

Following Jesus Must Include Political Implications - Part 2

The word “politics” finds its root in the Greek word, “politiká,” the “affairs of the cities.”

This was the title of Aristotle’s book that became a companion to his philosophical inquiry into ethics. He discovered that delving deeply into moral principles necessarily followed into politics - the affairs of the cities.

The practice of the Christian faith, based on the moral mandates of God as revealed in Jesus, indeed has political implications.

But the practice of the faith has been at its most transformative and powerful self when it has stood against the principalities and powers of the world, and not in collaboration with them.

These “principalities and powers” include the partisan ideologies that have emerged amid people who strive to live together, but that have instead deepened the tribalisms among them.

I shared [previously](#) four narratives that reflect people of faith standing against such ideologies.

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If we are to construct a biblically sound Christian theology of politics, we need to begin with the grand perspective of the biblical story of God's redemptive act in history which begins in Genesis, where God creates life and pronounces it as good, humanity distorts this relationship, and God begins working to bring healing and reconciliation.

We encounter the greatest mystery of our faith - that God lovingly "became flesh and dwelt among us" in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose suffering and death on the cross completes God's loving intention to reconcile the world.

This is the contextualization of God that sets forth the ontological responsibility of the church to be present in the world.

The grand mystery of the Incarnation - that God, out of love, became flesh and blood like us to be decisively and ultimately present with us - means that the destiny of the church on earth is to incarnate the presence of Jesus and the reign of God in every space it inhabits.

Not only is the faithful church commissioned to be preoccupied with its individual salvation, but also to be a corporeal presence living out its life in the world, in its neighborhood, as light unto the nations - light that must not be hid under a bushel.

God's personal participation in history is grandiosely political, liberating a slave people from bondage and commissioning them to be a separate people.

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And then God decisively enters our humanity through Jesus, who proclaims his ministry in unequivocal and concrete political terms in Luke 4.

But what kind of politics? This brings us to the issue at hand.

Secular, earthly partisan politics is a contest for power and hegemony. Because it is that, it is innately antithetical to the gospel and the teachings of Jesus who revealed God's reign of love.

This reign is not coercive or violent. Rather, it is a reign that invites us to willingly enter into a deep relationship with God who seeks to reconcile with us through humble, sacrificial love.

But the cause of Jesus is not a private matter, as it has become in modern religion. In fact, the cause of Jesus is provocatively a public one.

The ministry of Jesus took place within and during the reign of emperor Caesar, who was deified as the son of God.

Jesus' ministry and message of God's kingdom became a disruptive and dislocating presence to the hegemonic rule of Caesar. For this, Jesus was executed as a seditiousist.

Matthew 22:15-21 became a pivotal and decisive hermeneutic in how the politics of Jesus subordinates earthly partisan politics as an extension of the audacious

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claim in Psalm 24:1, that “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.”

God’s reign on earth is political because the consequence of the redemptive power of the Holy Spirit in the world dislocates and transforms all human relations and all human structures, including earthly partisan politics.

To “give unto Caesar...” means that, as followers of Jesus, we are in the world but not of the world, which is to say, that while we are ultimately citizens of heaven, we still live in the land of Pharaoh and Caesar.

But we cannot be religious collaborators of the empire.

We must maintain our prophetic distance from earthly dominions so that we can exercise our responsibility to speak truth even to power.

We cannot do this if we have sublimated our prophetic role to the dominion of Caesar and Pharaoh.

The faithful church - as visible sign of Jesus’ presence - will always be in a dialectical struggle against the principalities and powers of the world, exposing counterfeit beliefs and eliciting truth.

To the degree that the church abrogates this innate task, it falls short of its role in society and the world.

Jesus describes the kingdom as like new cloth sewn onto old cloth, or new wine put inside an old wine skin. The former always causes turbulence in the latter, deconstructing and rearranging its very essence.

The work of transformation is like this, and it is always hard. It signifies the “losing” of our lives for the sake of Jesus, yet it is in this crossing of the poison river of fear and enmity through obedience that the church finds its life and its joy.

The faithful church, living out the presence of Jesus, will always be about this work. It is its signet.

The first words heralding the decisive coming of God in Jesus were, “Fear not!” God’s love – by its very nature – brings hope, joy, healing, radical hospitality, solace in grief, beauty, the repair and rehabilitation of creation; it stands in solidarity with the poor, the weak and the oppressed; it brings justice and redemption.

This is the charge of the church in society and culture, to be bearers and embodiments of God’s reign of love on earth, and to be in faithful submission to the capacious and sovereign leadership of the Holy Spirit who always disrupts our complacency to point and urge us to the future of God.

Anything else that robs her of this task is an offspring of fear.

Editor’s note: This is the second of a two-part series. The first part can be found

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