

Romney vs. Obama and Beyond: The Church's Prophetic Role in Politics

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese answers a common question of a Christian view of politics and government: How would a biblical worldview inform us on being in the world of politics but not of it? "Dr. T" models a critical yet engaged distance in assessing the beliefs of Presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

Christian Government

During each new election season Christians ask, "What is a biblical view of government?" Does it teach Theocracy, Communism or maybe Democracy? The Old Testament does teach theocracy, which means the Priests ruled the people through the Mosaic Law. Later in its history Israel became a monarchy by its own decision under King Saul—a choice God was not very pleased with, but He accommodated Israel's demand (I Samuel 8).

The New Testament does not adopt theocracy because it applied only to the chosen nation of Israel; it gives no endorsement of any one form of government, but instead offers the Church a special role as a prophetic voice engaging any and all forms of government. There is no such thing as *Christian (civil) Government*, only *Christians in government*. Instead of creating a new system, the Church brings biblical principles to bear on all governments.^[1] This position allows the Church everywhere to be actively involved in its particular political situation through maintaining its witness to Christ.

Israel and the Church

The role of Israel and the Church are often conflated in Christian minds, especially during the political season. Many still believe that Christians should create laws or vote for candidates that will bring us closer to a “Christian America” ideal. This is a revised version of an old notion of Christendom that joins church and state going back to the Constantinian Church which espoused a Christian Roman Empire. Some of our Puritan forebears held that America was the New Jerusalem. America as a nation replaces Israel as the people of God and the Church becomes a political entity like Israel.

In approaching politics, it is essential that we keep in mind the differences between Israel and the Church. Israel was a national people with its own civil law and identity. It was closed to the rest of the world and had to live in strict separation from the Gentile nations. Their call was to isolation, to establish Theocracy and to drive the Gentiles out from Canaan, a goal they were never really successful at accomplishing (Judges 1: 19, 28, 32). Israel was one civil nation among many civil nations and it was usually at war with those neighbors.

Israel foreshadowed the Church. They prepared the world for the coming of the messiah and the Church. Their history and law serves as an example or model of instruction for the Church (Romans 15: 4 and I Corinthians 10: 6), but the Church is not obligated to adopt Israel’s civil identity because this would violate her broader mission to reach all people (Acts 1: 8). The Church is called to political and cultural engagement with all systems and all people, not isolation. When the Church becomes a political or cultural system, it loses its message of grace through faith and reverts back to Law (Galatians 3). Faith cannot be legislated.

The Church could not be true to its universal calling if it was a political power like Israel because this turns its

mission into one of war and conquest, such as the Crusades in the middle ages, rather than conversion through faith (John 18: 36). Islam is a good example of a religion that does follow Israel's kind of political identity in the establishment of Sharia Law. The Church is not one nation, but one people among many nations, cultures and systems. It cannot afford to be a nation with its own civil law and government, which sets itself against other governments and other people. When the Church establishes itself as a political power it compromises its prophetic mission and loses its unique contribution to politics. Instead the Church has a more complex role in any system it finds itself in.

In The World but Not of It

Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Jesus prayed that his followers will not be taken out of the world, but that they be sent into the world and kept from its evil (John 17: 15). The Apostle Paul argued similarly that we must maintain our association with people in the world, even immoral people—and not to isolate ourselves (I Corinthians 5: 9, 10). He says, “the form of this world is passing away,” an awareness that creates in us an “undistracted devotion to the Lord” in every area of life. We are to participate in the world, but not get too attached to it. We “should be as those who buy, but do not possess...and those who make use of the world as though they did not make full use of it” (I Corinthians 7: 31-35). We bring awareness of the temporal nature of the world.

The Prophetic Role of the Church

The Apostle Peter states that the Church is a unique people of God, “a people for God's own possession” or a “peculiar people” as the King James Version says, called to proclaim the truth. He exhorts Christians to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness...” and to keep our “behavior

excellent" in the world. (I Peter 2: 9- 12).

The Church lives differently in society by setting an example. As God's special people, the Church is called to witness His truth to the world, including to the government structures. This means that the Church works within various systems, something Paul accomplished effectively in his use of Roman Citizenship and with his appeal to Caesar (Matthew 17: 24-27; I Peter 2: 13-20, Romans 13: 1-7, Acts 16: 35-39; 23: 11; 24 and 25).

In preaching the Word the Church acts as prophet to "the world," the societal structures arrayed against God (Romans 12: 2). This includes all political systems under satanic control (Luke 4: 5-8). A prophet brings a timely and meaningful message of relevance. He has insight to speak to a particular situation. For example when Nathan the prophet spoke the Word of the Lord to King David in confronting David's sin of murder he held him accountable for his behavior (2 Samuel 12: 1-15). The Bible teaches us through this example that the political powers are not absolute. *The king is not God*, a radical statement in ancient times.

Prophets call people back to obedience to God. They were the conscience of the nation. Likewise, the Church acts as prophet through active participation, but with an attitude of critical distance.

Critical Distance

Critical distance does not mean isolation or withdrawal where we go live in the woods and wait for the world to die. It means involvement in everything the world offers, especially politics, but with an approach from a *different perspective*, an eternal perspective. Criticism means Christians work from within society and offer a perpetual challenge to the status quo that reflects a Christian conscience; it never arrives at a final form of society in which it is completely comfortable.

This is an important, albeit an uncomfortable, role to play. It can never endorse any system uncritically because this acceptance negates the fact of the inherent evil of the world and announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church then is swallowed in the world's identity. This reflects what happened in the Christian Roman Empire and in the Christian America ideal, which is often the ideology behind so called "Christian Conservative" political activism. The United States is identified with Christendom as "a Christian country." Criticism in this sense does not simply entail a good word of advice, but active participation guided by an ethic of love (Matthew 5: 43-48; Romans 13: 8-10). This may manifest in working to repeal an unjust law or establishing a new law that meets certain needs in society, but especially the needs of the weakest members of society, who cannot speak for themselves and are powerless. This reflects a Christian conscience of concern for others, rather than just ourselves. Laws must protect those who need the most protection, rather than empower those who make it. Law is the enforcement of the personal morality of its makers (hence, when people say you "cannot legislate morality," that's an absurdity).

Perhaps the greatest example in recent times of the Church's prophetic voice in American politics was in bringing attention to the cause of the unborn in its efforts to stem the tide of abortion, both in its political activism and through nonpolitical work of advocating adoption as an alternative to abortion. Another good example was the American Civil Rights Movement when it spoke against racism and the unjust social structures in American society.

Just as the Old Testament prophets held the king accountable to the Law of God—*the king is not God*—so the Church reminds the world of its limitations, that its systems have flaws and must allow for improvement. *The world is not yet in the kingdom of God.* There is no perfect system any more than there

are perfect people. There is always room for growth and change. Only in the kingdom of God does change and growth cease because it is no longer necessary in the final state of perfection (Revelation 21).

Democracy offers a better system for Christians than Communism or Theocracy because it reflects an ideal of freedom, the basis of love and faith. But it has flaws, such as the tyranny of the majority (de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*). Nor is democracy “the end of history,” a popular idea after the Cold War, arguing that democracy has emerged from the ideological struggles of history to become the greatest and final system. Nothing will succeed it. The post-Cold War world has reached the end of history, or the end of struggle and the end of change.[\[2\]](#)

There is every reason to consider that democracy will perish from the earth if its people grow complacent and do not defend it or practice it and any idea to suggest that it cannot perish on the basis of a metaphysical law of history will only contribute to that complacency. There is never a final system of society in which the Church refuses to adjure and criticize toward change because that entity would then be equal to the kingdom of God.

Romney vs. Obama

We apply the same standard of *critical distance* in voting for our favorite candidate or party. Voting is often the choice of the lesser of two evils. This popular maxim expresses the same idea of critical distance as long as we understand that the choice of the lesser evil is still a far less than perfect choice. Critical distance includes self-criticism.

Most people choose a candidate who comes closest to their own position and then largely ignore their differences. Critical distance will not dismiss the differences because through it we hold ourselves accountable by seeing our blind spots and

recognizing potential problems. We show humility and responsibility through admitting the limits of our own position and choices.

Many contrasts exist between Governor Romney and President Obama, not least of which is personal religious belief. Ironically, Evangelical Christians largely ignore this issue, though each candidate's views represent a serious difference as compared to biblical Christianity. In the past, Evangelicals have stressed the importance of personal belief. After all, most people hold to a particular political and economic view because of their religious views, not despite them.

President Obama reflects Liberation Theology in his belief that government must act as champion of the people. This should be done, in his view, by elevating the condition of the disenfranchised into the middle class, mainly through economic redistribution, but also through religious pluralism, toleration of minorities, woman's rights and gay rights. Liberation Theology adapts Christianity to a socialist political agenda that uses government as a tool to free people from oppressive social structures such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy. There is a strong emphasis on social justice, radical equality and group sin, meaning the structure of a society is to blame for its problems rather than the individual, who is a victim.

Governor Romney styles himself as a stalwart defender of free enterprise informed by Mormon beliefs that reflect traditional American values of family, faith, and work ethic. Government must protect those values from its own encroachment in order to maintain the middle class. Although Mormonism is radically different from Evangelical Christianity in its doctrinal formulation, it accepts similar social values, which stress personal responsibility and initiative.

Although, no election can be reduced to one issue or to

personal beliefs, these considerations' potential impact cannot be disregarded. Behind Obama stands a Liberation Christianity that has and will continue to benefit from his re-election. A Romney victory will lift the cultural status of Mormons in America from outsiders to the mainstream. In the past, the election to the Presidency of a member from a group struggling for recognition in mainstream America received a stamp of approval at the highest level of political office that gave them increased cultural recognition and cache . The election of one of your own to the Presidency is a sign of arrival. President Kennedy's election to office brought American mainstream acceptance to Roman Catholics, just as President Carter brought it to Evangelicals and President Obama brought the full acceptance of African-Americans, so a "President Romney" will create a greater cultural awareness and acceptance of Mormons.

The contemporary political logic of the American system says put your criticism out there during the primaries, but put it away once a candidate for your party is chosen. You're supposed to fall in line behind him or her. Christians often follow the same logic and refuse to entertain criticism of our chosen candidate because it suggests a preference for the opposing side. The lack of criticism generally continues through our chosen candidate's administration. Problems and faults are usually blamed on the other side and Christians become as politically polarized as the parties. This surrenders any critical distance gained and the Church loses its unique contribution for political advantage. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25: 27-34). We can in good conscience choose a candidate that we do not completely agree with *if* we retain our criticism of him. We should participate, yet with reservations.

Critical distance can tolerate voting for someone of a different faith if he is a better choice than the alternative, but it cannot live with softening its differences in order to

win an election or modifying its convictions for political gain. Evangelicals are faced with a difficult choice, not between Liberation Theology or Mormonism, but whether or not they will retain their doctrinal critique and rejection of Mormonism, when those differences threaten its economic and political interests.

Recently, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association dropped Mormonism from its cult list. And the language of “values” between Christians and Mormons grows indistinguishable, so that now “Christian values” are somehow equated with “Mormon values” and a vote for a Mormon is a vote for “biblical values.” The greatest “value” for Christians is the deity of Jesus Christ, which most Mormons do not accept. Evangelicals and Mormons share a similar political agenda in preserving the free enterprise system and in protecting the traditional American family ideal, which they both consider preferable to the creeping socialism of the Obama administration. There is no need to drop the hard and fast differences between Christianity and Mormonism; Christians can work with anyone if we effectively practice *critical distance* at the same time.

So, it comes down to retaining our prophetic role as members of Christ’s Body—not as much who we vote for, but why and how.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, “A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action,” *Mind Games Survival Course Manual* (Plano, Texas: Probe Ministries, 1998), www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Politics/Gov1.htm

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). The idea of the end of history here is really a Hegelian version of Christian America, just as the idea of progress, the foundation of Fukuyama’s argument, reflects a secularization of the older notion of the idea of providence that founded “Christian America.” Both identify

either Christendom or the Western World with the kingdom of God, the final form of society. One is traditionally religious in its conception and the other secular.

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Responding To President Obama's Same-Sex Approval

President Obama recently gave public support to gay marriage. How do we respond from within a biblical worldview?

Some Christians have used this news event to highlight the way the church is blowing it on the opportunity to be “Jesus with skin on” to the GLBT (gay | lesbian | bi-sexual | transgender) community. This sentiment is especially prominent among people under forty who often have good friends who identify as gay.

There are two different issues that need to be kept separate: how the church treats gay-identifying *people*, and the church's position on the culture-affecting issue of gay identity and so-called gay marriage. The first provides an opportunity to display a welcoming attitude of grace, which says, “We're glad you're here like the rest of us messed-up sinners who desperately need Jesus. He loves you and accepts you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to let you stay that way. Come embrace holiness with us as we learn it together.” (And this message is just as true for drug and porn addicts, as well as Pharisaical holier-than-thou folks addicted to judgmental moralism.)

The other is about refusing to budge on what God has said about sexual sin, which does not change. Homosexuality is no

more right, holy or acceptable today than it ever was in Bible times. Neither is heterosexual fornication, adultery, or pornography-driven lust. It's not just that sex outside of God's plan for marriage (which is limited to one man and one woman, per the created intent in Genesis 1 and 2) breaks His law-His rules are given as a gift to keep us from breaking our hearts.

Jesus said He came to bring a sword (Matt. 10:34), and this issue is one of the areas of conflict He was bound to cause because His standard of holiness, and His call to live in it, is at odds with the human desire to do what we want regardless of what God thinks. Is homosexuality a sin? This is a simple question, but it needs a complex answer. Same-sex attraction (SSA) is usually not a choice; it's something people discover, usually with pain and horror. (Females, naturally more relational, can cultivate it and be emotionally seduced toward lesbianism, though, even with no previous leanings that way.)

But does it "fall short of the glory of God," one way Scripture defines sin (Rom 3:23)?

Certainly.

Same-sex attractions are a corruption of God's intention for healthy personal and sexual development, the result of the Fall and of living in a fallen world. I get this. I have lived with polio ever since I was six months old. I didn't choose this disability, but is it a sin? It certainly falls short of the glory of God, and polio is part of living in a fallen world. It's one of the ways I experience the infection of sin. I did not choose the fallen-creation consequence of polio, yet I have to deal with it. My *responses* to it can be sinful, just as those who experience unwanted SSA have to deal with the fallen-creation consequence of homosexuality, but their responses to it can be sinful.

(By the way, there is no evidence of a genetic cause for

homosexuality. The “born that way” myth cannot be supported biologically. But there are good reasons that many people end up with same-sex feelings; for more information, please read my articles in the [homosexuality section](#) of the Probe website, as well as articles on the Living Hope Ministries website at www.livehope.org.)

When people give in to the temptations of SSA and engage sexually with other men or other women, God’s word has a very serious word for it: *abomination* (Lev. 18:22). But it’s important to understand that the abomination is the act, not the people.

President Obama referred to the golden rule (treat others as you want them to treat you) as his rationale for supporting gay marriage:

[Michelle and I] are both practicing Christians and obviously this position may be considered to put us at odds with the views of others but, you know, when we think about our faith, the thing at root that we think about is, not only Christ sacrificing himself on our behalf, but it’s also the Golden Rule, you know, treat others the way you would want to be treated. And I think that’s what we try to impart to our kids and that’s what motivates me as president and I figure the most consistent I can be in being true to those precepts, the better I’ll be as a dad and a husband and, hopefully, the better I’ll be as president.[{1}](#)

In 2008, in defending his current position against same-sex marriage but for civil unions, he said concerning people who might find his position controversial, “I would just refer them to the Sermon on the Mount, which I think is, in my mind, for my faith, more central than an obscure passage in Romans.”[{2}](#)

Two things strike me about this. First, he’s not consistent about his application of the golden rule; he’s pro-abortion-

but of course he doesn't want to be hacked to pieces without anesthesia, which is precisely what certain abortion procedures entail.

Second, choosing the golden rule over "an obscure passage in Romans" shows he doesn't understand that "the entirety of [God's] word is truth" (Ps. 119:160). Both the Golden Rule and the Romans 1 passage are true; it's not a choice between the two. Since he used to give lectures on Constitutional law at the University of Chicago, I doubt that he would ever use the term "an obscure phrase in the Constitution," because obscurity is about one's perception of importance, not the actual importance of a matter. To a Constitutional lawyer who respects the document, every phrase of the document is important. To a serious [true] Christ-follower, every word of His scriptures is important.

The issue of same-sex marriage isn't about people's right to live in committed relationships, to do life together. It's about demanding society's approval for "[the façade of normalcy](#)." It's about demanding approval for what God has called an abomination (the sexual act, not the people engaged in it).

Ryan Anderson wrote in the *National Review Online*,

"What's at issue is whether the government will recognize such unions as marriages – and then force every citizen and business to do so as well. This isn't the legalization of something, this is the coercion and compulsion of others to recognize and affirm same-sex unions as marriages."[\[3\]](#)

American culture is definitely moving toward normalizing homosexuality, but from God's perspective it will never be normal or natural (Rom. 1:26-27). And it's God's perspective that matters.

Notes

1.

www.dennyburk.com/president-obamas-scriptural-defense-of-gay-marriage/

2. www.wnd.com/2008/03/57975/

3. bit.ly/LGZ1z1

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Should Christians Respect Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled “Should Christians Respect Obama?” was forwarded to me. Perhaps you’ve seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.

Dr. David Barton – on Obama

Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !

I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !

Why am I doing this ? It is because:

- I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;
- I do not share his Abortion beliefs;
- I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;
- I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make \$150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);
- I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;
- I do not share his view that America is not a Christian Nation;
- I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;
- I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
- I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
- I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
- I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
- I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
- I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ; and
- I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson

GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !

(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)

Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"

"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan

I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK....

In GOD We Trust.....

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the man." It's like saying, "I respect my boss's position of authority over me, but I don't respect my boss." But in my experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to "do everything without complaining or arguing." That habit derives only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I'm particularly unnerved by the way the term "embodiment of Evil" was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn't portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every

sentence is exclaiming, that's a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)

- From Dad: "Dr. Barton's website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity." Thanks Dad!

- Thirdly, there are at least three of the President's views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian than bearing false witness.

- Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be

perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/