

LOVING MY NEIGHBOR FROM THE VOTING BOOTH:
THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MARCH 7, 2018

ABSTRACT

Modern, liberal democracy provides Christians with a unique position in the history of politics: regardless of age, economic status, religion, race, or gender, many in the world today are promised a vote. Voters, in addition to being governed by elected authorities, have the governing power to change those authorities. While the institutions of church and state ought to remain separate, religious belief and political conviction are often linked in the personal opinions of individual voters. In a situation such as American democracy, how will God's people fulfill their role as the salt and light of the world in the voting booth? This thesis examines the promises of God regarding civil government as well as the promises of American democracy to show that the American Christian has the right and responsibility to vote in such a way as to provide a just, secure state with leaders that seek equality and fair representation for their neighbor. Such a responsibility requires critical thought from Christian voters regarding policies and candidates in light of the purpose and promises of civil government.

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INTRODUCTION

The history of civil government is bloody. Through the ages, human beings have conquered and killed in order to create a world according to their own liking. Empires have been built on the aspirations of wicked men and the backs of those they've forced under their heels. Wars have been waged in the name of nationalism, ethnic purity, and religious ideals.

The history of civil government has also provided human beings with comfort and hope. Good rulers have provided for their subjects in times of crisis. Military might has been used in the defense of the weak and oppressed. Wonders have been built through human ingenuity and cooperation.

What are Christians to think of the various forms of governments and those people who have led them? “The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Romans 13:1).¹ King David, Julius Caesar, Adolf Hitler, and every president of the United States would have had no power if God had not given civil authority to humanity. Christians trust and confess that every elected official—every ruler under which they find themselves—is a representative of God’s authority, whom God has given for their good.

But in liberal democracies², Christians also find themselves in a unique position in the history of politics. Where Christians in the past were largely subjects of kingdoms, many

¹ All Bible references are taken from the NIV.

² That is, democracies built upon the individual rights of their citizens. This core value of liberty (especially within the realm of private property) functions as the guiding principle of life in American democracy.

Christians today have the right and authority to make changes to their governing authorities. Through the rights guaranteed by democratic processes, Christian citizens are not merely subjects, but are themselves governing authorities. God has given governing authority to Christians through democracies throughout the world

The Bible has relatively little to say about the specific ways in which governing authorities carry out their responsibilities to defend and provide for the societies placed beneath them. Yet, the Bible provides enough general guidance to Christians about how to conduct themselves in the world that they are not left helpless in the face of the responsibilities of voting. Through understanding what God says about civil government and Christian love, as well as an understanding of the assumption inherent to democratic processes, Christians are able to honor God and love their neighbor through their actions as members of democratic polity.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research I conducted was entirely qualitative. Through examination of biblical texts, commentators, and dogmaticians, I uncovered God's revelation regarding civil government and its purpose. I did research in the realm of political science and philosophy to understand the structures inherent to liberal democracy and form a framework over which God's intentions for civil government could be laid. Using these findings, I was able to form a theory of Christian voting of sorts, with which I was able to react to a sampling of Christian literature concerning civil government and the right to vote.

SCRIPTURE ON CIVIL GOVERNMENT

Most people today likely cannot imagine a world without government. Given the rise of liberal democracy and the ubiquity of news media, a great deal of the public consciousness is consumed by politics. Wars and rumors of wars, elections, economics, rights, and political activism are at the forefront of the minds of many. As German novelist and scholar Thomas Mann wrote in his work, *The Magic Mountain*, “Everything is politics.” Yet, not long ago, this was not the case.

Most people in the western world likely did not concern themselves with politics and government before the rise of liberal democracy. Most cultures have tended toward output-oriented political engagement.³ The population was only concerned about their government insofar as governance affected their lives directly. In the earliest stages of history, the idea of political engagement would have been entirely meaningless. Observe the state of society before the Flood: “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). The days before the Flood lack any indication that a system of government was in place. As I enter into a discussion of Christian engagement in modern, liberal democracy, it is important to understand the institution and establishment of government from a Christian perspective, beginning with Genesis.

Government in the Old Testament

³ This concept will be more fully discussed in the section on the form and function of democracy.

The first indication of a system of government comes shortly after the above quoted verse.

Shortly after Noah left the ark, God gave him this charge:

Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.

Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

‘But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

‘Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;

for in the image of God

has God made mankind.

As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it’
(Genesis 9:1–7).

Martin Luther observed, “This text is outstanding and worthy of note; for here God establishes government and gives it the sword, to hold wantonness in check, lest violence and other sins proceed without limit . . . [In government] God has given protection for our life and possessions.”⁴ While God did not prescribe how the sword of justice might be wielded against the sword of violence, nevertheless, God here gives authority to human beings to be his agents against the violence sinners would inflict on one another. In other words, Moses describes here neither what kind of government existed, nor what power it wielded beyond that of punishment; only that God had given authority to humanity to be his agents of justice.⁵ For the first detailed

⁴ Quoted in Carl J. Lawrenz, and John C. Jeske. *A commentary on Genesis 1–11*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 2004, 285.

⁵ Some might (as we will later see Rousseau does) see the establishment of human government being grounded in the establishment of the family. This is a valid view in many respects. However, for this discussion, it is more worthwhile to discuss the concept of established governing authorities who have the explicit right to carry out justice.

example of how God expected his people to interact with their government, attention must be given to the Law of Moses.

The books of Moses served both to recount and establish God's institution of the nation of Israel. Among the governments of the world, this nation's was to be unique: a true theocracy in which God and his law would rule the people, both in the religious and the social spheres. Because of its unique nature, the nation of Israel provides modern Christians with little prescriptive guidance on how they are to relate to or engage in government. Nevertheless, some passages—both from Leviticus, and the wider account of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament—are helpful to the purposes of this discussion.

A great number of verses in the Old Testament deal directly with how God's people were to treat their neighbors. When summing up God's law, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37–40). What Jesus referred to as the "second commandment" is dealt with in myriad ways in the Law of Moses. While what follows is not an exhaustive list, it does demonstrate the areas of Israelite life about which God was concerned:

- Criminal justice (Deuteronomy 16:18–20)
- Land ownership (Leviticus 25)
- Murder (Deuteronomy 21:1–9)
- Treatment of the poor (Leviticus 19:13–15)
- Marriage (Deuteronomy 21:10–19)

From this short list, it is plain that God's theocratic rule over Israel was meant to govern the Israelites' relationship with each other.

The theocracy of ancient Israel also governed the nation's relationship to God himself. In the book of Leviticus, as God gave them commands on how they were to live holy lives, he declared "I am the Lord" 49 times. God's intention for the nation of Israel was that they be his holy people. Inherent in that national identity is acknowledgement that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the Lord, who brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 11:45). They were to bear witness to the great things God had done for them and so submit to God's rule over their public, common life, as well as his rule over their inward lives (their hearts).

God was the only king the people of Israel had for about 400 years.⁶ The prophets and judges served to govern Israel, but the people wanted more. When a pure theocracy was not enough in the eyes of the people of Israel, God gave them a king. The subsequent government's effectiveness in wielding authority over the common life of the people of Israel, as well as in its responsibility to remain faithful to God, left much to be desired. The poor were mistreated, the laws God had established were defiled, and the people turned from worship of the Lord their God to the worship of idols.⁷ The children of Israel were then carried off into exile in Babylon.

The rulers of the Ancient Near East during the Captivity of the Israelites were indeed sinful. Not only were they born in sin and guilty of breaking God's law, there also is no conclusive evidence that any of them possessed saving faith in the true God. Under such circumstances, the people of Israel may have felt that they were justified in begrudging the

⁶ Based on timeline at <http://biblehub.com/timeline/old.htm>.

⁷ Look to the books of Kings, Chronicles, and the Minor Prophets (especially Amos) for examples.

authorities placed over them and perhaps even resisting them. After all, they were a nation once ruled by the King of heaven and earth himself. Yet, what did their King tell them?

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:4–7).

There are two points to be drawn from this passage: 1. God encouraged the people to live within society as members of that society; and 2. God instructed his people to seek the prosperity of that pagan society.

First, God wanted the people to be engaged with the society in which they lived. As subjects of the Babylonians, the Israelites would have had little choice; they were exiles. Yet, their inclination would have been to remain separate from Babylonian influence. Consider the many passages in which God commands the nation of Israel to remain distinct and not to intermarry with other nations.⁸ While this passage does not specifically give license to intermingle with the Babylonians in such a way, God does want them to live as residents of that country. In other words, while they remained God’s people with Israelite citizenship, they also lived as residents of Babylon.

Second, God commanded that the Israelites seek prosperity for the land in which they found themselves. Again, this would go against their natural inclination. These were their captors, their oppressors, their enemies. The last thing the Israelites would want is to see Babylon

⁸ E.g. Deuteronomy 7:3, 1 Kings 11:2.

prosper. Yet, as residents of that place, they were to seek its flourishing in light of the promises God made to them.⁹

One promise God made to captive Israel is found in Isaiah 45:1: “This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.” Isaiah goes on to say that God would support Cyrus “for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel, my chosen” (45:4). Isaiah’s prophecy would prove true when Cyrus conquered the Babylonian Empire in 540 BC.

The important understanding to draw from these verses with regard to government today is that God has given civil authority to all human governments—no matter how wicked—and will use them for his purpose. That is not to say that Cyrus of Persia was the most godly man who could rule that part of the world at that time. It is important to understand that just because a ruler holds a position of authority does not mean that person the best leader, the most qualified for the job, or that his rulings will be just. Rather, God expects respect and honor to be given to such authorities as his representatives, all the while understanding that he will work through—and sometimes in spite of—sinful human rulers.

So we see from the Old Testament that God, in establishing human governments, has three concerns: 1. God is concerned with the hearts of his people. In pointing out again and again his identity as the Lord and their deliverer, God showed the people of Israel (and believers

⁹ Consider God’s promise at the end of Jeremiah 29:7, as well as the promises of vv. 10–14: “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’”

throughout history) that he alone would rule in their hearts. 2. God is concerned for common life. God cares how his people interact with one another in communities. He desires that they love and care for the needy in society and seek to protect and preserve others. 3. God is concerned with human governments as instruments of his purpose. He uses the movements of history to accomplish what he desires and what he has promised.

Government in the New Testament

Where the Old Testament provides descriptions and examples, the New Testament provides direct instruction for Christians of every era. Very often, Christians will turn to what Paul wrote in Romans 13:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (vv. 1–7).

This passage is rather helpful in understanding how Christians are to relate to government. There are three points to be drawn out regarding Christian interaction with governing authorities.

The first point is that the authorities that exist have been established by God. Understand the context in which Paul wrote these words. The Roman government was far from Christian: Emperor Nero certainly was not a believer. Very soon, in fact, the Roman government would

begin violent and vigorous persecution against the Christian church. Yet, Paul said that all governing authorities—even that of the Romans—were established by God. What he means is that God has established a “chain of command”: God gives authority to human governments to which subjects and citizens report. In obeying human governments, Christians obey God and give glory to him.

The second point to draw from these verses is the judicial responsibility given to government: “They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” The governing authorities wield the sword of justice against those who would do harm against others. Daniel Deutschlander expresses it this way: “It is the primary business of the state as instituted by God to govern the outward behavior of people in the interest of maintaining an orderly society. It is to carry out that business by means of law . . . It has the tools of taxes and the sword for accomplishing its will . . . it is the duty of the state to deal with outward behavior.”¹⁰

It is important especially to notice that final duty listed by Deutschlander: to deal with outward behavior. God has established governing authorities to manage the outward lives of sinful human beings. Through law and reason, the state both maintains order by curbing wrongdoers and provides for the physical needs of citizens.

The third point relates once again to the Christian’s obligation regarding these governing authorities. Paul exhorts Christians to “give to everyone what you owe them.” Understood in context, this phrase extends even beyond the Christian’s relationship to the government. Romans 12 provides guidance in offering our bodies “as living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1). With this

¹⁰ Daniel M. Deutschlander. *Grace Abounds: the Splendor of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2015, 524.

section of Romans, God is demonstrating to Christians of all ages how they are to love others and so fulfill God's law (Romans 12:10). The final verses of the above quoted section of Romans 13 ("Give to everyone what you owe them") then take on an additional dimension in light of modern, liberal democracy, as will be discussed in a later section.

1 Peter 2 also provides some explicit guidance regarding civil authority:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor (vv. 13–17).

Once again, observe how the instructions regarding civil authority are closely tied to the lives Christians live in society in general. Not only are God's people to submit to human governments, but by so doing, they are an example to others and express the freedom they have in Christ. The respect and love shown to others is an expression of the honor Christians give to God, as well as the respect they present before the civil authorities placed over them.

Many will point to Jesus's teaching regarding taxes as another example of God's teachings regarding civil government. The confrontation between Jesus and some of the Jewish leaders is recorded in Mark 12, Matthew 22, and Luke 20. The key statement Jesus made is to "give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." Dr. Gutenson, in his book *Christians and the Common Good* makes a compelling point about reading this section in context:

Nothing in the context suggests that Jesus is intending to give guidance on questions dealing with how Christians should view public institutions or civil government . . . For Jesus, it is unimaginable that any aspect of human life extends beyond God's active involvement and lordship. Nothing in the immediate context leads us to believe that

Jesus intends in this passage to deal with the role of civil governments in realizing God's intentions.¹¹

While his point is well taken, his conclusion is overstated.¹² Yes, this occasion was not a time when Jesus was necessarily intending to provide teaching on how to relate to civil government. However, Christians still must take seriously what Jesus said. There is no indication that he is making a specific point that only applies in this one case. The general way in which Jesus speaks leads to the conclusion that Jesus intends what he says to be taken generally.

The general principle, then, is that Christians recognize the honor due to governmental authority will also include the paying of taxes. As Paul wrote in Romans 13, "This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing" (v. 6). Civil authorities have a right to levy taxes, and Christians please God when they pay those taxes. This then extends to the various ways in which Christians can honor governmental authority and political systems; a topic which will be covered in the section on Christians in democracy.

God's Promises Regarding Civil Government

By looking at what God says about civil government, God's intentions for civil government are clear. As with all the events and institutions of the sinful world, Christians have the promise that "God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). With this confidence, Christians can see what specific promises God has attached to his institution of civil government:

¹¹ Charles E. Gutenson, *Christians and the Common Good: How Faith Intersects with Public Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011, 33, 34.

¹² Gutenson's approach to civil authority will be more fully addressed in a later section.

1. God has promised that outward behavior will be regulated by civil government. God's intention is that the natural knowledge of his law, written on the hearts of all, will rule in cooperation with human reason to create a safe society in which to live. This is accomplished through the rewards and punishments governments distribute. Those who obey the law enjoy a peaceful life and are protected from threats to their physical well-being. Those who disobey the law are curbed by the threat of punishment. Those who are harmed by others are given justice through the rule of law.

2. God has promised that good governance will lead to peaceful lives in which Christians can share the gospel. As Paul wrote to Timothy, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior" (1 Timothy 2:1–3). Under this promise also is the separation of the two kingdoms. As Christ's Church, Christians serve as priests before God on behalf of those in authority. In praying for "kings and all those in authority" Christians are asking that God would use those people to provide a secure and peaceful nation in which the gospel can flourish. Christians do not possess the responsibility to provide such security, nor are civil authorities compelled to serve in a religious capacity.

3. God has promised that government will provide regulation of society as a whole. The first promise in this list deals specifically with curbing the outward immoral behavior of members of society. This point deals more with the minutiae of public life. Human governments preside over more than morality and justice. They can provide help for the poor, they levy taxes, they provide currency and can provide economic controls. Especially in a democracy, which is

governed by the majority opinion, the form of governance will be shaped by what the populace desires from its government.

THE FORM AND FUNCTION OF DEMOCRACY

The writers of the Bible all lived under governments quite distinct from that of the United States. Even the Lutheran Confessors could not have conceived of a liberal, pluralistic, representative democracy such as the one modern Americans enjoy. The question Christians have before them, then, is how they are to relate to their government when it is far more than simply the established rulers.

In reality, Christians in the United States hold a unique position in world history. Where Christians of the past either enjoyed having rulers who tolerated Christianity, who were themselves Christian, or who persecuted Christians, American Christians are in many ways their own rulers. If the elected officials do not govern in the best interests of their Christian constituents, those Christians have the ability to voice their concerns and even change those officials. When Christians find themselves in such a situation, their relationship to their government becomes more nuanced than it was in centuries past.¹³ To help navigate the issue of relating to a democratic government, Christians do well to understand what exactly what democracy is.

¹³ The Apostles could simply say “submit to the authorities” except in cases where they had to say “we must obey God” In both cases, it was simply a matter of an official telling a Christian what to do, and then the Christian complying or not complying on the basis of what God has commanded.

The Establishment of Democracy

God has established civil government for the good of humanity in general. From a doctrinal standpoint, this fact would be difficult to argue. Human beings had no say in the matter. If we take God's pronouncement after the Flood in Genesis 9 as the first establishment of government, then we see that God established government as his agent against the will of human beings; humanity needed to be curbed due to its proclivity toward evil, and so God said, "by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). So, too, with the age of the judges: God's theocratic government was not honored among the people. They did as they pleased, without regard for their neighbor. The last words of the book of Judges read: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 21:25).

Such an ungoverned state of humanity is akin to Rousseau's¹⁴ primitive condition. He claims that the first law of natural man is to care for himself; that he is by nature his own master.¹⁵ Yet, in the interest of caring for himself, he will join into a society: "Let us take it that men have reached the point at which the obstacles to their survival in the state of nature overpower each individual's resources for maintaining himself in that state. So this primitive condition can't go on; the human race will perish unless it changes its manner of existence."¹⁶ According to Rousseau, any form of governance is based upon the need of the populace. They

¹⁴ Born in Geneva in 1712, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a political philosopher who has had a profound effect upon political and philosophical thought. His political interests primarily were concerned with harmonizing human freedom with the increasing interdependence of individuals in the societies of his day (Bertram, Christopher, "Jean Jacques Rousseau", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/rousseau/>>.)

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *The Social Contract*. Translated by Jonathan Bennet, accessed at www.earlymoderntexts.com, 3.

¹⁶ Rousseau, 6.

give their allegiance to each other and so give up some of their freedom; in return, each one receives what he needs to survive.

This is what Rousseau sees as the basis of society. He calls it the “social contract” (or “social compact,” as some translations render it). As proof for his argument, he points to the example of a family:¹⁷

You could call the family the prime model of political societies: the ruler corresponds to the father, and the people to the children; and all of them—ruler, people, father, children—because they were born free and equal don’t give up their liberty without getting something in return. The whole difference is that in the family the father’s care for his children is repaid by his love for them, whereas in the state the ruler’s care for the people under him is repaid not by love for them (which he doesn’t have!) but by the pleasure of being in charge.¹⁸

According to Rousseau, the father goes against his nature and cares for his children because he benefits from such a contract—the benefit being the affection he receives from his children.

When the children no longer need the father—or vice-versa—the contract ends and each individual returns to his natural state, i.e. being his own master.

Building upon this idea, Rousseau makes the claim that all societies, being built upon the model of this filial contract, are in themselves a social contract. Each person is unable to meet his or her own needs individually, so each one gives up the right to be his or her own master in order to receive what is necessary to survive. They then might choose for themselves a ruler.

Rousseau wants to be clear concerning the order of events in the social contract. Before a people can choose to be ruled (against their natural condition) they must first choose to become a people (against their natural condition). A collection of individuals becomes the collective

¹⁷ Luther also, in including government in his meaning of the fourth commandment, points to the family as the basis for human governance.

¹⁸ Rousseau, 3.

people, each one making two commitments: “as a member of the state he has a commitment to the sovereign, and as a member of the sovereign he has a commitment to each of the individuals, he being one of them.”¹⁹

As democracy has developed up to the present time, the idea of social contract has largely been retained. A number of philosophers who influenced (or were directly involved in) the Declaration of Independence and the formation of the United States expressed thoughts similar to Rousseau: John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Hugo Grotius, and Immanuel Kant, to name a few. Even the Declaration itself pays homage to the concept: “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”²⁰

The objection is sometimes raised that the social contract is a denial of God’s institution of human government. The argument being that governments derive their power not from the consent of the governed, but from God’s proclamation (whether God’s proclamation is that of Genesis 9 or elsewhere). This is certainly a difficulty that must be overcome; on the one hand, Scripture teaches that the authorities govern as God’s civil representatives; on the other, the core of democratic processes assumes a universal consent to operate democratically. Return to Rousseau: “The law of majority voting is itself something established by agreement, and it presupposes that on at least one occasion there was a unanimous vote [to be governed by majority voting].”²¹

¹⁹ Rousseau, 7.

²⁰ The Declaration of Independence. Transcript found at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

²¹ Rousseau, 6.

What might be useful to understanding how God has remains the source of every civil authority, is to look at how God used sinful human rulers to further his purpose. Look again at the kings of Babylon, the process of Roman law, and the rulers of Judea at the time of Jesus. None of these governments acknowledged God as the source of their authority—in fact, most of them pointed to the source of their authority as their own false gods; some would even claim themselves to be divine. Yet God, the Lord and ruler of history, was the true source of their authority, and used them to accomplish his purpose.

So it is with the social contract assumed in democratic governments. While Christians acknowledge that God is the source of all authority, they can also rest assured that no election happens outside of his knowledge and influence. No ruler, whether president, king, or emperor, has any power apart from the secular power God has granted to him.

The Promises of Democracy

The secular power God has granted to civil authorities has certain promises attached to it. These promises, however, do not preclude separate promises made by the established authorities and systems of a specific government. Where God has promised that a government will provide security and justice for its citizens, that government can in addition promise to provide other services which are not explicitly included in those promises of God. Because this paper is written from the perspective of a United States citizen, the form of liberal, pluralistic democracy present in the United States will form the basis for the discussion on the promises of modern democracy.

Regarding the social contract, then, there are included promises that are additional to the promises God has made. The first of these promises is inherent to the contract itself: that people

will join together for the common good. The United States, a liberal democracy, additionally promised protection of private property under the rule of law. This promise was the core of the Founding Fathers' intent, as the center of their political philosophy was found largely in the writings of John Locke.

At the present time, however, American democracy has shifted away from this "classical liberalism" into the "new" liberalism. Where Locke's idea of liberty centered on the free market as means to equality, the 19th and 20th centuries caused many to doubt its effectiveness. This gave rise to the idea that personal liberties extend beyond those rights of life, liberty, and property. A different view of liberalism was required to ensure a stable, free society for all.²²

Therefore, the United States falls into the category of a new-liberal democracy. The major difference between classical liberalism and the new liberalism is the promises made regarding people's natural rights. Classical liberalism famously promises "life, liberty, and property." New liberalism promises what many have taken to calling "social justice."²³

Take, for example, the Affordable Care Act. While some may argue that the rights promised by this piece of legislation fall under Locke's category of "life," nevertheless, affordable health care is not a right granted by nature, nor one necessarily guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. However, this right was granted in an effort to reach a level of "social justice" which many in American culture agree should be granted and protected by the federal government. There is no shortage of "social justice" rulings in recent history: the Civil Rights Act, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case which guaranteed the

²² Gerald Gaus, et al., "Liberalism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/liberalism/>>.

²³ Gaus, Courtland, and Schmitz.

right to marry to same-sex couples. While Christians may disagree on such protections falling under God’s initial intention for civil government, they must acknowledge that this is the government under which they live if they are citizens of the United States. Because the U.S. is so governed, and “the authorities that exist have been established by God,” they submit to this form of governance.

At the same time, Christians are promised through that very government the ability to lobby for change in how they are governed. The Constitution of the United States makes a promise regarding this governance: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence[sic], promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”²⁴ This “more perfect union” present in the social contract of the United States is that citizens are given the right to vote. However, this right bears with it a certain set of rules, as well as a set of expectations.

The Right to Vote

Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba’s work *The Civic Culture* represents the findings of a survey of five democracies in the middle of the 20th century. Their goal was to conduct a “study of the political culture of democracy.”²⁵ In their study, they identified three broad categories that describe the level of political engagement within a political culture: parochial, subject, and participant. In the parochial culture, “there are no specialized political roles . . . and for members

²⁴ U.S. Constitution, Preamble.

²⁵ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. vii.

of these societies the political orientations to these roles are not separated from their religious and social orientations. A parochial orientation also implies the comparative absence of expectations of change initiated by the political system. The parochial expects nothing from the political system.”²⁶ Almond and Verba point to many tribal societies as examples of parochial cultures: the idea of politics is largely alien to them, as they likely have *de facto* rulers who also fulfill other roles within the culture.

Like a parochial culture, a subject culture does not have high expectations of involvement in political processes:

There is a high frequency of orientations toward a differentiated political system and toward the output aspects of the system, but orientations toward specifically input objects, and toward the self as an active participant, approach zero. The subject is aware of specialized governmental authority; he is affectively oriented to it, perhaps taking pride in it, perhaps disliking it; and he evaluates it either as legitimate or as not. But the relationship is toward the system on the general level, and toward the output, administrative, or “downward flow” side of the political system; it is essentially a passive relationship, although there is, as we shall show below, a limited form of competence that is appropriate in a subject culture.²⁷

The difference between a parochial and subject culture is in the explicit nature of political power. Where parochial cultures tend to have powers that function in more than a political capacity, subject cultures have political powers that operate solely as such. Members of such a culture are more oriented to political systems because those systems are clearly defined and affect their lives directly. A monarchy would be an example of a subject political culture.

The final political culture Almond and Verba describe is the participant culture. “The third major type of political culture, the participant culture, is one in which the members of the

²⁶ Almond., 17–18.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

society tend to be explicitly oriented to the system as a whole and to both the political and administrative structures and processes: in other words, to both the input and output aspects of the political system.”²⁸ Members of a participant culture are invested not only in the effect political powers have upon their lives, but also in the processes of government. Democracies fall into this third type of political culture.

It should be noted that, while political cultures may tend toward one of these categories, most do not strictly belong to only one of them. For example, a democracy would rightly be termed a participant culture. However, citizens within a democracy still have a role as subjects of the governing powers, even if they have a high level of political engagement. They can also retain parochial aspects of political culture, being primarily oriented to their social connections and functions, rather than the political powers that exist.

Even in participant cultures, people tend to be oriented more toward the output of political structures than the input process of those structures.²⁹ Such orientation is natural: people tend to be more concerned with ways in which legislation will affect their lives than they are in the processes going on behind the scenes. Such an attitude represents the attitude of a subject, whose obligations to the political culture are passive rather than active. Understand that such an attitude is not itself a bad thing. The majority of people in the history of the world have lived in subject cultures. However, such an attitude is not conducive to fulfilling the promises made by democracy, nor the promises citizens make when they enter a social contract.

²⁸ Almond, 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

Rousseau wrote, “as a member of the state [a citizen] has a commitment to the sovereign, and as a member of the sovereign he has a commitment to each of the individuals, he being one of them.”³⁰ On the basis of this, he defined the social contract: “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole.”³¹

Based on the details of the social contract, citizens indeed have an obligation to one another. While this obligation can fall into a spectrum (classic liberalism would claim only the obligation to wield civil authority to protect each person’s right to private property, while modern liberal democracies burden themselves with greater obligations), each member of a democratic society has obligated himself to his fellow citizens: to rule justly, and to preserve the rights which the whole (through majority voting) has agreed to preserve.

So far we have seen how God establishes human governments. We also see how he uses those governments for his purposes, even when those governments extend beyond his initial institution of civil authority or even when those governments stand in opposition to his moral law. On the basis of New Testament passages, it is clearly seen that every governing authority stands as God’s representative in the public sphere, to provide safety and to punish wrongdoers. Finally, we have observed the process of democracy and the promises which democratic governments make to their citizens.

The foundation upon which this discussion will continue is this: that God expresses his authority through the social contract. God does not prescribe it (that is, the form of government is

³⁰ Rousseau, 7.

³¹ Ibid., 7.

not part of God's eternal will), but uses elected leaders and the participant political culture of the United States to "work all things for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). By participating in this culture, Christians agree to a certain set of rules; namely, that their public lives will be governed by majority vote. At the same time, citizens (including Christians) have the ability to change the rules, provided they have enough support. Moving forward will be an examination of how Christians are to go about governing as members of the public and in what ways they can expect to "change the rules" of American governance.

CHRISTIANS IN DEMOCRACY

The underlying assumption in political philosophies such as those of Locke and Rousseau is that human beings will exert their power out of a sense of self-interest. Generally, this is true. Human beings by nature are self-centered (from a theological stand-point). Many might argue against such a proposition on the basis of evidence: the philanthropy undertaken by many people in the wake of a crisis such as Hurricane Harvey.³² However altruistic the general population might be, the underlying assumption of democracy is that each person will govern largely in their own interests; or, at the very least, in the interest of others after being motivated by the rewards of living within the social contract.

Christians (according to their New Man) will have a different perspective. While the sinful nature remains self-centered, a Christian in his or her life of sanctification will seek to

³² The donations collected by a fund-raiser led by J.J. Watt (a professional football star) exceeded \$37 million: <https://www.cbssports.com/nfl/news/j-j-watts-final-fundraiser-total-for-hurricane-harvey-relief-tops-37-million/>.

show self-sacrificing love to others within a community. Given that the community that is involved in the social contract of United States democracy is the population of the aforementioned country, Christians possess a mindset and are in a position to show their Christian love to the entire population of their country.

At the same time, Christians will also seek to give honor to God by acknowledging the reasons why he established government, and by giving a witness to who he is and what he has revealed about the world and about human beings. To that end, what follows are the implications of the nature of American democracy for the Christian seeking active and cognizant political engagement.

Christians in the Two Kingdoms

Lutheran teaching has always made the distinction between the authority given to civil government and that given to the Church. This teaching is called the doctrine of the two kingdoms. In expressing the doctrine in this way, Lutherans confess that both kingdoms belong to and were established by God. They operate by the rules that he has given and they are given to human beings to accomplish specific tasks.

The role of the spiritual kingdom—often called the Kingdom of God, i.e. the Church—is to carry out the great commission; to go and make disciples of all nations. God has given instructions and tools to his Church to accomplish that purpose, namely, the teachings of the Bible and the means of grace. While God often speaks of his Church as a collective,³³ the tasks

³³ cf. Romans 12:5.

he has given to that collective are carried out by individual Christians, or by public ministers who are specifically called to carry out gospel ministry on the behalf of a group.

Democratic political systems have interesting parallels with the way in which the Church carries out its task. Just as gospel ministry is given to every believer, so the authority to govern is given to every citizen. Just as collections of believers might appoint an individual to carry out ministry on their behalf, so citizens elect representatives who promise to preserve and protect the rights and freedoms granted within a democratic state. While there are interesting parallels, there are also differences.

Looking at the passages regarding civil government, one can see that it has only been given authority over the earthly care of its subjects. Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 are especially helpful, as the Apostles wrote to Christians living under unbelieving governments; unlike the Old Testament writers who lived as and wrote to subjects of a theocracy. What needs to be made clear, however, is how far God intends the earthly care provided by the government to go, and at what point it crosses the boundaries of the kingdom of this world.

Confessional Lutheranism teaches that the roles of the two kingdoms are to be kept distinct: “Consequently, the powers of church and civil government must not be mixed. The power of the church possesses its own command to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. It should not usurp the other’s duty . . . In this way our people distinguish the duties of the two powers, and they command that both be held in honor.”³⁴ However, there is naturally some overlap to their interests. Christians are concerned for the poor and needy; they desire to express their Christian love to others and so give a witness to God’s love in order to present

³⁴ Augsburg Confession, Latin Text, Article XXVIII in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 93.

others with the gospel. Civil governments also have a vested interest in a strong and prosperous population. This overlap becomes all the more apparent in liberal democracies, where the promises of the social contract include a number of rights beyond those of life, liberty, and property.

The civil authorities and the Church also have overlapping interests in the areas of morality. Here, the distinction needs to be kept very clear. The Church is concerned about morality because it wants to honor God and his commands and give testimony to both law and gospel. The state, however, is interested in morality only insofar as it affects the public life of the population. God has given human governments the sword to punish wrongdoers and protect the innocent. However, the concept of morality is very different between believers and unbelievers.

“The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Romans 8:7). The unbelieving world cannot be expected to conform to what God has revealed in Scripture. Unbelieving governments are going to govern in accordance with what they see is right. They are to provide justice for those who are wronged and security for the vulnerable. They govern by laws based on human reason, while the Church is governed by Christian freedom based on the gospel of Jesus and his work.

This is where the lines become blurred for many. Democracy is based upon liberty, and liberty is often equated with freedom: the ability to do as a person pleases, assuming he doesn’t cause harm to or infringe on the rights of another. Christian freedom, on the other hand, refers to the freedom found in Christ which enables Christians to act in faith out of love for neighbor. This freedom finds its expression in restraining the sinful nature and the desire for personal gain and seeking instead to glorify God and benefit one’s neighbor. As far as liberal democracy is

concerned, liberty and personal freedom are to be expressed with the only restraint being the rule of law, which protects the innocent and provides justice for the wronged.

Christians in a Pluralistic Democracy

So we come to the matter of political pluralism. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines political pluralism under the entry for value pluralism:

Political pluralism usually starts with the observation that there are different value systems in use in the world, and there are various positions that arise out of that observation. Political pluralism is concerned with the question of what sort of restrictions governments can put on people's freedom to act according to their value systems. The strongest version of political pluralism claims that all these value systems are equally true (and thus presumably all ought to be tolerated), a weaker view is that these value systems all ought to be tolerated, and probably the most common version of the view is that some of these systems (the reasonable ones) ought to be tolerated. We shall leave political pluralism aside for the purposes of this entry.³⁵

Liberal democracies must in some way address political pluralism. While different governments will deal with the issue in different ways (on the basis of majority vote), democracies will make a judgment as to what value systems will be tolerated within their societies.

Within a democracy, religious faiths qualify as value systems. Christians possess one value system, Hindus another, and atheists yet another (value system, not religious faith). The First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees religious pluralism within the United States.³⁶

³⁵ Elinor Mason, "Value Pluralism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/value-pluralism/>>.

³⁶ "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

the federal government may not tell citizens what they are to believe, nor may it provide any sort of preferential treatment to one religion over another.³⁷

Christians would very much like to live in a Christian society, that is, a society in which all people are perfectly sanctified Christians. As it is, Christians live as “foreigners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11). They recognize that the sinful world—along with the pluralistic opinions of the unbelieving mind—is contrary to God’s intention for human society. However, God’s promises regarding government do not assume a Christian government. A truly unified, Christian nation is an impossibility—while this world persists, sin will persist, and sin will prevent any truly unified Christian government from existing. Therefore, Christians must come to terms with living within pluralistic societies.

Sidney E. Mead’s *Nation with the Soul of a Church* deals directly with the tension between the Christian citizens of a religiously pluralistic democracy. He writes,

[The idea that the United States was once a Protestant nation] is patently false when applied to what may be called the theology of the Republic, upon which rests the thinking behind the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the long line of court decisions on matters pertaining to religious freedom. Henry Steele Commager seems to me to have had the right distinction in mind when he wrote that ‘in everything but law, America, at the opening of the 20th century, was a Christian nation.’ The exception ‘in everything but law’ is very important, for the legal structure is the skeleton that holds up the meat of the body politic.³⁸

The “theology of the Republic,” as Sidney Mead calls it, and the theology to which Christians subscribe are incompatible. The former is entirely secular,³⁹ built upon the premise that human

³⁷ Unless, of course, a religious belief would be a threat to the liberties of other citizens protected by the United States’ social contract.

³⁸ Sidney Earl Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1985), 18.

³⁹ Ibid: “the religion of democracy is thoroughgoing secularism,” 18.

beings can arrive at the “more perfect union” on their own. The latter denies the ability of human beings to solve the problems of the sinful world; God’s intervention is required if true justice is to be realized.

The social contract into which United States Christians have entered, therefore, operates upon the premise that all religions are equally valid, because from a secular point of view—i.e., the “theology” which governs the social contract—there is not much difference between them. If religious teaching produces law-abiding citizens, the Republic as a whole is unconcerned with the content of that teaching. If religious people wish that a democratic country be governed according to their tenets, they must demonstrate to the rest of the population that their system of morality is better than all others on the basis of reason alone. As already mentioned, human reason cannot conclude that God’s ways are superior to humanity’s.

Yet God clearly speaks against unjust—and even ungodly—rulers. Take, for example, Psalm 2: “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles’ . . . Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling” (vv. 1–3, 10, 11). Doesn’t such a passage lead us to combat religious pluralism? Should we not desire godly rulers, who acknowledge the Lord? Of course we should. But we must be careful, lest we confuse the two kingdoms of God. It belongs to God’s Church to give him honor and praise. It belongs to the state to rule. Elected officials can operate in both kingdoms, but within a religiously pluralistic society such as the United States, Christians should be prepared for—and

expect⁴⁰—unbelieving rulers. Perhaps, in these end times, it is too much to hope for a victory in the battle against religious pluralism in countries like the United States.⁴¹

Christians and Liberty

The battlefield upon which Christians can make a stand is in the realm of liberalism: the value democracy places on individual liberty. While that sentence must grate on Confessional Lutheran ears, it might become more palatable after some explanation. Jesus promised that in the last days, there would be relatively few believers: “At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other . . . Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:10, 12). Yet he also has encouraged his disciples to bear witness to the ends of the earth and so bring more into the knowledge of his salvation: “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). While Christians have a great opponent in pluralism, they have a great ally in the liberalism espoused by the United States.

In addition to establishing pluralism, the First Amendment also provides the opportunity for religious witness. Because Christians can speak freely on religious matters, they are able to testify to the truth in the public sphere. What a change from the early days of Christianity, when believers faced persecution, arrest, and death. Yet this political liberalism does not come without the need for wisdom.

⁴⁰ Given Jesus’ words, “take up [your] cross and follow me,” and his promise that the end times would see relatively few believers, such an expectation is reasonable.

⁴¹ This is not to advocate defeatism in the public sphere. Rather, it is an acknowledgement of what Jesus promised would happen as his people await his second coming, and can serve also as a call to diligent action within the Kingdom of God as we wait for the day when the final victory is won: Jesus’ return.

The structure of the United States is built upon the liberties granted by the Constitution and other governing documents and decisions throughout the history of the country. While the majority of past generations of Americans called themselves Christian, the United States has never been a “Christian nation.” It was not founded upon the teachings of the Bible, nor does it assume any religious identity for its citizens. Quite the opposite, in fact. United States citizens, of all faiths, have the same rights as Christians do.

The battle against the devil, the world, and the sinful nature of unbelievers cannot be fought in the political arena. Voting for legislation that conforms to biblical morality is not the same as Christian witness. In the summer of 2017, Russell Vought was nominated to the Office of Management and Budget. He was questioned by Senator Bernie Sanders: “...Do you believe people in the Muslim religion stand condemned?”⁴² While this was an opportunity to testify to the exclusivity of salvation found in Christ alone, it could not come at a more inconvenient time. It is true that the Constitution promises that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”⁴³ Yet, in the context of being asked to uphold and protect the rights of one’s fellow citizens, the Bible’s clear teaching will cause doubts in the minds of others concerning a candidate or nominee’s ability to govern fairly. Remember the promises God makes regarding civil government: just treatment of all people. While a Christian who takes seriously the second table of the law could be expected to uphold the rights of his fellow citizens regardless of their spiritual status before God, his religious statements regarding those of other religious faiths can be easily misconstrued. To use a

⁴² Transcript taken from https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sanders-is-right-russell-voughts-nomination-should_us_593af9d0e4b014ae8c69e030.

⁴³ U.S. Constitution, Article VI.

government position to make political statements in support of biblical morality gives the Christian's individual responsibility as a witness to God's word to the secular government.

Christians still need to operate in public life, however. As members of the Kingdom of God, they wield the means of grace in an effort to reach out to those who do not know Christ. Very often, however, Christians are mistaken about how to go about this mission. We will now move into a discussion of the ways in which many Christians engage in the public sphere.

The Christian Voter and Elected Officials

After looking at these facets of life in American democracy, what remains is the question no doubt leveled at any number of WELS pastors: "Who should I vote for?" Perhaps this question is better stated as, "Who should *Christians* vote for?" Politics is complicated. There are a number of issues and factors to be considered, from the perspective of civil government and the promises of democracy and to the wider geo-political climate of the time, and every policy decision in between.

While a Christian has the right not to vote (voting is not compulsory in the United States), to abstain from voting is not the best expression of Christian love. Despite the burden required of the individual, it is better by far to become aware of the responsibilities of elected officials and informed about the issues they will address. Christian love assumes self-sacrifice, and the sacrifice of time and effort in becoming informed about elections and candidates is one way in which Christian voters can express their love.

The Duties of Elected Officials

Integral to the question of how Christians should vote is the meaning of an individual's vote.

What is implicit when a person votes for a candidate? Are they saying that this is the most qualified, the most fair, the most experienced person for the job? Or, are they simply expressing agreement with the person's policy positions? What follows is a discussion of what officials are elected to do and the qualifications they are expected to have.

The Constitution has relatively little to say on what qualifies a person to serve in the federal government of the United States. For positions in the legislative and executive branches, the only requirements are a minimum age,⁴⁴ a minimum length of residency in the United States,⁴⁵ and, only in the case of the president, that they be a "natural born citizen" of the United States.⁴⁶ The Constitution does not lay out any other qualifications for these positions.

In addition to the qualifications of an elected official, the responsibilities of the offices to which they are elected also need consideration. The president's responsibilities include: serving as head of state and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces; the execution and enforcement of congressional law; the appointment and oversight of members of his cabinet, as well as other federal commissions; the veto power as a check against the legislative branch; the ability to pardon federal crimes; the responsibility to report on the state of the Union before Congress; as well as serving as the primary ambassador of the United States.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ For representatives, 25 years old; for senators, 30; and for the president, 35.

⁴⁵ The assumption for senators and representatives is that they are residents of the area they represent.

⁴⁶ U.S. Constitution, Article II, Section I.

⁴⁷ U.S. Constitution, Article II, sections 2 and 3

The responsibilities of Congress are essentially “to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.”⁴⁸ Included in this duty is the ability to levy taxes; to declare and wage war; to set the nation’s currency, etc.

Members of both the legislative and executive branches⁴⁹ take an oath of office. The current congressional oath of office reads,

I, AB, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.⁵⁰

The presidential oath, while shorter, has much the same spirit: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.” When the people of the United States elect officials to office, their duties are prescribed by the Constitution and affirmed by the oaths they take when they enter the office.

Due to the duties and oaths of elected officials, voters need to understand the positions for which an election is held—especially Christians. That is not to say that all Christian voters must be able to navigate the intricacies of legislation or international diplomacy. Rather, Christians need to be aware of the job they are asking their president, senator, or representative

⁴⁸ U.S. Constitution Article I, section 8.

⁴⁹ The third branch of the United States’ government is not treated here because justices of the Supreme Court are appointed by the president and not elected by the people.

⁵⁰ <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Origins-Development/Oath-of-Office/>

to do. This understanding will guide Christians in voting for candidates who are well-equipped for their duties and capable of representing the people of the United States.

The Importance of Issues

While there are any number of political issues that weigh heavily on the hearts of Christians in the United States, not all of them are particularly important regarding the duties of elected officials. For example, a president's opinion on abortion is not likely to come into his daily considerations as he executes the duties of his office; he has far more pressing matters of state with which he must deal.

American citizens are not electing moral examples (though an upright, moral life will help a candidate get elected), nor are they electing religious leaders; they are electing legislators and governors. Far more important than considerations about personal opinions on whatever issue will score more points in the polls is their ability to accomplish the tasks to which they are elected. As those who have entered into a social contract wherein officials are elected to represent the people, U.S. citizens have implicitly agreed to vote for those candidates which they believe will best represent their interests.

Christians, however, take this implicit agreement one step further because their interests include love and compassion for neighbor. In a representative, liberal, pluralistic democracy, Christians must think critically about the candidates for whom they vote because they will want their neighbor to enjoy the representation, the rights, and the legitimacy of belief which they enjoy.

PREVAILING POLITICAL APPROACHES

How should a Christian vote? As a citizen with the ability to engage in governance through the power of the social contract, what does the Christian owe to his fellow citizens? What follows is a discussion of some of the common approaches Christians take to democratic politics. While the list is not exhaustive, these broad categories represent common ways Christians have reacted to the responsibility of voting.

The Social Gospel

The so-called social gospel is perhaps the best represented and most familiar of political approaches among Christians. The basic thesis of the social gospel is that the Church has a responsibility to improve social structures: “For me, ‘social justice’ is integral to the meaning of the gospel—a holistic message that includes both personal salvation and social transformation. This is the gospel of the kingdom, not an atonement-only gospel. In the latter, it almost seems that Jesus wasted his first three years with all those teachings, parables, and healings.”⁵¹ Jim Wallis, the author of the preceding quote, is a leader within the social gospel. He is president and founder of the publication *Sojourners*, which “sit[s] at the intersection of faith, politics, and culture.”⁵² *Sojourners*, and therefore its founder, Wallis, holds a fair amount of influence within Christian thinking,⁵³ as will be seen.

⁵¹ Jim Wallis. *On God's Side*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013., 54.

⁵² Wallis, J. (Ed.). (2016, September 14). “About Us.” From <https://sojo.net/about-us>.

⁵³ According to the *Sojourners* website, the publication has a combined readership of 5 million people.

The “gospel of the kingdom” is the primary concern of the social gospel. The goal of this so-called gospel is that the world conform to a “kingdom agenda.” Dr. Gutenson writes:

First and foremost, Christians must focus on specific ways in which public and private institutions can be brought into alignment so as to encourage and empower human flourishing at all levels. We should be looking for ways to realize the kinds of things we have discovered in our discussion so far . . . for the purpose of accomplishing the ends we have discerned that God intends for us.⁵⁴

At the core of Gutenson’s thesis is the idea that God’s primary concern is human flourishing.

While this can be understood properly, the way Gutenson (and Wallis) write, it is clear that they do not have the ultimate, eternal flourishing of human beings in view. Rather, these two men understand the “kingdom of God” to be an earthly kingdom: God’s rule over all things.⁵⁵

Gutenson sees civil government playing an integral role in that kingdom: “Governments and public institutions are ordained by God to serve their particular purpose in a kingdom agenda. As Christians we should insist that governments live up to the divine intent.”⁵⁶

Gutenson goes on to write that human governments do not replace God’s kingdom, but that they are a part of God’s design of the world. In this aspect, he’s correct: God has ordained human government for the good of humanity, i.e. for the earthly flourishing of human beings. Where he missteps is that God’s kingdom, understood in the narrow sense, does not include “social transformation” (as Wallis stated above) as a primary concern. Certainly social transformation can result from Christians bearing witness in civic and social life through

⁵⁴ Gutenson, 149.

⁵⁵ Cf. my citation of Gutenson from page 12: “For Jesus, it is unimaginable that any aspect of human life extends beyond God’s active involvement and lordship.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 148.

activism and voting, but this comes only after the inner transformation the Holy Spirit accomplishes when he brings a person into the Kingdom of God by bringing him or her to faith.

Wallis and Gutenson are to be commended in their holistic approach to Christian life and teaching. Both are careful to view Scripture as a whole, and to understand doctrine as an interwoven fabric of truth, not as individual items God has loosely strung together.⁵⁷ However, their oversight in the area of Christian teaching is in defining the gospel. Wallis, in attempting to have a holistic gospel, wants to include social transformation within the purpose of the gospel. When biblical descriptions of the gospel are observed, however, such a purpose is incompatible with the gospel's function.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes,” Paul states in Romans 1:16. He goes on to say, “in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” Paul's idea of the gospel is decisively soteriological: the gospel saves sinners by revealing God's righteousness. This is not done by giving birth to righteousness through social structures, but by giving birth to faith in the heart. From beginning to end, the righteousness granted by the gospel is “by faith”—faith that appropriates God's salvation.

If the righteousness revealed in the gospel is by faith, then the righteousness God seeks to accomplish is at once narrower and broader than the kind of righteousness supposed by a “gospel of the kingdom:” narrower in that it deals with individuals, rather than societies; broader in that it

⁵⁷ Gutenson wants every aspect of Christian doctrine to inform his theology of civic engagement. He says on page 58: “We will focus our attention first on aspects of God's nature and then on the implications the divine nature should have for how we order our common public lives.”

is a matter of the heart, and not a matter of mere outward action.⁵⁸ Christian political engagement, therefore, recognizes that the gospel's transformative power is not effected upon a society directly, but through the evangelical efforts of Christians who want to see others brought into the faith, righteousness, and salvation which they enjoy.

Patriotic Legalism

Christians must focus on true gospel proclamation if they want to improve the lives of those around them. Ultimately, the goal of any approach to political engagement is to improve society. The social gospel claims that if society conforms to God's values—namely, caring for “the least of these”—then civil authorities are furthering God's kingdom: his rule over all things to allow human beings to flourish. The next approach to political engagement instead sees God's kingdom as his rule over people's behavior.

The second popular approach to how Christians are to wield their voting power is less a theological position and more a spirit—one that is prevalent in the United States. Matt Walsh, a popular conservative blogger, provides an example of the kind of language this spirit uses in his article, “We are Doomed as a Nation—Unless we turn back to God:”

America survived two wars with Britain, the Civil War, the Depression, two world wars, and the Cold War, but it only did so with the blessings of God. We were a religious people in those times. We cried out to God to deliver us, to heal us, and He did because He knew that we had so much to give to the world. God would not allow a freedom-

⁵⁸ Gutenson's latter chapters deal with the kind of political outcomes he believes Christians should seek. Invariably, they revolve around social justice: ways in which society can make sure to care for those who have been denied some of the opportunity or privilege which is assumed by living in a democracy. Gutenson calls such people “the least of these,” quoting Jesus' words of Matthew 25:40.

loving, God-fearing, devout people to perish from the Earth. We came to him in prayer, and He responded.⁵⁹

This spirit is prevalent among conservative Christianity. It has even been expressed by some of the United States' elected leaders. President Ronald Reagan stated in his 1983 speech to the National Association of Evangelicals: "The crisis of the Western world exists to the degree in which the West is indifferent to God, the degree to which it collaborates in communism's attempt to make man stand alone without God."⁶⁰

This spirit is legalistic and patriotic: legalistic in that it assumes the way to earn God's favor is by obedience to his moral law; patriotic in that it seems more concerned for the nation than for the people of that nation. Therefore, I have termed this spirit "patriotic legalism."

Reinhold Niebuhr, theologian and popular commentator on the intersection of faith and politics, captured this view:

Altruistic passion is sluiced into the reservoirs of nationalism with great ease, and is made to flow beyond them with great difficulty. What lies beyond the nation, the community of mankind, is too vague to inspire devotion. The lesser communities within the nation, religious, economic, racial and cultural, have equal difficulty in competing with the nation for the loyalty of its citizens.⁶¹

At the heart of patriotic legalism is collective retribution: the idea that God invariably blesses those who do right. Consequently, in this view, if a nation does not enjoy prosperity it must have angered God in some way. In support of this view, some turn to Exodus 20: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth

⁵⁹ Matt Walsh. "We are doomed as a nation - unless we turn back to God." TheBlaze. August 14, 2017. <http://www.theblaze.com/contributions/matt-walsh-we-are-doomed-as-a-nation-unless-we-turn-back-to-god>.

⁶⁰ Transcript taken from Reagan, Ronald. "Reagan, 'Evil Empire,' Speech Text." Voices of Democracy. Accessed November 12, 2017. <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>.

⁶¹ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1960., 91.

generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (vv. 5,6). The basic premise of patriotic legalism is that God promises to engage in a *quid pro quo*: if a country loves God and keep his commands by passing laws that conform to the Ten Commandments, then he will allow them to flourish. This leads to a push to legislate correct behavior: if only people would stop having abortions, or stop being homosexual, then the country would flourish.

As mentioned earlier, God is concerned with people’s hearts. As Joel told the Israelites, “rend your hearts and not your garments” (Joel 2:13). When Jesus comes on the last day, he will not separate the people by their national identity; he will separate them by the content of their heart, i.e., he will judge all people based upon their faith or lack thereof. Faith that is only given as a free gift from God. God does not deliver people because of their obedience, piety, or the freedoms they give to the world. God delivers people because of his grace; grace which gives people faith in his deliverance.

But faith is always accompanied by works. Those who claim to have faith, and yet do not express that faith in love for neighbor are to be corrected,⁶² and if they persist in sin, they are to be treated as unbelievers. While God will not judge a nation on the basis of its actions (as a nation has no heart, and so can have no faith), God does examine the hearts of individual human beings.⁶³ If individuals show a lack of love, it is a manifestation of a problem with the heart.

⁶² James 1:27: “Religion that God our Father accepts 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.”

⁶³ The idea of corporate guilt is not alien to Scripture, but it does not serve a principle upon which human beings can predict the result of corporate disobedience: “Other biblical passages dealing with collective divine retribution show, however, that it is impossible to regard this concept as a doctrine or a principle, although an awareness of it existed alongside the principle of individual retribution.” Jože Krašovec. "Is there a doctrine of 'collective retribution' in the Hebrew Bible." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65, (1994 1994): 35-89. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed February 14, 2018), 88.

In the context of the social contract, Christians have numerous opportunities to express their love. Not only can they care for others in their families, congregations, and communities, they can also govern in the interests of others. Within pluralistic, liberal democracy, the preservation of liberty is of utmost importance for Christians (especially regarding the First Amendment). As governing authorities, we can “do to others as [we] would have them do to [us]” (Luke 6:31) by upholding their rights to free practice of religion. Then we can use our own liberty to exercise religion and present them with the gospel. Within the preservation of the First Amendment, there is an opportunity to express both civil and spiritual love for others.

Political Disengagement

Some argue that, because of the nature of Christian faith and secular politics, it is most advisable that Christians not engage in political activity. They point out the Christian’s heavenly citizenship, the lack of biblical directive to influence secular affairs, and the open contempt many in the secular world have for Christianity as reasons to avoid political engagement. Each of these objections will be explained and addressed.

First, proponents of political disengagement emphasize the Christian’s heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20).⁶⁴ This argument certainly has flaws. By this logic, Christians should then refuse to pay taxes or benefit from social programs available to citizens. Christians shouldn’t own passports or other documents that identify them as citizens of the United States. Perhaps someone who subscribes to this idea would argue along these lines. In response, Jesus said, “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21) in response to the very question of

⁶⁴ "Why I believe that Christians should not be involved in politics." Believer's Magazine. <http://www.believersmagazine.com/bm.php?i=20110806>.

whether Christians should pay taxes. John the Baptizer did not tell the tax collectors and soldiers to abandon their government functions, but to do their work faithfully and honestly (Luke 3:12–14). Even Old Testament believers were encouraged to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:7). The Christian’s heavenly citizenship does not exclude earthly citizenship by any means.

Second, they cite a lack of biblical examples of political engagement. Once again, we can turn to Luke 3 and Jeremiah 29 as examples where believers were expected to be concerned for social structures that were not Christian. Daniel and Joseph serve as further examples of believers who served in government. While there is no direct encouragement to use social structures to benefit other people, Christians are to use every gift of God (including the privileges given to them as citizens of earthly nations) to serve their neighbor. There are many ways in which Christians show love for neighbor that are not delineated in Scripture, including political engagement.

Finally, they point to the hostility the world has toward Christians. “The political world is openly antagonistic to Christian principles and is riddled with humanist thinking.”⁶⁵ Scripture argues against this point: Jesus prayed, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:15–18). Just before telling his readers to submit to earthly authorities, Peter wrote, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on

⁶⁵ Believer’s Magazine.

the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). The answer to earthly hostility is not withdrawal from the world, but to respond with loving Christian witness.

While God makes no law that Christians must vote—or even engage with politics at all—the arguments that claim Christians shouldn’t be involved in politics limp severely. As an expression of Christian love, voting can be a powerful witness in the public sphere. Further political engagement or activism⁶⁶ can provide opportunity to preach law and gospel to those who need to hear them. Consequently, political disengagement is not a biblical stance for Christians to take.

Further, given the nature of the social contract and the Christian’s loving approach to every facet of life, political disengagement might even signify resistance to sanctified living. Christians who insist on political disengagement also disengage from the social contract upon which democracy is built. Within a participant political culture, which assumes input-orientation on the part of citizens, the abdication of political participation is itself a political statement: either that the citizen assumes he can do nothing to affect the outcome, or that he feels no need to govern for the sake of the others in the social contract. While a Christian citizen is not compelled (either by the state or by God) to vote, he or she must consider what political disengagement is communicating to their neighbor.

Christian Realism

Any discussion of the intersection of faith and politics must address Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian Realism. The premise of this approach is explained in the preface of his book, “Moral

⁶⁶ As individual Christians: the institution of the church rightly does not take a political stance to lobby for political change, though it might make doctrinal statements in response to political developments.

Man and Immoral Society:” “The thesis to be elaborated in these pages is that a sharp distinction must be drawn between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups . . . and that this distinction justifies and necessitates political policies which a purely individualistic ethic must always find embarrassing.”⁶⁷ Niebuhr sees a distinction between private moral judgments and public ones. Individuals are able to judge their own actions and motivations by whatever standard they like; but if they are to judge other members of society, they must judge according to society’s standards.

Niebuhr rightly observes that certain members of society will always be immoral according to biblical standards. As people express their individual and collective self-interest within a pluralistic democracy, members of that society by no means can be expected to conform to one moral standard among many (since pluralistic democracy considers all value systems equally valid as long as they don’t infringe upon the civic rights of others). At the same time, Niebuhr acknowledges, “The needs of an adequate political strategy do not obviate the necessity of cultivating the strictest individual moral discipline and the most uncompromising idealism. Individuals, even when involved in their communities, will always have the opportunity of loyalty to the highest canons of personal morality.”⁶⁸ Here is a call on the part of Niebuhr to Christian witness, even within a pluralistic society.

In spite of his call to faithful witness, Niebuhr’s arguments often read as defeatist. “There is . . . no possibility of harmonising[sic] the two strategists designed to bring the strongest inner and the most effective social restraint upon egoistic impulse. It would therefore seem better to

⁶⁷ Niebuhr, xi.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 273.

accept a frank dualism in morals than to attempt a harmony between the two methods which threatens the effectiveness of both.”⁶⁹ Niebuhr attempts to be realistic by acknowledging the sin that will always accompany earthly human governments. In so doing, however, his language suggests that Christians have no secular responsibility as members of the social contract who bear the gospel. Even when he admits the possibility of individual ideologies effecting change, he couches it in so much improbability that it’s clear he does not consider it likely: “Religiously inspired pacifists who protest against the violence of their state in the name of a sensitive individual conscience may never lame the will-to-power of a state as much as a class-conscious labor group. But if their numbers grew to large proportions, they might affect the policy of the government.”⁷⁰

Overall, Niebuhr’s Christian Realism, despite its faults, recognizes the role of civil government and Christ’s church in the world. He points out the distinction between the two kingdoms and understands how they relate to each other. Of all of the approaches here delineated, his is the most palatable in light of this study.

A Balanced Approach

Each of the above approaches, when distilled to its most basic premise, is a balance of individual and corporate responsibility within the Church and the state. Some equate the corporate responsibilities of the two kingdoms (social gospel, patriotic legalism), but in doing so they confuse the kingdom of the left hand with the kingdom of the right: making social change the

⁶⁹ Niebuhr, 270–271.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

responsibility of the Church. Others emphasize the individual's responsibility for living a moral life (Christian Realism, disengagement). This emphasis is preferable to the former, since it maintains the distinction between Church and state, but it can easily lead Christians to neglect their individual responsibility in one of the two kingdoms.

The life of a Christian is thoroughly spiritual.⁷¹ Christians cannot divorce their political opinions and approach to the social contract from their faith. What often happens, however, is that faith life and political life become conflated: the Christian's role in each sphere is confused. The Christian's role as member of the Church is to minister to the people around them with God's word. The Christian's role as a member of a democracy is to protect the rights and lives of the people around them by the democratic process. While these are distinct roles, the Christian's primary responsibility is as a member of the Church;⁷² this responsibility will then inform how a Christian engages in the political sphere.

Christians recognize that their individual responsibilities as a part of the Church (showing Christian love, preaching the gospel) provide all they need to fulfill the debt of love they owe to their neighbor as individual members of a democratic society. They also balance the two sets of corporate responsibilities: the Church spreads the gospel and provides for spiritual needs, the state provides justice and security for physical needs.

For example, a Christian voter can reasonably think that the best way for the state to fulfill its corporate responsibility to its citizens is by providing universal healthcare. Another

⁷¹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God," as well as Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

⁷² Philippians 3:20,21: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Christian can reasonably disagree. In the way they vote, however, they do not want to forget their individual responsibility to their neighbor. The Christian who votes for the universal healthcare platform is expressing Christian love: voting is one way he fulfills his individual responsibility. The Christian who votes against that platform also does so in Christian love: hoping that the public funds that would be used for such a program would be used for the good of his neighbor in some other way, either by the government or by the individuals whose taxes are lower than they would have been. In both cases, each one puts their trust in God who establishes every governing authority and who has seated Jesus at his right hand and “placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (Ephesians 1:22).

As individuals, both hypothetical Christians then go on to fulfill their other individual responsibility: gospel ministry. In public and private life, each one testifies to who God is and what he has done to save them. They talk about their trust in the God who has placed governing authorities over them and who promises to rule all things. They obey God’s laws, no matter what legislation might be passed. In this way “the righteous will live by faith” (Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4). This is true freedom. The democratic concept of freedom is equal to liberty: the individual’s ability to do as he pleases as long as he does not infringe upon the rights of another. True freedom—Christian freedom—recognizes that God has set the individual free from slavery to sin and uses every right to honor God and serve its neighbor.

Consequently, the Christian balances corporate and individual responsibilities on the scale of Christian freedom, which measures everything against the standard of love: first for God, then for neighbor. “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8), Jesus told his disciples. He exhorted them to share the gospel they had heard and demonstrate the love God had

shown them. An extra dimension is added when Christians see how richly they've received from God through the social contract. God has granted liberty to the citizens of the United States. Out of Christian love, Christians use their freedom to vote according to their conscience so as to preserve liberty for their fellow citizens. More importantly, because the Christian has been freed from the power of sin, death, and the devil, he openly proclaims that freedom to others.

Despite what Thomas Mann might say, not everything is politics. In fact, the Christian's voting isn't politics, properly defined. Politics is concerned with the acquisition and retention of power. Christians, when they vote, do not try to gain power for themselves. They try to use the power given to them to express their Christian love. The battle between the political right and left is not the Christian's battle. Christians battle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). In that battle, it doesn't matter who sits in the oval office; it doesn't even matter whether a president or king or tyrant stands over a country. What matters in that battle is a Christian's faith expressing itself through love, both in the private and in the public spheres.

CONCLUSION

"Religion is incorrigibly interventionist,"⁷³ Richard John Neuhaus wrote. Christians can exercise their love for God and neighbor by intervening within the confines of the social contract.

Political engagement is not a compromise of Christian principle, either: "One enters the public

⁷³ Richard John Neuhaus. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984., 144.

square, then, not as an anonymous citizen but as a person shaped by “other sources” [more than mere citizenship] that are neither defined by nor subservient to the public square. The public square is not a secular and morally sterilized space but a space for conversation, contention, and compromise among moral actors. Compromise is not mere fudging, then. It is not morally compromising.”⁷⁴

As Christians, we have an opportunity given to us in the social contract as those shaped by the gospel. We converse, contend, and even compromise with other ideologies. That is not to say we compromise God’s truth; by no means. Rather, we stand firm upon that truth, which is not defined or subservient to politics, while maintaining political flexibility with matters that are not directly addressed spiritually. When it comes to voting, we stand upon the truth that God establishes human government and himself stands as king over it all. We stand upon the truth that God has given this government for our good and the good of others. We stand upon the truth that God has given us a role and responsibilities within society.

As members of Christ’s Church, we fulfill our role by serving as his priests: praying for our leaders and witnessing to the gospel. As individual Christians, we engage in acts of Christian love. As individual citizens, we seek the good of our nation. As members of the sovereign within the social contract, we seek to uphold the rights of others. All of these we balance on Christian freedom: the freedom from sin, and the freedom to serve God and neighbor out of love. Within that freedom, we vote for candidates and policies that will serve our neighbor, rather than ones that represent our interests.

⁷⁴ Neuhaus., 128.

Nations rise and fall. The past is stained with the blood of deposed emperors and kings, and the future will see the same blood spilled. In the same way, the blood of the martyrs has flowed from the executioner's block at the command of past rulers, and as the Last Day approaches, we will see more martyrs' blood spilled. But Christians, while concerned for these things, do not despair of them. These things must happen. Over all of them, however, stands the King of Kings. We "set [our] hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God . . . not on earthly things. For [we] died, and [our] life is now hidden with Christ in God."

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