

Pepperdine University

PASTORS AND POLITICS:  
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH LEADERS ADDRESSING POLITICAL  
MATTERS

A Paper

Of the Requirement for the Course

REL 599 Pastors and Politics

by

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We live in a politically divided time.<sup>1</sup> Long-standing questions about the political role of the church have taken on a renewed interest for American Christians who see this political divide widening and have trouble reconciling their beliefs with the platforms of either major party. How ought Church leaders, seeking to lead missional congregations, speak to our current political context?

This paper lays out a framework for political engagement by missional Church leaders. The paper will first offer a definition of a missional church and a missional church leader. Second, it will survey some of the various approaches to Church and State relations in the Christian tradition and evaluate them. Third, the paper will overview some of the pragmatic risks of political engagement for churches, specifically regarding maintenance of tax-exempt status. Lastly, the paper will conclude with a theological reflection on the appropriateness of pastors advocating for political stances from the pulpit.

### **Missional Churches**

The target audience of this paper is members of Church leadership who are seeking to lead a missional congregation. Christopher Wright describes the mission of the Church as the “committed participation of God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”<sup>2</sup> Churches understand themselves as “missional” when the orientation of their faith community is

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<sup>1</sup> “Republicans and Democrats are more divided along ideological lines – and partisan antipathy is deeper and more extensive – than at any point in the last two decades.” (“Pew Research Center: Political Polarization in the American Public,” People-Press.org, June 12, 2014, <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>(accessed April 20, 2018).)

<sup>2</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2006) 22-23.

characterized by participation in God’s mission.<sup>3</sup> This missional call of the Church is holistic, entailing a commitment to serving the spiritual, physical, social, and ecological needs of humanity.

A commitment to holistic mission raises political concerns as well. To what extent is the church called to influence public policy? In what way might government involvement or abstention factor into mission? Below are some of the major approaches to Church and State relations that are taken up by various Christian traditions.

### **Theologies of the Relationship Between Church and State**

#### **Separationist**

The Separationist approach to politics is most clearly seen in the Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions.<sup>4</sup> The posture of separation is owed in large part to a commitment to nonviolence.<sup>5</sup> The Anabaptist tradition rejects the use of force or coercion even in self-defense. Violence and the threat of violence is an inherent part of any governmental system.<sup>6</sup> They saw in the life of Christ an image of a radical peacemaker who did not stoop to the use of political force. Rather, they advocated living a life shaped by the Sermon on the Mount and disengaging from

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>4</sup> Amy E. Black, *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 9; Thomas W. Heilke, “The Anabaptist (Separationist) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Black, 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.; “...the law is a magnificently refined and wonderfully disciplined system of violence. The violence of the law is generally concealed, but behind every legislative act, every judicial decision, every voluntary contract, there stands the force of the state, without which the law would not be law at all, but mere suggestion. Behind the dignity of the courtroom and the solemnity of the law's stately procedures stand the police and the army and the prison wardens who represent, as it were, the punch line of every legal argument. To enter the world of law is thus to enter a realm of violence - often only threatened violence, but real nonetheless.” (Anthony T. Kronman, “Pepperdine Commencement Speech,” in “Can the Ordinary Practice of Law be a Religious Calling?,” special issue, *Pepperdine Law Review* 32, no. 2 (2005).)

politics to whatever degree necessary not to compromise that calling.<sup>7</sup> The Separationist sees that government does indeed serve a legitimate role in God's plan, but they believe that Christians should abstain or at least significantly refrain from any governmental involvement.<sup>8</sup>

The separationist approach receives criticism for not participating in politics by those who contend that the Church has a responsibility for political engagement.<sup>9</sup> Some also worry that the Church may develop a kind of pietistic quietism, causing it to fail in its prophetic role as a critic of unjust laws, or its constructive role in helping to shape political bodies in ways that glorify God.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, there are concerns that Christians may need to participate in politics as a protective measure or risk becoming the victims of government action down the road.<sup>11</sup>

The separationist does not abandon mission, but they emphasize the need for the church to serve as "an alternative community" embodying gospel truth.<sup>12</sup> Rather than seeking to influence broad social and political platforms, separationists focus on forging "a distinctive social ethic that prefigures the kingdom of God in all its Christ-like particularity."<sup>13</sup> If this ever

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<sup>7</sup> Black, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Heilke, "The Anabaptist (Separationist) View," 26-27; Robert Benne, "A Lutheran Response to the Anabaptist (Separationist) View," *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 47-48; Bruce L Fields, "A Black Church Response to the Anabaptist (Separationist) View," *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 52; James K.A. Smith, "A Reformed Response to the Anabaptist (Separationist) View," *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid; Karl Barth, *Church and State*, trans. G Ronald Howe Church Classics (Greenville, S.C.: Smyth & Helways Pub.,1991), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Black, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

leads to persecution by civil authorities, the separationist points to the Savior who suffered and called upon his own followers to suffer for righteousness' sake.<sup>14</sup>

### Church and State in Paradox

The branch of Christianity that best captures the Church and State in Paradox position is the Lutheran tradition.<sup>15</sup> This position is at times referred to as the “dualist approach” to church and state, or the “two kingdoms doctrine.”<sup>16</sup> It lays out the kingdom of creation (societal order for all people) and the kingdom of redemption (a gospel order given for the people of God).<sup>17</sup> The kingdom of creation includes political organization and this organization should be directed by “universal principles and laws” discernible by way of reason.<sup>18</sup> Secular authorities are responsible for “keeping order and justice in society,” and the church is responsible for spreading and living the gospel. God ultimately institutes government, and it exists because it is necessary to restrain evil in a fallen world.<sup>19</sup> Conflating these two kingdoms poses a problem because “people can wrongly look to law as a means to salvation or turn God’s love into an earthly ethical norm.”<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically, this was also paired with Luther’s understanding of vocation,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.; Robert Benne, “The Lutheran (Paradoxical) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 59.

<sup>16</sup> Black, 11; *Judge and Jurist: Essays in Memory of Lord Rodger of Earlsferry* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), 642.

<sup>17</sup> Black, 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

wherein every occupation, no matter how seemingly mundane, is a divine calling.<sup>21</sup> Those who worked in government do work unto the Lord, but they were to look to the rule of law as to how to act.<sup>22</sup> However, some Christians may, if the need arises, “translate the concerns of God’s word into arguments appropriate for civil government.”<sup>23</sup> They must communicate their concerns in a manner that is judicable by reason and not solely by Christian commitments.

The two kingdoms approach was responsive to Luther’s criticism of Christendom at the time and the comingling of church and secular authority. It was abhorrent for the Church to evangelize via the sword, and Luther argued that the Church should exercise persuasion, not coercion.<sup>24</sup> Critics argue that the Lutheran approach is unduly reactionary to past Church abuses of government power, and the dualistic notion of Church and State has at times conditioned Christians against bringing their faith to bear in the political arena at all.<sup>25</sup> The most famous cautionary tale is Christian complacency in Germany during the rise of Nazism.<sup>26</sup>

### Prophetic Voice

The primary advocates of the “prophetic voice” perspective are the American Black church and Karl Barth. The Black church is a denomination-transcending tradition that “is

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<sup>21</sup> Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries Into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 17-19, 24, 26, 45, 51.

<sup>22</sup> “Do you want to know what your duty is as a prince or a judge or a lord or a lady, with people under you? You do not have to ask Christ about your duty. Ask the imperial or the territorial law.” Robert C. Crouse, *Two Kingdoms and Two Cities: Mapping Theological Traditions of Church, Culture, and Civil Order*, Emerging Scholars (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2017), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Black, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Benne, “The Lutheran (Paradoxical) View,” 59-60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas W. Heilke, “An Anabaptist Response to the Lutheran (Paradoxical) View,” 83.

rooted in the response of African-Americans to their tragic history.”<sup>27</sup> The Black church has both suffered under government oppression and witnessed some liberation by means of political activity, making its relationship to politics paradoxical but distinguishable from the Lutheran perspective.<sup>28</sup> Its theological locus is the suffering of Christ, the identification of present suffering, and “God’s heart for the marginalized, the downcast, the ‘least of these.’”<sup>29</sup> The Black church seeks to involve itself in politics in order to work for “liberation, justice, and reconciliation.”<sup>30</sup> Its understanding of political engagement is more communal than it is individualistic, and the reforms it proposes tend to address large-scale systemic issues and broad institutional reform.<sup>31</sup> Much of the power for reform is aided by the tradition’s hope-filled eschatology and a trust in the promise of Christ to further his kingdom while his people struggle against injustice.<sup>32</sup>

Karl Barth approached church and state relations in a similar way. He spoke with a background of opposing the Nazi regime and recognized the evil threatened by government, but also emphasized the need for the church to act as prophetic watchmen within the state.<sup>33</sup> To totally disengage from politics, as separationists and some dualists might, risks “pietistic

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<sup>27</sup> Black, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce L Fields, “The Black Church (Prophetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 110.

<sup>33</sup> Barth, 11; Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 171-172, 183.

sterility” wherein theology is disconnected to the “problems of human justice.”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, it also risks “an enlightenment sterility,” where the laws of the land are grounded in a vacuous notion of God shaped out of various political philosophies not found in the New Testament.<sup>35</sup> The Christian is called is to pray for one’s country, to witness to the Gospel, and to further a Christocentric approach to politics wherein justice is sought for the most poor and marginalized.<sup>36</sup>

Some criticize the prophetic voice approach to politics citing that it can come to over-emphasize the call to social action at the expense of evangelistic preaching. The “transcendent character of the Gospel” must be preserved, caution critics, and though “the Gospel may lead to political initiatives, it is not itself a political initiative.”<sup>37</sup> Others caution that those who take a prophetic approach, in their zeal, may conflate “political statements on injustice on which all Christians should agree and statements about which there could be reasonable disagreement among committed Christians.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Barth, 7, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 63, 65-66, 84; Karl Barth, "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-1952* (trans. Mrs. E. M. Delacour and Stanley Godman; London: SCM Press, 1954), 80.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Benne, “A Lutheran Response to the Black Church (Prophetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 130.

<sup>38</sup> J. Brian Benestad, “A Catholic Response to the Black Church (Prophetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 136-137.



## Transformationist

The transformationist approach is most closely associated with the Reformed tradition.<sup>39</sup> Reformed theologians emphasize the supreme sovereignty of God over all things—including human governments.<sup>40</sup> God created the world to be good, sin corrupted the world in the fall, but God reaches out to the world in grace.<sup>41</sup> Saving grace (“particular” grace) is extended to God’s elect, but another form of grace, common grace, can enable human beings to discover certain moral truths and develop a level of wisdom for life.<sup>42</sup> Government is part of God’s gift to the world through common grace and it can be used as “an agent of transformation.”<sup>43</sup> Christians are called to obey governments but also work to transform governments.<sup>44</sup> They should use insight they have received via special revelation to influence the common good.<sup>45</sup> Like the prophetic witness approach, the transformationist approach possesses a hope-filled eschatology and sees the present efforts of the church as a kind of laboring toward the New Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup>

Critics argue that the transformationist approach suffers from an “overconfidence in its knowledge of God’s will in education and politics, paradoxically leading it to integrate too readily with the reigning secular claims and ideologies of the day.”<sup>47</sup> The biblical norms that

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<sup>39</sup> James K.A. Smith, “The Reformed (Transformationist) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 139-140.

<sup>40</sup> Black, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 15,

<sup>46</sup> Smith, “The Reformed (Transformationist) View,” 147.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Benne, “A Lutheran Response to the Reformed (Transformationist) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 167.

transformationists seek to apply to the political realm face a two-sided dilemma: the more rigid the norms, the more legalistic and theocratic the aims of the transformationist become. The looser the biblical norms are, the more “hidden norms” from the world are incorporated into the faith, and ‘transformation’ becomes a form of confirmation.<sup>48</sup>

### Synthetic

Contemporary Catholicism best represents the synthetic approach to Church and State. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides seven core principles for the Catholic view on politics: (1) all human life possesses dignity; (2) the importance of family and intermediate communities; (3) human rights and responsibilities; (4) a preference for policies that care for the poor and vulnerable; (5) the dignity of work and need for workers rights; (6) solidarity; (7) God’s creation ought be cared for.<sup>49</sup> The Catholic Church encourages active participation in government for the public good but, in more recent history, advocates for the separation of Church and State as a means of preserving religious freedom.<sup>50</sup> Religious convictions can have influence in the public sphere; however, secular governments reasoning on the basis of natural law best handle public policy.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 167-168.

<sup>49</sup> Black, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>51</sup> J. Brian Benestad, “The Catholic (Synthetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 190; Robert Benne, “A Lutheran Response to the Catholic (Synthetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 209.

Critics of the synthetic approach might sight examples of historic Church oversteps into the political arena and the negative results of such actions.<sup>52</sup> Some may critique the ontological reality of natural law or see problems in trying to persuade people through appeals to natural law.<sup>53</sup> Others highlight and disagree with the fairly optimistic view of human reason possessed by advocates for the synthetic view, and caution that human reason has become more darkened by the effects of the fall than proponents of the synthetic view acknowledge.

No approach to Church and State is perfect because no political system is perfect, and Christians remain imperfect as well. The above provides some major lenses to explore in approaching the Church's relationship to politics. Each view has strengths and weaknesses, and a survey of the various views shows that the riddle of the proper relationship between the Church and politics is, at the very least, not easily resolved.

### Practical Concerns: Threats to Tax-Exempt Status

Excessive lobbying or substantial political activity could cause a church to lose its tax exemption Section 501(c)(3). Losing tax-exempt status can be a very significant blow to operating a Church and is worth taking intentional effort to avoid.<sup>54</sup> Churches may not “lobby” in

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<sup>52</sup> Benne, “A Lutheran Response to the Catholic (Synthetic) View,” 208; Thomas W. Heilke, “The Anabaptist Response to the Catholic (Synthetic) View,” *Five Views On the Church and Politics*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 207.

<sup>53</sup> Benne, “A Lutheran Response to the Catholic (Synthetic) View,” 209.; Burton F. Porter, *Deity and Morality: with Regard to the Naturalistic Fallacy* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13-14; Jesse Covington, *Natural Law and Evangelical Political Thought* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 49.

<sup>54</sup> Possible consequences of losing tax exempt status as laid out by the National Council of Nonprofits: “a nonprofit...no longer exempt from federal income tax and will have to [pay corporate income tax](#) on annual revenue going forward; the organization may also be subject to back taxes and penalties for failure to pay corporate income taxes, as of the effective date of revocation; [a]ny state tax exemptions that the nonprofit received, such as exemptions for income tax, property tax, and sales/use tax -- that are dependent on federal tax-exempt status - may also be revoked; [t]he nonprofit will not be listed in...the official list of organizations eligible to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions; [c]onsequently, donors will not be able to receive a tax deduction for their gifts to the organization after the revocation date; [f]inally, most private foundations are unlikely to give a grant directly

the sense that they cannot contact or urge the public to contact “members of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation;” or advocate the “adoption or rejection of legislation.”<sup>55</sup> However, churches may engage in an “insubstantial” amount of lobbying.<sup>56</sup> The IRS determines whether or not a church’s lobbying was insubstantial based on a number of factors, including: the amount of time devoted to the activity by church volunteers or employees and the amount of money devoted by the church to the activity.<sup>57</sup> There is no clear-cut equation for how much time and money spent lobbying is allowable, which gives the IRS fairly broad discretion to apply the restriction.<sup>58</sup>

Churches may also lose their tax-exempt status if they do not operate exclusively for a religious purpose.<sup>59</sup> In practice, the word ‘exclusively’ is interpreted to allow for insubstantial political activity.<sup>60</sup> Three ways for losing tax-exempt status are if (1) “a substantial part of the organization’s activities consists in attempting to influence legislation,” (2) “the organization participates or intervenes (directly or indirectly) in any political campaign in support of or in

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to nonprofits that are not tax-exempt because their guidelines normally require grantees to be recognized as tax-exempt public charities, since federal tax law imposes an excise tax on the foundation for grants made to organizations that are not tax-exempt.” (“Protect Your Nonprofit’s Tax-Exempt Status.” National Council of Nonprofits. October 06, 2017. Accessed April 14, 2018. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/protect-your-nonprofit's-tax-exempt-status>).

<sup>55</sup> “Legislation, in turn, is defined broadly as an ‘action by the Congress, by any State legislature, by any local council or similar governing body, or by the public in a referendum, initiative, constitutional amendment, or similar procedure.’” W. Cole Durham and Robert Smith, *4 Religious Organizations and the Law* § 32:13 (2017).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> One clear-cut example is the seminal revocation case, *Branch Ministries v. Rossotti*, 211 F.3d 137 (D.C. Cir. 2000), where the court upheld a revocation of tax-exempt status for a church that placed full-page newspaper advertisements urging Christians not to vote for Bill Clinton four days before the 1992 presidential election.

<sup>59</sup> W. Cole Durham and Robert Smith, *4 Religious Organizations and the Law* § 32:12 (2017).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

opposition to a candidate running for public office,” or (3) when the organization’s primary objective may be attained only by passing or defeating proposed legislation and it advocates or campaigns for the attainment of that purpose.”<sup>61</sup>

There are exemptions to the above rules as well. For example, Churches may publish informational voter guides, “conduct educational activities that inform the community on current issues that are of interest or benefit the community,” “invite candidates to speak from the pulpit in their individual capacity” (so long as the church makes it clear that the candidate speaking from the pulpit is not a political endorsement from the church), and churches are able to teach doctrinal principles that “undoubtedly influence the voting decisions of their members.”<sup>62</sup> Religious leaders may not “make partisan comments at official church functions or in official publications” but can endorse a candidate in their personal capacity (and pastors are encouraged to clearly define when they speak about politics in an individual capacity).<sup>63</sup> Lay ministers or volunteers that hold administrative responsibilities are not restricted in politicking, provided that it is clear they are not doing so in their capacity as church leaders and such politicking is not held at “church events or on church property.”<sup>64</sup>

## Theological Reflection

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>62</sup> W. Cole Durham and Robert Smith, *4 Religious Organizations and the Law § 32:16 –Permissible Participation by Religious Organizations in Political Activity* (2017). It is also possible for churches to operate as “two distinct organizations” by creating a 501(c)(4) organization (in addition to the 501(c)(3) that the church is formed as), and this second organization can participate in unlimited lobbying and remain tax-exempt provided that it operates “exclusively for the promotion of social welfare.” A 501(c)(4) is tax-exempt but donations to it are not tax-deductible, and it is able to take part in political campaigns so long as political campaigning is not the organization’s primary purpose.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

This paper proposes that church leaders adopt a “prophetic voice” view to political discussions, but that they do so while acknowledging a paradoxical relationship between church and state. The Church does need to be a voice of protest against injustice—the history of western society is full of examples where much of the church were silent in the face of atrocious government acts, or even supportive.<sup>65</sup> There should not be so great a separation between church and state that the voice of the church is silent to state matters. However, the church should not be so politically affiliated as to become placeholders for a particular party.<sup>66</sup> The church’s witness must be firmly rooted in scriptural truth, which will naturally highlight the strengths and deficiencies in the approaches by either major party. The Church should keep speaking on biblical truth and keep relating the importance of a fully-integrated faith and life, wherein one does not retreat into a dualistic form of reasoning where they live differently in the workplace, or at their voting booth, then they do in their homes and personal lives. When churches make narrowly tailored appeals to important ethical and political principles, then they are able to control the message that they project and place self-restraints from overstepping sound biblical advice into speculative appeals for statecraft.

James 3:1 instructs that “not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” Pastors possess a significant influence over congregations and should cautiously wield that influence on murky matters of politics. Pastors are best off speaking from their primary realm of competency, which is biblical values, “things above,” and they should be very careful about precise policy advocacy because

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<sup>65</sup> Slavery readily comes to mind, along with Indian relocation, Jim Crowe, and twentieth century fascism.

<sup>66</sup> Consider the way association with Trump has harmed the perception of evangelicalism in America. Green, Emma. "How Trump Is Remaking Evangelicalism." *The Atlantic*. March 12, 2018. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/still-evangelical-trump/554831/>; Gerson, Michael. "The Last Temptation." *The Atlantic*. March 11, 2018. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/the-last-temptation/554066/>.

(1) they might not be in the best position to assess all the possible externalities and unintended consequences of policies, and (2) in a politically divided age, people they hope to preach the gospel to will be closed off and feel excluded if a pastor presents overt political bias. Some insight from C.S. Lewis is helpful here:

“Theology teaches us what ends are desirable and what means are lawful, while Politics teaches what means are effective. Thus Theology tells us that every man ought to have a decent wage. Politics tells us by what means this is likely to be attained. Theology tells us which of these means are consistent with justice and charity. On the political question, guidance comes not from Revelation but from natural prudence, knowledge of complicated facts and ripe experience. If we have these qualifications we may, of course, state our political opinions: but then we must make it quite clear that we are giving our personal judgment and have no command from the Lord. Not many priests have these qualifications. Most political sermons teach the congregation nothing except what newspapers are taken at the Rectory.”<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the separationists are right when they say the Church should be “an alternative community” with “a distinctive social ethic that prefigures the kingdom of God in all its Christ-like particularity.”<sup>68</sup> Regardless of the majority political persuasion of church bodies, two things are very clear: the church should be displaying an undeniable commitment to marginalized populations through the church’s ministerial and outreach efforts, and they should be a community embodying the Galatian ideal. Regardless of all the external identifiers of class, gender, and race, the Church is called to be joined together in Christ.<sup>69</sup> This community has an opportunity to listen to the stories of its members; to be impacted by them in a non-hostile environment, and be drawn together towards Christ-centered life. In a nation that is starkly

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<sup>67</sup> C S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays On Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 92.

<sup>68</sup> Black, 11

<sup>69</sup> Galatians 3:27-29.

divided, the Church can be a witness to a way of life that allows for disagreement, nurtures engagement, and humbly pursues mutual transformation together.

### Conclusion

The issue of the Church's proper role in politics is not easily solvable. However, its exploration is highly important, because God's mission certainly encompasses the civic life of believers as well. Many have gone before in the faith and sought to discern the road forward for the Church's political engagement (or disengagement). Given the political structure and situation in the United States, a missional pastor is best positioned when they appropriate some of the insights from the different frameworks. The Church must speak prophetically to the truth of scripture and call out injustice; however, it must also remain true to its message. Real and perceived partisan corruption obfuscates the church's message and can hinder church unity. In a politically divided time, it is best for churches to seek unity around firm doctrines and invite mutual discussion, in good faith, as to how they may apply in the political world. This is not a call to quiet pietism or a call toward any particular party platform. This is a call to pursue Christ in fearful reverence and to help guide a church body to a wholly Christocentric worldview.