

Article XVI of the Augustana and its Apology in Contemporary Political and Social Applications

By

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He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

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Introduction

Today in our North American context we are faced with a very interesting political reality. In the past several decades, our neighbours to the South have experienced a massive rise in the power and importance of what is called the “moral majority” or the “Christian right.” That is, a previously quiet group of largely Protestant Christians have become very politically active and begun to achieve massive things in the last remaining super-power. The rise of evangelicalism as a political force has forced the world to take notice of a particular “brand” of Christians that previously varied from either having no interest in politics to coming from traditions wherein they were taught to never get involved, i.e. the Anabaptist traditions. However, the combination of theological changes and pragmatism that lead to that is not the subject of this work.

During this time period, many conservative Protestant Christians in Canada have also begun to exert political influence, the movement perhaps reaching its zenith with the destruction of the national Progressive Conservative Party and the creation of the Reform Party, who achieved the status of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition and was led by Preston Manning and then Stockwell Day, both professed Evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, here in Canada a series of Roman Catholic, publicly irreligious, and largely theologically liberal Prime Ministers took office. This observation is again, the subject for another time, but the realities in both nations highlight a question that was being asked of Christians in North America, and to some extent Christianity in general; is there a Christian way to “do” politics?

Obviously, the massive amounts of voters who swung elections in many a riding or even on the national stage on moral and social issues think so. This paper will not analyse where that thinking comes from, as much as it will evaluate to what extent can and should a Christian in general and a Pastor in

particular, participate in civil government? Should we participate? If so, how? What is the role of the Pastor in this, if any?

This paper will seek to establish an answer to these questions in reflection of the Biblical and Confessional principles detailed in the Augsburg Confessions and its Apology of 1530. It will do so by first looking at Christians as voters and advocates within our Canadian political context, then move to a review of Christians as professionally active participants in politics, i.e., politicians, and finally will draw from these an understanding of what role, if any, Pastors should exercise in terms of political advocacy.

Christians as Voters and Advocates in a Canadian Political Context

The rise of the religious right in the United States follows on the heels of decades of non-involvement by Evangelical Christians in politics on both sides of the border, as they for the most part felt that Christians had no place in the dirty business that is politics. As Alberta Premier Ralph Klein explained, "Politics...is a blood sport."¹ And these Christians simply did not see a way to hold fast to their ideals and ethical guidelines and still to be involved in any meaningful way. However, it is during this time of non-involvement that massive "progress" was made in the radical secularisation of the state in North America, and the results of this were what were perceived as massive moral decay. So, in response to this, many leaders in the evangelical community emerged with the idea that they could, and more importantly should, get involved. This can be indicatively demarcated by the entry of the previously politically isolationist Pentecostal movement into the political realm in the late 1950's.² But, was this the right, morally and Biblically, thing to do?

¹ Larry Johnsrude, Klein Resigns: Colourful Political Era to End With His Retirement by Year End," *Edmonton Journal* n.p. [cited 23 November 2007]. Online: <http://www.canada.com/edmontonjournal/news/story.html?id=71162f29-3c47-410e-90f0-0d38a4dffb69&k=0>

² Brian C. Stiller, *Jesus and Caesar: Christians in the Public Square* (Oakville, Ontario: Castle Quay Books Canada, 2003), 142. I use this as an indication of the overall readiness of this very varied and nuanced community to enter

Phillip Melanchthon expressed while writing the Augsburg Confession "...that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentences according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell...etc."³ The Confessions take a very positive view of government as a whole, and go so far as to say, "Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian."⁴ It is interesting to note that the modern Evangelicals can count among their spiritual descendent the very same Anabaptists herein condemned, but that is an aside.

Martin Luther, in his classic work of 1520, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*, claimed that the temporal authority of government was "...ordained of God to punish the wicked and protect the good."⁵ He thus placed government under the purview of God, whether they knew it or not. They served Him in governing, in wielding the sword of temporal power in His stead and in providing order, stability, and good government for His people. He gave them this authority, and the power of the sword had existed since the very beginning.⁶ This definitely affirms the power and authority of the temporal government, but what is the Christian's place in relationship to that government? St. Peter writes in his first Epistle, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to

into the political realm, as they, along with groups like the Radical Charismatics, represent in some ways the political fringe of the Evangelical movement in their reticence to be involved in the political process, and thus serve as an adequate barometer with which to illustrate the willingness of the movement as a whole.

³ AC XVI.2 in Tappert, 37.

⁴⁴ AC XVI.3 in Tappert, 37.

⁵ Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate, 1520," in *Luther's Works American Edition* (55 vols.: ed. James Atkinson and Helmut T. Lehmann, trans. Charles M. Jacobs; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis, Concordia, 1955-86) 44:130.

⁶ Genesis 4:14. Here we see an example of the temporal power of the sword being feared by the murderer Cain. God does not then refute the power held by those that would punish Cain as a wicked evildoer; rather, he just overrules them. Regardless, it is clear that Cain's first thought was to the mortal and temporal punishment he would surely receive, rather than direct violence by God. This does seem to suggest that God, since the Fall, has invested this temporal power with mortal men to use in His stead.

every human institution, whether it is to the emperor as supreme, or to the governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.”⁷ This is a bold statement of support for the institution, especially considering the sporadic persecution of that particular government toward Christians.

As Christians, we are commanded to hold in high esteem and even to obey the government. And St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans goes further writing, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” and “Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for our good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not wield the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer.”⁸

Yes, the Bible does stand behind this understanding. The government is truly ordained of God, and in Canada this is recognised, though perhaps in a lip service fashion, by the phrasing in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, “Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.”⁹ This truly does recognise that though the government, as lawmakers and arbiters of the law do in fact rule and govern the people, they have the authority only at the bequest of God, again whether they realise that reality or not. Christians then have a Biblical mandate to support our government and obey it, but what about more active forms of participation?

The Church Fathers had something to say about this situation, in the case of both St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom. Forell defines Chrysostom, who held that politically important post as Bishop of

⁷ The Epistle of 1 Peter, 2:13-14. (RSV)

⁸ The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, 13:1, 3b-4. (RSV)

⁹ Charter of Rights and Freedoms, n.p. [cited 23 November, 2007]. Online: http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/annex_e.html#l

Constantinople, and thus personal priest, father-confessor, and religious advisor to the emperor, as believing that, “He was certain that Christians were not called to escape the world; they were called to change it.”¹⁰ This is quite a statement from a man that was known for his monastic leanings and ascetic lifestyle. It also led to him dying in banishment after calling the emperor to account for the many evils, social and personal, that he was involved with at the time. This was echoed also by the learned St. Augustine, to whom Forell ascribes a more nuanced view in writing, “...Augustine did not advocate the absolute rejection of the world but its proper use.”¹¹ We do stand on the shoulders of those giants that have come before us, and I will assert that this view of involvement in the world, which Carter would call Type 4 Typology, Christ transforming culture,¹² does hold with the Biblical and Confessional model, though Carter erroneously jumbles the placement of the classification. I do however think that some more modern theological scholarship does sum this up perfectly. Horden writes that, “The Gospel calls us to love our neighbour, but if that is so, Christians cannot ignore the political realm.”¹³

Christians are called to love God with all of their heart, and to serve their fellow men and women. This service of others is integral to our understanding of politics. It is often through politics that Christians can do the most good. In regards to advocacy - that is intrinsically tied to your vote. If you exercise your right to vote in any election, you have a moral right to call upon whosoever is elected to serve you as the governing authority, even as you would call on God to protect and serve you in all things temporal. God has placed you as a citizen within your political context as surely as He has

¹⁰ George Wolfgang Forell, *History of Christian Ethics: Volume I, From the New Testament to Augustine* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979), 153.

¹¹ Forell, *History of Christian Ethics*, 169.

¹² Craig A. Carter. *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), 113. There are many places that I could reference for this idea in a vague sense, but I will use this chart as it is a simple and plain example.

¹³ William Horden, “Political Theology,” in *Political Theology in the Canadian Context* (ed. Benjamin G. Smillie: Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 43.

ordained the authority of that context's government, and as surely as He has called men and women into that government to fill an office and fulfill their vocation to wield temporal power in His stead. Forell writes, "You follow your calling by the way you vote for city council, for school board, for Congress, and for the President of the United States."¹⁴ Of course, this is speaking to an American context, but one would have to be obtuse to not see the correlation of the principle to the Canadian context. This paper then suggests with some conviction, that not only should Christians respect the civil government, and see its authority as being God's own, exercised on His behalf, but that it is not only OK for them to be involved as a citizen, it is their responsibility to be so involved.

Christians as Professionally Active Participants in Politics, i.e., Politicians

But what of Christians as professionally active participants in politics? What of Christian politicians? There is a definite push within our culture to have these people "check their faith at the door" when they enter office, and many do. Some seem to believe that to bring their faith with them into politics, as it were, would be in some way either just wrong or even morally repugnant. I must confess bafflement as to the sophistry of their minds that allows such a dichotomy between private faith and public service. One could reason legitimately that if faith is pre-eminent in your priorities, and that faith correctly defined and understood could not but be, that this very thing would be impossible. And, following that line of reasoning any claim to do so would either indicate that faith is being paid lip service to for the sake of political expediency, or that membership in and of whatever particular faith involved is an act of abject hypocrisy, or some combination thereof. Faith simply defines the believer, the believer does not properly speaking, define faith. So, can Christians legitimately hold a public office in politics without doing violence to their conscience?

¹⁴ George W. Forell, *The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1968), 71.

Melanchthon, in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession writes, “What makes for Christian perfection is not contempt of civil ordinances but attitudes of the heart, like deep fear of God and a strong faith. Though they were wealthy and held high positions, Abraham, David, and Daniel were no less perfect than any hermit.”¹⁵

That is to say, we affirm that the Scriptures tell us of many people who worked in government in one way or another, with Abraham as the great patriarch, David the anointed King of united Israel, and Daniel who was made third highest ruler in the government of Babylon. They did this and were/are affirmed as heroes of the faith. They were called by God to those vocations, God blessed them with temporal power, and they then exercised that power on His behalf, however imperfectly.

In the Confessions we as Christians, are not only *allowed* to hold public office, but we are *called* to public office. Forell writes on this point, “Christians are called to intelligent and responsible citizenship. They are warned not to abandon the power structure but to infiltrate it.”¹⁶ Though this author does wish that Forell had used a word with less insidious implications than “infiltrate” the meaning is clear. If in fact there is a Christian way of doing politics then Christians are called to be involved in both the support of those politicians that uphold this, and also in holding positions of leadership within the government.

Luther is completely on side with this assessment, and in his *Temporal Authority: To What Extent Should it be Obeyed* of 1523 he writes, “Therefore, if you see that there is a lack of hangmen,

¹⁵ Ap XVI.9 in Tappert, 224.

¹⁶ Forell, *The Augsburg Confession: A Contemporary Commentary*, 70.

constables, judges, lords, or princes, and you find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the position....”¹⁷

But why should we seek these positions of temporal power? To what end? Stiller writes, “Christians have a reforming presence by opposing powers that run contrary to biblical values.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, this is often interpreted as having some insidious end, as though with Christians in power, the horrors of the inquisition or even residential schools would suddenly run wild once again. There must also here be some distinctions made between the mistakes and even sins of people who claimed to be Christians in the past, even in our nation, and how they abused that power and the principles laid out here. Here, it is assumed that they would honestly and with intelligence and diligence work towards the betterment of life for all citizens as countless well-meaning (and largely forgotten, it would seem) Christian leaders have through history.

However, to claim Christianity is to place oneself under a microscope. It is as though even with such a secularised world, people don’t mind it when or even expect that the irreligious will abuse their positions, but it is seen as much worse when the religious do it. In truth, Christians are not qualitatively “better” than anyone else; they are just forgiven through their faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Christians should be held to a higher standard, even by the atheist. If anyone claims to hold to a set of values, then they had better live up to them while in public service, that is a universal expectation. Christians not only must compete with secular politicians at their level, but they must also hold themselves and be held to a higher standard for they confess Christ and Him crucified wherever they go and the Gospel is preached, or hindered, by their actions. And let us never forget that we are playing to

¹⁷ Martin Luther, “Temporal Authority: To What Extent Should it be Obeyed, 1523,” in *Luther’s Works* American Edition (55 vols.: ed. Walther I. Brandt and Helmut T. Lehman; trans. J.J. Schindel; Philadelphia: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis, Concordia, 1955-86) 45:95.

¹⁸ Stiller, *Jesus and Caesar*, 139.

a hostile audience, as it were, for as Carter insightfully discloses, "...we live in a society whose intellectual elites are united in little except a common conviction that Christianity is intolerant and backward, and, therefore, represents a barrier to social progress."¹⁹ This is the cross that Christians in public service must bear, but it is also an opportunity to serve God through this "other noble task."

So what must a Christian politician do? He must simply follow through with action what usually are the empty promises of his colleagues. He must serve his constituents with integrity and efficiency. Luther gave this advice, "He must give consideration and attention to his subjects, and really devote himself to it. This he does when he directs his every thought to making himself useful and beneficial to them...." Isn't that what any constituent would want from their elected representative? Forell comments on Luther's political advices, saying, "When [Luther] tried to reform schools and churches, restrain usury, counsel fair trade practices, and organise the rehabilitation of the poor, he merely put into practice what he had preached and tried to bring his Christian insights to bear on the social order."²⁰ In the end, the politician stands in the stead of God, exercising the temporal power and authority of God on behalf of God, in order to serve and protect His people, and he is called to do this in love, humility, efficiency, and with intelligence.

What Role, if any, Pastors Should Exercise?

Thus far we have spoken of the role of Christian in general, both as ordinary citizens, and as called politicians, ordained by God. But what of the shepherds of the flock? What is the role of the Pastor? Does he have any?

¹⁹ Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 19.

²⁰ George W. Forell, *Faith Active in Love: An Investigation of the Principles Underlying Luther's Social Ethics*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959), 154.

Luther spoke of the world having two kingdoms, both of which God uses to rule. On one side, in the so-called kingdom of the right hand God rules His people with the Gospel. It is here that the church functions. This where forgiveness of sins, consolation of suffering, easing of consciences, and worship of God is done; this is where unmerited salvation occurs. And then there is the kingdom of the left hand. This is the temporal government. God rules the world through this kingdom with the law, so that evildoers are kept in check and relative order is established in this sinful and fallen world.

God rules only some in the kingdom of the right, only repentant sinners under the sacrifice of Christ our Lord are members of this kingdom, but they have “dual citizenship,” after a fashion. They are also member of the kingdom of the left, where God has established institutions of government so that His people may be cared for and protected from anarchy to some degree before He comes back to claim His. But even those who reject membership in the kingdom of the right are under the dominion of the kingdom of the left by virtue of their having been born into the world. And God rules them through this kingdom, as He rules all people.²¹

So then, with that understanding, with the politician being called from among equals in merit to hold and exercise a Godly office on behalf of the people in the kingdom of the left, and with pastors being called from among equals in merit to hold and exercise a Godly office on behalf of the people in the kingdom of the right, the question then becomes: at what point, if any, do/should these kingdoms cross paths? It is simple to see that the pastor is still a citizen within the kingdom of the left and subject therefore to the temporal authority exercised by the politician, but to what extent is the politician subject to the authority of the pastor?

²¹ Luther, *Temporal Authority*, 92. I am just referencing here a train of thought that is found here and in many other places in Luther's writing, this document and others.

In one sense, not at all. You can no more force people to do things with the Gospel of the kingdom of the right than you could force gravity to obey your whims. The concept is just nonsensical. How can unmerited favour be also “force”? And an exercise in temporal authority by a pastor is a clear overstepping of the bounds of his purview. Thus, admonishing the faithful to vote for a particular candidate, or support a particular party is such an egregious sin that the man doing so needs to be called to repentance within and by the members of the kingdom of the right; while having done so, he is essentially stepping into the kingdom of the left and temporal punishment should be brought to bear on him for the breach. And in Canada, this is a breach of the temporal law and may lead to various consequences, the least of which may be the revocation by the state of the tax-exempt status of the congregation, as is right and proper. There also may be eternal consequences, as by stepping into the kingdom of the left, the pastor effectively relinquishes the moral authority with which to effectively witness for Christ in the position that he has been called to.

However, the church in the kingdom of the left does have political function in society. This is its prophetic function.²² This is best exemplified in the 2nd Book of Samuel, wherein the prophet Nathan is sent by the Lord to call the King, David son of Jesse, to account for his sin with the wife of Uriah. The government, in this case the monarch David, was not acting in a way that exemplified the Biblical model of integrity that is discussed above. And so the Lord, through the church, here represented by the prophet Nathan, calls the government to repentance for its sin. And most importantly, in verse 13 of the 12th chapter, he pronounces the forgiveness, the Gospel message of God to the king, the government for his *sincere* repentance.²³ Thus it is with the church and specifically the pastor.

²² Paul G. Kauper, “Government Limits to the “Free Exercise” of Religion,” in *God’s Call to Public Responsibility*. (eds. George W. Forell and William H. Lazareth: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 14.

²³ 2 Samuel 12:1-15

The pastor is to call, with the people, the government to repentance if necessary, and admonish the faithful to uphold Biblical views in their private participation, whether that be in voting, advocacy, or as a politician them self. But are there limits? Yes. Absolutely yes! The public limits of the office are outlined above, but further, the man who holds the position of pastor should never, ever stand for public office that is not ecclesiastical in nature. This mixing of the kingdoms just muddies the effective proclamation of the Word of God and creates a hindrance to the Gospel.

Conclusion

So, we return to the question at hand, to what extent can and should a Christian in general and a Pastor in particular, participate in civil government? I think that the outline above sketches a vague understanding of what can and should be done. Can an individual Christian participate in voting and advocacy? Yes, not only may they, but they have the responsibility to do this and proclaim Christ and the Gospel through the witness of their actions in this regard, as well as support those who do likewise.

Can a Christian serve as a politician without fear of sin? Yes, not only may they, but they have a responsibility to seek out those positions for which they are qualified and serve God in those vocations, also witnessing for Christ through their actions, a kind of living Gospel.

And what role does the pastor have in all of this? He must act as the functional arbiter of the kingdom of the right, all the while retaining and exercising the duty of the church and his office to the prophetic function of the people of God in society. But may he be personally involved in the way of holding office or standing for nomination? No. This would so hamper the clear proclamation of the Gospel and trade away all moral authority with which he might muster for his prophetic role, that it is simply impossible. But as a private citizen, he should and is still called to vote and participate in that way.

The Christian calling in society is to service of your fellow man. This means that you not only should, but must participate in politics in the sense that this is a major vehicle for positive change in any society. Where the government is unjust or directly contravenes the clear teaching of Scripture, it must be opposed, but even then only by peaceful means. Our nation was founded recognising the supremacy of God. He rules the world, and this nation in it. But He generously allows us to exercise His authority on behalf of Him to protect and serve the people. The Lord is incredibly generous in this matter, as with many others. This is most certainly true.

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