



UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY

"The unexamined faith is not worth believing."

A monthly forum on the third *Saturday* of each month from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M. following Evening Prayer at 6
 Forums are usually with Canon Richard T. Nolan
retired philosophy & religion professor, editor of www.philosophy-religion.org

TOPIC: “Your Faith and Your Political Choices: Entirely Separate?”

A Prayer To Be Said In Unison

Almighty God, who has committed to your holy Church the care and nurture of all the faithful; Enlighten with your wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship and serve you from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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I. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

THE NATURE OF FAITH

We may read or hear of “The Hindu *Faith*,” an individual’s *faith* in God, *faith* in one’s country, *faith* in one’s physician, and *faith* in a body of teachings. Underlying all these usages is an attitude of trust.

“The Hindu *Faith*” refers to the religious teachings and practices trusted by millions of people of India for nearly four thousand years. Moses’ *faith* in God refers to his personal trust in God. Patriotic *faith* means the allegiance or loyalty to one’s country. *Faith* in a physician denotes confidence in the doctor’s professional judgments. *Faith* in teachings (also called *doctrines*) signifies agreement with particular beliefs.

Faith can be primarily a matter of the heart (such as trust in someone), a matter of the mind (such as trust in particular beliefs), or a blend of emotional and rational trust in someone or something.

Naive faith is an attitude of trust without justification; *faith* is present without sufficient experience or explanation. Examples of naive or uninformed *faith* are (a) trust in mere acquaintances, such that they are unquestioningly loaned your car and (b) trust placed in unexamined teachings. Religious leaders are usually satisfied by naive faith on the part of their flocks.

Informed faith is an attitude of trust justified by adequate experience and explanation. Examples of informed *faith* are (a) trust in some friends you know well, such that they are loaned your car confidently and (b) trust in teachings supported by a suitable rationale. Not surprisingly, philosophers, other scholars, and inquiring people prefer *informed faith*.

Philosophical faith is similar: it is a trust in the basic assumptions of one's views on what constitutes reality, truth, and values. In their philosophies some people include beliefs in a god(s); others include the belief that there are no gods. In both cases, trust is a factor.

Relativism, which is self-contradictory, proposes that all philosophies and/or faiths are equally valid or true – which would require opponents of relativism to be given equal status and opposite positions given equal credibility, something relativists are reluctant to admit.

On the other hand, *pluralism* acknowledges different, informed “schools of thought” on virtually every claim – whether religious, philosophical, or scientific. Adherents to a particular school of thought *trust* that theirs is the only correct explanation of a topic or they are persuaded that theirs is at least a close approximation to the truth about the issue.

II. EVERYONE HAS BASIC BELIEFS THAT THEY TRUST, IN WHICH THEY HAVE FAITH.

Whether or not individuals have examined the meaning and adequacy of their basic beliefs, every individual trusts (*i.e.*, takes for granted, assumes, has faith in) an assortment of convictions at work in his/her life virtually every day.

III. MANY PEOPLE DERIVE THEIR VALUES FROM THEIR RELIGIOUS FAITH; MANY DO NOT.

One's values (*i.e.*, standards, preferences) influence directly all sorts of choices, including political choices. Sometimes values have their origins in one's religious faith; sometimes values have their origins in other sources to the exclusion of religion: a particular secular political philosophy (such as, a form of humanism, the ideals of a constitution, the principles of a great leader, etc.).

IV. excerpts from “REDEEMING POLITICS: A CHRISTIAN OBLIGATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY”

by The Rev. Dr. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, Professor of Religion, Trinity College (April 28, 2002)

We live in a time when politics has become a despised profession. Politicians are not widely trusted or admired. Until September 11, even government was suspect, except at the local level. We had become a nation of individualists highly suspicious of institutions that seemed to threaten our private autonomy [and right to pursue our own private interests without interference from others, especially collective groups such as government].

At the same time, religion was seen as an essentially private matter, an antidote or alternative to and an escape from the public world in which we are forced to live, and therefore as separate and distinct from the messiness of political decision-making and the formation of public policy. Religion became, for many people, a way of retreating from the social obligations that are often seen as forced upon us by the public impersonal institutions that structure so much of our public lives.

There are, however, rich resources in the traditions of Christianity and Judaism that link our personal moral lives with the political processes by which our social relations with each other in public space are governed.

... Christians have an obligation to take the political order seriously precisely because it is the joint activity of persons seeking to establish justice among all peoples who live together in the world....

... While greater fulfillment and flourishing might well be found in smaller, more intimate, more directly personal communities that churches, at their best, strive to become, Christians in the modern world all still live and exercise considerable power in and through larger social groups that are less intimate, more indirect and impersonal, and less loving than communities. These social groups, or societies, have an obligation to establish justice for all their members even, perhaps especially, when they cannot live by love alone. And justice is the work of politics. It is the work of citizens deliberating together and creating policies, rules, and laws that best protect the rights and fulfill the needs of all the members of the society. At their best these acts of justice-creation are political. ...

What is Christian ethics? Ethics in general is the principles and values by which one lives one's own life and by which one hopes others will live as well. Ethics has to do with such things as justice or fairness applied to our social relations with others and, for Christians, with our relation to God.

Christian ethics is ultimately a human response to what Christians have inferred is God's intention for humankind, even for the world as a whole. It is a responsible response to what it believes "God is up to in the world" based on a reading of Scripture, reason, human experience, and tradition: the result is the Christian ethical construal that the: Ultimate goal of Christian ethics = human (and possibly also all creation's) flourishing in and through loving mutual interpersonal relationships with others, including God and all other persons. Unselfish (*agape*) love freely given and received is the "peak" experience, the ultimate in fulfillment for human persons, the essence of human flourishing. No one is, in principle, excluded from these relationships of love because God intended them for the fulfillment of God's whole human creation which God called "good".

... If we believe that democratic participation in the shaping of a common life is an essential value for all human beings and is the basis of political life then we can accept the following claim:

"What distinguishes politics [from other forms of social endeavor] is the possibility of a shared collective, deliberate, active intervention in our fate in what would otherwise be the byproduct of private decisions. . . . The distinctive promise of political freedom remains the possibility of genuine collective action, an entire community consciously and jointly shaping its policy, its way of life." (Hanna Pitkin)

... And, from a Christian ethical point of view, this is one way toward becoming conformed to or in line with what God is up to in the world: creating the conditions of justice that are the necessary foundation for living lives of well-being and flourishing in relationship to other human beings in the world God has created and in the process realizing God's intention for all humankind.

V. ORGANIZED RELIGIOUS FAITHS AND POLITICS IN THE U.S.A.

http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2008/01/the_bully_pulpi.html

"POLITICS FROM THE PULPIT" by Allan R. Bevere

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Can a church support a presidential candidate without jeopardizing its tax-exempt status?

Should the church wade into the murky waters of politics? And if it does what is the risk?

The Associated Press has reported that several pastors in Iowa, who have publicly supported Governor Mike Huckabee for President have received anonymous letters warning them that their churches are in danger of losing their nonprofit status. The fact that the letters are anonymous means that they are probably from someone opposed to Huckabee, who wants to silence these ministers who support him.

There is great misunderstanding, even in government, as to what tax-exempt status does and does not mean in reference to what churches are and are not allowed to say and do when it comes to politics and elections in particular.

First, for some history:

Historically there was no law in the United States restricting any church or other nonprofit organization from endorsing or opposing a candidate for political office.

In 1954, after being opposed by a nonprofit organization, then Senator Lyndon Johnson proposed legislation prohibiting nonprofits from either opposing or endorsing any candidate (which did not and still does not apply to appointed offices such as Supreme Court Justices). The code was amended without debate. Since that time, the political landscape has changed.

So, exactly what is it that pastors and churches are allowed to do politically?

Churches may not directly endorse or oppose a political candidate. The key word is "directly." No church may officially say, "We endorse Jane Doe." "We oppose John Doe." In addition, the pastor should not send out a personal written endorsement on church letterhead. Political signs should not be displayed on the lawn of the church.

"Indirect" participation is allowed and includes the following:

1. Pastors may personally endorse a candidate. The office of pastor does not exclude clergy from expressing their personal views. Everyone has that right. The IRS explicitly states that, while a pastor may endorse or oppose a candidate in the parking lot of the church or in the local grocery store in conversation, he or she may not directly endorse or oppose a candidate from the pulpit. There are many who believe, however, that such a view is unconstitutional. At the very least it is problematic from a polity standpoint in that, even in the pulpit, most pastors do not speak officially for their congregations.
2. Pastors may also personally work for a candidate and contribute financially to his or her campaign. No church may contribute to a campaign.
3. Pastors may even endorse a candidate in print, such as in a newspaper ad. The pastor's title and the church s/he is affiliated with may also be listed for the purposes of identification.
4. Pastors may also preach on moral and social issues (abortion, gay marriage, economic matters, etc.) which, depending on the pastor's views, may by implication throw support behind one candidate over another. It is wise, however, not to connect any one candidate to any one position during the sermon. Churches may also take official positions on such issues, as long as they don't directly endorse or oppose a candidate in the process.
5. Churches may organize voter registrations and drives as long as they are directed at all eligible voters and not only toward voters of one political party.
6. Churches may hold forums where candidates address the issues.
7. If a candidate visits a church during worship, he or she may be introduced publicly.
8. Churches may host candidates who may speak from the pulpit, as long as that candidate is not directly endorsed or urges the congregation to vote for her/him.
9. Churches may distribute non-partisan voter guide giving information on where each candidate stands on the issues. Churches should be warned about using guides that come from outside sources as they may be deemed to be partisan.
10. Churches may use their premises as voting stations.

Whether or not it is a good idea for a pastor to personally endorse a political candidate or not, and exactly how far a church should go in getting involved in the political process is another post for another time; but for those pastors and churches that are so inclined, it is helpful to know what the rules are as Caesar continues to domesticate the church into doing his bidding; whether it is in threatening the church's tax-exempt status, or in so sucking us into the partisan political process in both parties, that we forget the church's more profound political task of reminding the nations of the world that it is God who reigns and they are on borrowed time.

VI. A SPECIALIST/SCHOLAR RESPONDS TO AN E-MAIL

Mark -

In your blog, or elsewhere, do you have a basic essay/comments on the relationship of one's personal faith to one's political choices? I would use it in a parish adult forum.

Dick,

Not, I'm afraid, as such—if by that you mean how a single individual's otherwise unspecified faith is or can be related to political choices. In the aggregate, these relations vary from tradition to tradition, and within traditions over time. There are times when the intensity of an issue, or one's faith commitment in some regard, will create a closer relationship to political choices than others. I actually don't know of any essay that tries to sort all this out.

Mark

Check out Spiritual Politics, our blog on religion and the 2008 election, at <http://www.spiritual-politics.org>.

VII. THE BIBLE AND POLITICS

THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE BIBLE

“POLITICS AND THE BIBLE”

The Bible is not a purely religious book; its pages are full of kings and empires, armies and wars, cries for justice. Its political implications have had great influence on the way in which it has been interpreted.

The Bible does not, however, present any systematic or unambiguous teaching about political matters. Its books were written over many centuries and under widely differing political systems, from Israelite tribal society to the Roman empire. Many remarks that have political implications are brief hints rather than clearly stated principles. Later tradition, however, has tended to draw from the Bible certain great architectonic images of political life, and many have taken one such image to be the dominant one, even when the Bible itself furnishes counter indications. This article will sketch some of these classic images.

THE ALIEN STATE. The great empires could at times be seen as blessed by God and as serving his purposes, but at the best they were heathen empires and their polity did not derive from the God of Israel. In Judea in the first century ce, Roman rule was often bitterly resented, and the war of 66–70 was approaching.

Thus Jesus, with his talk of the kingdom of God, and people's belief that he was the son of David, might easily raise political questions. The position he takes up is depicted as a strikingly neutralist one; asked if it is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, he commands, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Mark 12.17). He does not define what is Caesar's and what is God's, but at least there is something that is Caesar's; there is a certain dualism in society; not everything is God's, nor can everything be derived from the theocratic idea. When asked to decide about an inheritance, Jesus asked, “Who made me a judge or divider over you?” (Luke 12.14); some things are human business, and Jesus refuses to involve God in people's partisan struggles. He does not encourage nationalist yearnings for revolt against Rome. Some New Testament sources, such as Luke-Acts, seem to give a favorable picture of Rome (e.g., the Roman administration protects Paul against Jewish violence). Roman persecutions of the church, however, pointed in the other direction: is Rome the beast of Revelation 13, the Babylon of Revelation 18?

Some have thought that the historical Jesus was much more involved in the nationalist politics of his time, as indicated by the superscription “the King of the Jews” on the cross, suggesting that Jesus was put to death for political sedition; the reality of this was then covered up in the Gospels as we have them. The New Testament, seen in this way, is sometimes taken to support involvement in political conflict and violence, contrasting with the neutralist image conveyed by the existing Gospels.

THE PROPHETIC IMAGE. From the nineteenth century onward, the prophets have been seen in the context of their own times as those who demanded social justice and warned of divine judgment if this demand was not met; the heathen empires would serve God in punishing his own people. The “prophetic” task of the church was thus to protest against the evils and injustices of society. Since the New Testament had not done much of this—Paul in Philemon touches upon slavery but does not attack the institution as such—the example of the Israelite prophets was appealed to all the more.

The prophetic image often clashes with the theocratic: God will not hesitate to overthrow that which has theocratic legitimacy if by its inaction it favors the powerful and leaves the weak to suffer. Much progressive, reformist, politically activist religion has thus relied on the prophetic image. Yet the prophets rarely proposed reform, and after early times they did little to foster political action within the nation; God's action came rather through forces from without.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL IMAGE. Allied with the prophetic, and still more evident in the apocalyptic movement, is the image of the coming of a new world in which war and evil will be no more (Isaiah 2.4; Isaiah 11.1–9; Revelation 21.1–5)—and one that may come to pass very soon. Political upheavals and international violence may be birth pangs of this new era (Mark 13.1–30). This vision of immediate catastrophe and a new world nourishes two hostile but related tendencies: millenarianism, which almost welcomes catastrophe because it ushers in the end, and sympathy for Marxist revolution.

The Image of Migration. The Hebrew Bible emphasizes the migrations of Abraham, of the Hebrews from Egypt to the Promised Land, of the returning exiles; the New Testament also pictures the church as a pilgrim people (Hebrews 13.14). This biblical image of migration and return was the motive power for modern Zionism. Christian nations often saw themselves in the same way: they were Israel, going out to find a land where they could build a life in the pattern ordained by God—the Puritan settlers of New England and the Afrikaners in South Africa are examples.

THE IMAGE OF LIBERATION. New Testament passages often emphasize freedom or liberty (e.g., John 8.36; Romans 8.21; Galatians 4.26), and modern scholarly trends have emphasized the Exodus as the dominant event of the Hebrew Bible. In Egypt, the Hebrews were enslaved and subjected to forced labor; their male population was threatened by infanticide. They looked back on the time in Egypt with horror, and their escape from Egypt was the great event, ever afterward to be celebrated. No biblical theme has received more attention for its political importance in recent years than liberation. This theme was taken up by and on behalf of the exploited and oppressed of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, and made into the keystone of liberation theology. The church must take the side of the poor and oppressed, stand with them in their struggle, join with their cry to God for deliverance, and read the Bible from within that context. Neutrality in relation to this situation is intolerable.

This use of the Exodus theme, powerful as it seems, has also been questioned on the ground that it implies a peculiar selectivity within the biblical traditions and a neglect of contrary aspects. Why did the Hebrews not organize politically to resist oppression? Why is their demand not a call for social justice but a request to leave Egypt in order to worship God in the wilderness? If the Exodus theme is so authoritative, what about its sequel when the liberated Hebrews enter Canaan and destroy or reduce to slavery the entire population of that land? Why should one aspect be more authoritative than the other? Liberation theologians generally answer by an appeal to the context of the interpreter: if the context is right, then it will be obvious which aspects of the biblical materials are relevant.

CONCLUSION. The Bible is certainly deeply interested in human political, social, and historical existence, and it presents powerful images relevant for understanding it. But all of these images have a somewhat relative character within the Bible and are limited through inner qualifications and through the coexistence of other, different images. It is doubtful therefore whether any clear and unitary political view can be derived from the Bible taken alone and as an entirety. If we appeal to the contextual situation of the interpreter, then the source is not the Bible as a whole but one's contextual selection. Or is it intrinsically mistaken to appeal so directly to the Bible at all? May the biblical images be valid and salutary only insofar as they are taken up into a total religious and philosophical position that includes, but goes beyond, the actual material of the Bible? These are fundamental questions posed by a consideration of politics and the Bible. J.B.

VIII. FAITH ENGAGING POLITICS: PASSION AND CONSTRAINT by David Price (January 2008)

http://price.house.gov/apps/list/press/nc04_price/120907.shtml

David E. Price, *who earned a Yale Divinity School degree (1964) and a Yale Ph.D. in political science (1969), is a ten-term congressman (D-N. C.) representing the state's Research Triangle, the district that includes Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. Before he began serving in Congress in 1987, he was a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University. He currently serves on the House Appropriations Committee and is chair of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. He received the William Sloane Coffin Award for Peace and Justice from the Yale Divinity School Alumni Board in 2006.*

Speaking personally, I regard my undergraduate and YDS (Yale Divinity School) years, which coincided with the early civil rights movement and culminated in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as the time when my political and religious identities were decisively shaped. Nowadays, religious conservatives claim the banner of faith-based politics for themselves, and their political leaders not only

ignore the religious and moral roots of progressive politics but often portray the entire Democratic Party as hostile to the faith connection.

How has it come to this? Some of the religious groups that we criticized in the 1960s for their individualistic and otherworldly approach to faith have become politically mobilized, and their cultural conservatism has become a key component of Republican politics. “Mainstream” religious communities have often seemed confused or complacent. Some have mistakenly assumed, reacting to the excesses of the Religious Right, that the separation of church and state requires a separation of faith and politics. Some progressive politicians have even become reluctant to tell their own personal stories or to advocate their positions in moral terms. Among many mainstream congregants, nothing has ever quite matched the clarity and conviction of civil rights, and there has been a reluctance to take on religious conservatives in either religious or political forums.

Some of this confusion and complacency has begun to lift, thanks in part to the wake-up call furnished by the 2004 election. But it is not just on the religious and political “left” that such discussions have intensified. There seems to be a renewed awareness across the spectrum that the faith-politics nexus requires searching examination, and that this cannot and should not be mainly a matter of seeking political advantage.

Both our faith and our politics require the exploration of the wellsprings of our own vision for society and of the way our deepest values should shape public policy. It is in this spirit that Yale Divinity School has hosted various faith and politics discussions over the past year and that I have been asked to contribute to the current issue of *Reflections*. I will focus on the passion and conviction that faith brings to politics, the constraints on political power it inspires, and the theologically based humility that tempers our engagement.

PASSIONATE ENGAGEMENT

The rediscovery by many Americans of the Hebrew prophets and their call for justice that “rolls down like waters” (Amos 5:24) had far-reaching political and religious significance in the 1960s. Many of us came to understand that the familiar compartmentalization of life—whereby people who were loving and generous in their personal relationships saw no contradiction in supporting laws and social practices that denied others their humanity—was ultimately untenable. The result was a new direction in public policy, charted by landmark civil rights statutes in 1964 and 1965.

Although civil rights remains a paradigmatic case, the prophetic imperative to “do justice and love kindness” (Micah 6:8) speaks to much of our political life. It requires us to cut through the welter of policy detail and ask what government is doing in our name—to subject military interventions to “just war” criteria, for example, or evaluate governmental budgets as statements of moral priorities.

Faith inspires passionate engagement in the political arena, but that does not mean that it is always simple or straightforward to translate religious and moral convictions into social action. Our faith traditions themselves reveal various modes of engagement—for example, the biblical roles of prophet and peacemaker. While the psalmist extols the blessings of “kindred living together in unity” (133:1), Jeremiah rebukes those whose desire for peace leads to passivity in the face of evil. “From prophet to priest . . . they have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (6:13–14). The life of Jesus displays a similar tension. Some, like Martin Luther King, Jr., may find creative ways of reconciling the roles, but often people of faith will be called to differing, even contrasting, modes of engagement.

Passion must also employ reason. In the legislative arena the calculation of consequences is essential. One of the few times during my service in Congress that I have referred explicitly to my seminary background came in early 2007 during a caucus discussion of a Democratic proposal to put conditions and withdrawal deadlines on a supplemental appropriations bill on Iraq. One colleague stated that because the bill did not immediately defund the war he was not certain that he, as a former seminarian, could vote for it “in good conscience.”

This prompted me to counter with the distinction, familiar from the first day of Ethics 101, between deontological and teleological theories of ethics, although of course I did not lay those exact terms on my colleagues. What if the result of joining Republicans in a “no” vote, because our proposal fell short of liberal members’ notion of perfection, was to bring it down? What if the consequence was to forfeit the best chance we might have for some time to compel a change in war policy? What if the result was to show fatal weakness and division and thus to compromise our longer-term prospects for taking foreign policy in a new direction?

It was *precisely* “conscience,” I said, that required us not merely to measure our bill against an ideal standard but to count the costs and calculate the consequences of defeat.

THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

Passion and conviction are compatible with seeking common ground with those who come to politics from other backgrounds or perspectives—indeed, they often require it. The happy experience of the civil rights movement and of many movements since is that one can bring one’s deepest convictions to political advocacy and at the same time ally with people whose theological and philosophical perspectives differ greatly and sometimes do not have conventional religious roots at all. This will often involve going beyond a specifically religious frame of reference, invoking the commonly held values and shared aspirations of the wider community. It also requires a willingness to “reason together,” as opposed to viewing our religious convictions as debate-stoppers.

Religious conservatives sometimes portray the search for common ground as requiring them, as one of my colleagues put it, “to check my Christian beliefs at the public door.” There is also a tendency to see the invoking of universal values as producing a mere “common denominator” that lacks specificity or force. That, I believe, greatly underestimates the power of the fundamental principles of our constitutional democracy, which have deep religious roots but also find broader resonance. Certainly it would have come as news to Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, as they invoked the Declaration of Independence to combat slavery and segregation, that making a universalistic appeal diluted their passion or the force of their argument.

What if such common ground is not to be found? Obviously, there are sectarian rules and observances that individuals and communities regard as binding, with no thought of extending them to the broader community. But the boundaries delineating what may legitimately be taken into the public arena are neither clear nor uncontroversial. Some politicians, for example, including many who are personally opposed to abortion on religious or moral grounds, argue against “imposing” such beliefs on society. Others regard that position as unjustifiably preempting legitimate political debate.

The issue of gay rights, like that of abortion, evokes contrasting responses *among* religious communities; many people of faith, for good reason, believe that the same moral standards of fidelity and mutual commitment should apply to both gay and heterosexual relationships. Moreover, any attempt to translate religiously based disapproval of a particular sexual orientation into civil law is likely to conflict with broadly shared principles such as civil liberty, nondiscrimination, and equal opportunity, which themselves have strong religious pedigrees.

In such instances, the best course is often to stop short of codifying specific religious and moral precepts, leaving the individual and communal expression of conscience free. But we cannot always resolve such matters simply by declaring them “off limits” for political debate. Those who oppose efforts to codify or sanction various aspects of personal morality will often need to challenge the proponents directly, within religious and other institutions of civil society as well as in the political arena.

Many questions surround the agenda for engagement—not only what issues are best left free of governmental prescription but also how to prioritize the wide range of issues with implications for faith and morality. Religious communities often seem to talk past one another. Conservative groups focus on matters such as abortion and gay marriage, while liberals stress questions of economic justice and war and peace. There is some convergence on pornography and gambling and, increasingly, environmental stewardship. All would do well to guard against the human tendency to address only those questions and heed only those teachings that we find convenient or comfortable.

Some selective judgment is inevitable, however, whether we are dealing with the codes of Leviticus or the admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount. Much depends on how we read and understand the Bible—referencing scriptural commands, for example, as opposed to heeding the admonitions throughout the prophets and the New Testament to attend less to the minutiae of the law and more to its “weightier matters . . . justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23). Relating faith and politics is not merely a matter of obeying commands; it requires ongoing efforts to mine the riches of our religious traditions and to apply them to new and challenging circumstances.

FAITH-BASED CONSTRAINTS

Even as our faith prompts passionate engagement in the political arena, it also raises warnings and suggests constraints on the form and content of our advocacy. Two constraints written into the U.S. Constitution—checks and balances among the major organs of government, and the First Amendment’s twin prohibitions of the “establishment” of religion or the prevention of its “free exercise”—have deep religious roots and continuing significance in terms of our understanding of human nature and religious liberty.

James Madison’s reflections on the “interior structures of the government” reveal a persistent streak of Calvinism in this son of the Enlightenment:

What is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men . . . you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. (*Federalist*, no. 51)

This view, interpreted by Reinhold Niebuhr as a landmark expression of “Christian realism,” must be distinguished from the more simplistic anti-power ideology that persistently rears its head in American politics. Government is hardly the only realm where power exists or can be abused; in fact, political power can be used to counter or control economic, military, or other kinds of power. We must attend not only to the dangers of strengthening a given organ of government but also to the powers and interests that might fill the vacuum if it is weakened. The realism rooted in our religious traditions provides an awareness of the presence of self-interest and self-seeking in all human endeavors, the necessity to use power judiciously as we pursue the common good, and the need for checks and safeguards as we recognize the vulnerability of power in all realms to distortion and abuse.

The First Amendment also embodies religiously inspired constraints on engagement. By no means does it require a strict “privatization” of faith. But it does provide certain ground rules for relating religion to government. Religious conservatives often chafe at these ground rules and treat them as a secular imposition. People of faith need to understand and insist that, on the contrary, the First Amendment has deep and firm religious roots. A brief look at the lineage of the establishment clause will reveal that Roger Williams and other proponents of church-state separation were far more focused on the church’s integrity than on the state’s prerogatives. What was and still is at stake is not only civil liberty but also religious faithfulness.

The First Amendment and the tension between the establishment and free exercise clauses have been at issue in debates over President Bush’s “faith-based initiative.” Such initiatives—congregationally sponsored HUD housing for the elderly, for example, and Meals on Wheels—flourished in my district for many years before the Bush administration. I thought Democrats should have been more vocal in welcoming the President to the cause. But there was also good reason to voice concern about the ground rules. Religious organizations have historically taken pains—often by administering their social services through a legally distinct entity—to avoid using federal funds for sectarian purposes and to ensure against discrimination in hiring and the choice of beneficiaries. This is what Bush sought to alter, and it helps explain the difficulties the initiative encountered in the Senate and the courts.

Finally, our religious traditions teach us humility, and that too should shape and constrain our politics. This is the point of the familiar story of Abraham Lincoln’s response during the Civil War to a clergyman who expressed the hope that the Lord was on the side of the Union (in other words, “God Bless America”). “I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right,” Lincoln said. “But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord’s side.”

This anecdote, like Lincoln’s masterful Second Inaugural address, draws on a religious understanding central to the Jewish and Christian faiths: our own will and striving are always subject to God’s judgment, even—perhaps especially—when we are most confident we are doing God’s will. This does not mean that we engage less vigorously; after all, Lincoln was relentlessly pursuing a military victory. But he did voice what Reinhold Niebuhr termed a “religious reservation”: a recognition that ultimate judgment belongs to God alone and a refusal to presume an absolute identification between his own cause and God’s will.

“Like ‘God-fearing’ people of all ages,” Niebuhr wrote, “[we] are never safe against the temptation of claiming God too simply as the sanctifier of whatever we most fervently desire.” Note that, once again, the most

powerful argument against religious and political pretension is not secular but theological. Claiming divine sanction for our own power or program does not merely undermine American pluralism; it also flies in the face of our religious understanding of human sinfulness and divine transcendence.

So let us engage: our country needs and our faith requires our full-throated advocacy. We can engage far more effectively by taking explicit account of the faith traditions that provide most Americans with their moral frames of reference. This is partly a matter of communicating effectively, but even more of understanding what is required of us as heirs to these riches. A more deeply rooted politics will enable us to make a more authentic and persuasive case for a just society, even as it equips us to resist political arrogance and pretension and to defend the American constitutional order.

IX. WILLIAM TEMPLE, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, 1944 *CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL ORDER*

Christianity and Social Order, published in 1942, was Temple's last and perhaps his most provocative book, in which he articulated the principles which had guided his political activity and challenged many popular assumptions. The church is not a department of life concerned only with personal beliefs and devotional practices, he wrote. From earliest times, the church has spoken out on public matters, and it is only in recent years that this right has been questioned.

When the economic order fails to build Christian character, the church must seek to change it. "The church may tell the politician what ends the social order should promote; but it must leave to the politician the devising of the precise means to those ends," Temple wrote. Society should be structured to give each person the widest opportunity to become what God has placed it in that person to become, Temple said. He saw personal freedom (maximum individual choice), social fellowship (strengthening family, national, and international ties), and service (wider loyalties taking priority over narrow ones) as the key principles leading to such a society. "The art of government," Temple wrote, "in fact is the art of so ordering life that self-interest prompts what justice demands."

From the introduction to William Temple in *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality* by Richard H. Schmidt (Eerdmans, 2002).

from *TIME* 1944

Last year, in *Christianity and Social Order*, Dr. Temple set forth six propositions for a Christian society:

- ¶ Every child should find itself a member of a family housed with decency and dignity.
- ¶ Every child should have an opportunity for education up to maturity.
- ¶ Every citizen should have sufficient income to make a home and bring up his children properly.
- ¶ Every worker should have a voice in the conduct of the business or industry in which he works.
- ¶ Every citizen should have sufficient leisure—two days' rest in seven and an annual holiday with pay.
- ¶ Every citizen should be guaranteed freedom of worship, speech, assembly and association.

Church and Social Order

What is the Anglican view of when and how the Church should interfere in the social order? This is a classic excerpt by William Temple, who served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942-44: "If we belong to the Church...we are obligated to ask concerning every field of human activity what is the purpose of God for it. The method of the Church's impact upon society at large should be twofold. The Church must announce Christian principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must then pass on to Christian citizens, acting in their civic capacity, the task of reshaping the existing order in closer conformity to the principles. ... [For example] the Church may tell the politician what ends the social order should promote; but it must leave to the politician the devising of the precise means to those ends... It can all be summed up in a phrase: the aim of a Christian social order is the fullest possible development of individual personality in the widest and deepest fellowship. ...the first necessity for progress is more and better Christians taking full responsibility as citizens for the political, social and economic system under which they and their fellows live."

[excerpted in the quarterly newsletter *Millennium3* created by some Episcopal bishops (Spring/Summer 1998)]