelites, however, declined to become involved. “Curse Meroz,” said the angel of the Lord, ‘Curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty’” (Judg. 5:23). Based on this incident, it seems apparent that there are situations in which passivity is an inappropriate response.

### **Baasha**

As noted in the experiences of Saul and Nebuchadnezzar, the case of Baasha confirms that God installs and removes civil rulers. In this instance, however, it is clarified that this intervention is not an arbitrary act, but rather a response to that ruler’s leadership. “The word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani, against Baasha, saying: ‘Inasmuch as I lifted you out of the dust and made you ruler over My people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have made My people Israel sin, to pro-

voke Me to anger with their sins, surely I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat’” (1 Kings 16:1-3).

### **Jehoshaphat**

In his government, Jehoshaphat appointed judges in each of the major cities of Judah. He reminded these men that they were to judge according to the divine standard—justly and without partiality or corruption (2 Chron. 19:5-10). The implication is that politicians should be held to ethical norms of leadership and conduct.

### **Elisha**

Appreciative of the kindness shown to him by the woman of Shunam, the prophet Elisha offered do something for her—perhaps to speak on her behalf to the king or commander of the army (2 Kings 4:11-13). As illustrated in this incident, it seems appropriate, even for religious leaders, to intercede before government on behalf of those who may find themselves without voice.

### **Jeremiah**

In commissioning the prophet Jeremiah, God gave him a political function: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to

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pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant’” (Jer. 1:9, 10). Again we see God actively involved in the realm of human government; this time, however, by means of a specially appointed messenger.

### **Cyrus**

In Isaiah 45:1-4, God refers to Cyrus as His “‘anointed,’” even though Cyrus was not aware of God’s direct involvement in his life. Furthermore, Cyrus’ political role was prophesied some 170 years before he was born, indicating God’s foreknowledge of political personages and events. We might note that God’s involvement was “‘for Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect’” (Isa. 45:4)—in order to assure the survival and well-being of His people.

### **John the Baptist**

“Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother

Philip’s wife. Because John had said to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her’” (Matt. 14:3, 4). Luke 3:19 adds that in addition to the adulterous relationship with Herodias, John had rebuked Herod for “all the evils which Herod had done.” From John’s experience, it seems apparent that there is an obligation to speak out against corruption and immorality. In essence, respect for authority does not include a glossing over of sin. Christians cannot simply excuse what rulers do simply because of who they are.

### **James and John**

In order to gain influence and perhaps occupy key positions in the anticipated kingdom, James and John enlisted the aid of their mother to petition Jesus that they might sit “‘at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom’” (Matt. 20:21, NIV). Jesus, however, declined to offer the brothers these prized positions, stating that “‘these places belong to those for whom they have

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been prepared by my Father” (vs. 23, NIV).

When the other disciples heard of what had transpired, they were indignant. Jesus then called the disciples together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28). The principle emerges that seeking political office for the sake of position and prestige is contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

#### **Pilate**

There is an inherent danger in politics of valuing position over principle. This is evident in the case of Pilate. He knew that Jesus was innocent; even his wife, warned in a

dream, cautioned him to have “nothing to do with that just Man” (Matt. 27:19). Afraid, however, of the possible consequences to his political career, Pilate washed his hands of the matter and condemned Jesus to death.

#### **Peter and the Apostles**

Brought before the Sanhedrin, a religious-civil government, the apostles were given strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus. Peter replied, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). When members of the council urged that the apostles be put to death, Gamaliel intervened on their behalf, persuading the council and securing their release.

Although they had been flogged, the disciples were not intimidated by the threats of the Sanhedrin. “Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). This episode clarifies that (1) the Christian must maintain loy-

alty to a Higher Authority than civil government, (2) civil disobedience can be an appropriate response, and (3) when in a position of civil authority, as was Gamaliel, one is able to exert an influence on the side of good.

#### **Paul**

Prior to his conversion, Saul of Tarsus was deeply involved in politics. As a Pharisee and roving representative of the Sanhedrin, he was an energetic member of one of the most active political parties in Jewish society. He also saw good opportunity to advance his career by persecuting the followers of Jesus.

On the road to Damascus, however, he encountered Christ, and the direction of his life changed. As this early incident in Paul’s experience illustrates, it is possible that involvement in politics may run contrary to God’s plan for a Christian’s life.

Throughout his ministry, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen on various occasions to further the gospel and to work for his own protection. In Philippi, for example, Paul and Silas were publicly beaten and thrown into prison. During the night, freed by the jolt of an earthquake, they did not try to escape, but used the opportunity to witness to the jailer. In the morning, the magistrates sent their officers to release Paul and Silas. Paul, however, stated, “They have beaten us openly, un-

condemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out” (Acts 16:37). In essence, Paul requested a public admission that the government position was wrong and that the fledgling Christian community in Philippi posed no threat to Roman law.

On a subsequent occasion, a Roman commander decided that Paul should be examined by flogging. “As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, ‘Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?’ . . . Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains” (Acts 22:25, 29, NIV).

A few days later, apprised of a sinister plot against his life, Paul notified the Roman authorities of the conspiracy and accepted the protection of two centurions and 470 soldiers to deliver him into the custody of Felix, the governor (Acts 23–25). Once in Caesarea, however, Paul declined to bribe Felix for his release. Finally, appearing before Festus, Paul maintained his innocence and claimed his right as a Roman citizen to appeal for a hearing before Caesar. We might note, however, that Paul’s appeal for trial in Rome was

not primarily to save his life, but in order to enable him to carry the gospel directly to the imperial court.

These experiences in Paul's life illustrate several key concepts: (1) When knowledgeable of its laws, the believer may appeal to the state for justice and for protection of the well-being of its citizens. (2) Christians may use their legal rights as citizens to maintain freedom and to further the gospel. (3) A Christian must be submissive to civil authority (e.g., Paul's remaining in the Philipian jail when he had ample opportunity to escape) but refrain from participation in its corruption (e.g., refusing to bribe Felix for release).

### Christ

In each facet of our lives, we are to follow the example and teaching of Jesus. Consequently, it is particularly important for us to ask: How did Jesus respond when faced with the political issues of His day? What did He expect of His disciples, and, by extension, of His followers today? It is in considering the life and ministry of Jesus that we may best clarify the relationship of the Christian and politics.

Christ was to exercise the power of government. Centuries prior to Christ's birth, Isaiah wrote: "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever" (Isa. 9:6, 7).

Shortly after His birth, Jesus was, in fact, targeted by Herod as a potential political rival, who tried unsuccessfully to destroy Him.

After His baptism, Christ was tempted by the devil. The final temptation involved a political dimension: "The devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me'" (Matt. 4:8, 9).

Jesus successfully resisted the allure of worldly power with the response, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'" (Matt 4:10).

When Jesus announced in Nazareth the beginning of His ministry, He outlined far-reaching political principles, suggesting that fundamental changes would be needed in the basic structures of society: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And

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recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

Christ's daily life was, in fact, a grassroots effort—associating with castaways, eating with the rejected of society, bringing hope to the marginalized and exploited. He spoke out against societal wrongs, such as neglect of aged parents and devouring "widows' houses" (20:47). He declined, however, to become installed as a civil authority, stating, in response to a dispute over inheritance, "Who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" (12:14).

Christ clearly dealt, nonetheless, with sociopolitical issues—so much so that people wanted to crown Him king. How did Jesus, a leader with personal charisma and gifts of oratory, respond to this groundswell? Did He seize it as an opportunity to enunciate a political platform, to clean up an immoral and corrupt government, or to free His nation from the yoke of Rome? If He had decided to set up His kingdom on

earth, there is ample evidence that He would have been successful (Luke 19:38; John 12:13-15).

It appears, however, that Christ was not interested in holding political office or in revolutionizing the political order. Rather, He made it clear that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). His goal was to change society one heart at a time.

Christ's teachings are also instructive. He promoted, for example, the principle of nonviolence. "To him who strikes you 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). He focused on service, rather than on position. When a contention erupted among His disciples as to which of them was the greatest, Jesus advised, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest

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among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. . . . I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:25-27).

Christ also advocated the concept of submission to civil authority within the framework of allegiance to God. When the unlikely alliance of the Pharisees and the Herodians tried to entrap Him with a question of taxation, Jesus replied, “Show Me the tax money.’ So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ ‘They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:19-21).

In particular, the final hours of Christ’s 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 by the civil-religious authorities to arrest Him, He did not attempt to resist or escape, although He did request that His disciples might not be apprehended.

In an act of loyalty and perhaps desperation, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. Jesus responded, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52).

Although Jesus would not defend Himself against the false accusations, when the high priest charged Him: “Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God” (Matt. 26:63), Jesus replied, “It is as you say” (vs. 64, NIV). Later, when Pilate asked, “Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not know that I have power to crucify You?” (John 19:10), Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above” (vs. 11).

Although Jesus was accused of being politically subversive, Pilate declared Him to be innocent of po-

litical resistance to Roman power, stating, “I find no fault in this Man” (Luke 23:4). Falsely condemned on political charges as “King of the Jews,” Christ died on the cross, a sign of political execution.

As disciples of Christ, Christians are to live the life of Christ. They are to practice the “politics of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> In Christ’s own words: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21).

### **A Reasoned Stance on the Christian and Politics**

With a consideration of biblical principles and cases, as well as a backdrop of historical antecedents, the fundamental question is: How then should a Christian relate to politics? While each of the five positions earlier noted can help in understanding particular facets of this relationship, and could perhaps become an appropriate response in a given situation, it would seem that there should also be an overarching perspective to guide the Christian in his or her relation to politics.

This response might be described as a position of Lordship—the recognition that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and that human society in each of its dimensions must be cognizant of His sovereignty.

In this perspective, the Christian acknowledges that the sovereignty of Christ extends to all facets of life, including the political arena. This ap-

proach is biblical. Paul, for example, writes, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Believers then see themselves not as possessing dual citizenship, but as a citizen of the encompassing kingdom of God.

In this perspective, politics is not viewed as a demonic domain (Rejection), nor as a necessary evil (Paradox). On the other hand, it is not seen as basically neutral, but deficient (Critical Collaboration), nor as essentially good (Synthesis). Neither is politics viewed as an arena on which the will of God must be imposed by human agents (Domination).

Rather, the Christian recognizes that humankind is embroiled in the cosmic conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. This Great Controversy perspective acknowledges manifestations of both good and evil in each aspect of society, including politics. Thus, in the Christian worldview, evil is opposed, yet human culture is affirmed and elevated, by the grace of God.

This position of Lordship may call for involvement in social causes—caring for the suffering and anguish of others, speaking out for social justice. It may include nonviolent activism, particularly where moral issues are involved. Forms of

political activism that could fit particularly well within this perspective include roles of advocacy, mediation, and conciliation.

The Lordship perspective may involve casting one's vote in favor of specific issues or platforms, rather than merely as a reflection of partisan alignment. Provided that one does not compromise biblical principle, it may lead a Christian to hold political office in order to better address injustices or enhance the well-being of others. Finally, while the Christian is to respect earthly government, there may be occasion for civil disobedience when the requirements of the state conflict with those of the kingdom of God.

The position of Lordship thus recognizes that there are perils as well as opportunities for the Christian. There are dangers of compromise of principle and of a corruption of values, as well allowing an involvement with politics to become all-absorbing. At the same time, there are key opportunities for fulfilling the divine mandate to be the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and the "light of the world" (vs. 14), serving as an effective witness for God. This perspective may conse-

quently involve a radical reorientation of thinking—from seeing Christian engagement primarily in terms of political action, to viewing political involvement as the faithful response of witness.

While degree and form of political participation may vary for the institutional church, its leaders and individual members, the mission of the gospel must always include both the proclamation, as well as the tangible revelation of who God is. This commission involves standing with voice and vote against immorality and in favor of all that is just and compassionate. It includes caring for God's creation in all of its diversity—even "the least of these My brethren" (Matt. 25:40). It involves furthering the kingdom of God through our witness and through our service. In essence, it is a commitment to live a life like Christ, of Christ, and for Christ in every way. □

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton: Faith and Life, 1964), p. 190.

