

Church, Politics and Prayer (1 Tim 2:1-8)

Introduction

Bonjour!

Church and politics

Your pastor has asked me to speak on the topic of Church and politics. He said: “please tell us how to vote”. And as a French citizen, I would be happy to!

Talking about politics is quite a challenge anywhere in the world. I even found some advice on different websites on how to conduct a conversation on the subject.

- Lyz Wardle Lenion writes a blog of “The Do's and Don'ts of Talking Politics in the Office”. Basically she says “play nice” “don't touch heated issues” and “know when to walk away”
- On another blog entry, Tom Murse writes about “How to Talk Politics and Still Stay Friends; Avoid Hurt Feelings at Holiday Gatherings and Family Functions”. He writes: “Cite Facts Not Opinions”; “Disagree Respectfully”; “See the Other Side”; Don't Take it Personally; “Keep Quiet”.
- On a site dedicated to the military, an article titled: “Air Force Warns Airmen Against Talking Politics on Social Media”

The reason Jordan suggested the theme is that I've coauthored a book on the subject, with my colleague and successor Philippe Viguier. The title is *The Gospel & The Citizen*. What we want to do in this book is to make Christians think of their imprint upon this world.

Obviously I did not anticipate that we would be confronted, in this country, with such a painful situation. I hope that this message will bring some sort of encouragement and perspective.

This morning, I'll have a lengthy introduction on different models of church and state interaction, and then we'll look at one of the 4 main NT texts that deal with this issue.

Different models of interactions

Throughout church history, we find several models of interactions between Church and State:

Theocracy. This concept considers God to be King over everything, including the political sphere. This system considers that authorities should be Christians setting up Christian laws.

- What do you think? Would you like the next president to be born again, and would like him to enact Christian laws?
- I suspect some are thinking that yes, it would be nice! Of course, it would be very easy to define Christian laws. For example Calvin imposed heavy fines on the citizen of Geneva who did not attend church services on Christmas day!

- In history, this became the dominant system in Europe from the 4th century on, leading to a rather militant and at times violent 'Christian Empire'

Retreat. This considers that the world is so polluted that the church ought to be completely separate from any worldly sphere. Churches should be like castles, away from the highway, a place of solitude and meditation.

- Would you like to move with all your brothers and sisters to live and peace and harmony in the Californian desert, with Jordan as your bishop?
- The monastic movements were of that nature and reflected the attempt to live a pure Christianity. Unfortunately, purity is not found when we isolate ourselves from the world. Evil is in the heart, not in society.

Subjection: In this model, the church serves the State. It is the spiritual and moral arm of the State. The church always convinces its members to follow the government, and actually to fully submit to the government.

- This is the case of the Russian Orthodox church, which very much supports Mr Putin's regime.
- It would be like Mr. Bob Huber, or Mr. Obama, demanding of this church to always applaud, support and apply their policy.
- That is probably the farthest away from the American mindset!

Lobbying: Probably the most commonly shared perspective, especially in the US, is that the church is supposed to influence governments so that they vote Christian laws, or laws that favor Christian ethics. If I'm not mistaken, I feel like this has been the modus operandi of churches in the US... The church militates against abortion, militates in favor of traditional marriages, and seeks the vote and implementation of laws that reflects its understanding. It could be on any particular issues, and all the way to favoring what is called theonomism, which seeks to establish the 10 commandments as the basis for a constitution...

We'll look a bit more at that idea later.

If you want to know more, you'll have to read our book! What I find in the Scriptures is that we are to be, as a church, a witness of Jesus Christ. By this I mean two things:

- We preach Jesus, and the Gospel – and that should be the only stumbling block. We are calling men and women who are exhausted from trying to hide from God that they can be reconciled and redeemed. The Gospel is our message.
- We exemplify, as a church, how the Gospel changes lives. Our main business is to be an example of how the world should live. The world should be speechless about the church, because of its life.

It is our conviction that the church, as a whole, has a redemptive message, not a political one. And that it should exemplify that redemption in the way we live.

I want to underline here that I'm talking about the church, defined as a collective voice, notably through its leaders. I am not talking here about the vocation of political activism a church member may choose to pursue. But I would suggest here that he would pursue it as

citizen, inspired by his Christian conviction, but not as a representative or in the name of Christianity.

The NT contains 5 critical texts on church and state relationships:

- Mt 22.17-22: Jesus separates the sphere of God and the sphere of worldly leaders – “give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s”. Cf. John 18.36 : Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”
- Romans 13: submission to the State, and the payment of taxes.
- Act 5.29 shows the apostle disobey orders violating their conscience.
- 1 Peter 2 gives some specific instructions to Christian with regard to authorities. This is the text we focus our attention on.
- And there is 1 Tim 2, which I want to focus on this morning.

Reading 1 Timothy 2 (ESV)

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. ⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

The bottom line of this text: **The church’s priority is to pray for the freedom to preach the Gospel and for men to be content with it...**

The personal benefits(2.1)

“¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people”

Verse 1 and verse 8 commands us to pray. It the **focus** of this passage, and in the **middle of the sandwich** you have the content of prayer.

If Paul writes “First of all, then”, it is about something that precedes. Well, in the preceding verses, Paul commands Timothy to:

“fight the battle well, ¹⁹ holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. ²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

Hymenaeus and Alexander were likely 2 members of the church. Suddenly they turned against **God and the Gospel**. We don’t exactly know what happened they challenged Paul for many years as the rest of Scriptures show.

- Perhaps a **secret sin** that they nurtured and so to protect themselves they had to attack Paul who would have called them to repent.
- Perhaps it was a **vicious and angry temperament** that was left unchecked and unchallenged.

Paul sees a direct link between **prayer** and **keeping our spiritual sanity**. As the rest of the text shows, we, and especially men, are prone to take matters in our hands. We are **easily upset** at the ways things are. We want to do something about things!

It is easy to arbore **bitterness** and **fear** about the **Muslim extremists**. It is easy to be upset at the **political climate** and pester about the **candidates' shortcomings**. The problem is that this **kind of attitude** will not **change the world**. It will not change the politics of this nation. It will not influence your kids to godliness, and it will not help you sleep better at night. It will only take us further away from fighting the battle well.

In his exhortation to pray, Paul focuses our attention to where it should be. The world is not well. Troubles are everywhere.

- We may very well take out our sword, just as Peter did when he sought to prevent Jesus' arrest.
- We may very well ask the Lord for fire to come upon the others guys, just as the disciples asked Jesus for the Samaritans.
- We may very well leave the church, as Demas and others have, to focus on our business, on ourselves.

Instead, we should develop all kinds of prayers. Paul urges / encourages / exhorts us to pray, **first of all**. That should be our priority.

- "supplications, prayers, intercessions," are synonyms. Just for emphasis
- "Thanksgivings" is a praise, an item of thankfulness.

There are positive benefits for prayer:

- It keeps our heart in the right place.
- It allows us to depend upon God.
- It calms our anger as we express our trust in God.
- It allows us to gradually gain God's perspective
- It grants us the joy of seeing God answer
- It expresses our trust in the sovereignty of God.
- It makes our heart glad as we thank God for his purposes.

In this vicious and dangerous world, Paul begs Timothy to lead the church of Ephesus to pray. "For all people".

- when I take the bus / train, I try to pray for some of the people. Sometime I sit down at a café outside and just look at these folks and pray.
- I try to pray for my neighbors as I leave for the office.
- I have an app from the *Joshua Project* that reminds me to pray for an unreached group. Some days I do it, some days I don't!
- And thanksgiving. Jordan had me meet the church leaders yesterday at 7 am. I can't believe you guys do that. Way too early. I'm not sure the angels are up at this hour.

As I was driving, the sun was just coloring brightly the hills – it was beautiful and I started to praise God for the beauty of creation, for the enjoyment we will have during the Millennium and on the New Earth of all of God's creation.

Pray, pray for all men. I'm also to pray with a political intent. Look at verse 2:

The political purpose (2.2)

"² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."

When we pray for kings, and "all who are in high positions", I'm struck to notice what he is not asking for

- Paul is not asking for Christian laws to pass
- Paul is not asking for Christian leaders to be nominated
- Paul is not asking for Christian ethics to be imposed.

The church is to pray that political leaders allow us to live **peaceful and quiet lives**. To use a more modern expression, he is asking us to pray for **freedom of conscience**. The main purpose of a government, from this perspective, is to keep an ability to live peacefully.

It is my understanding that the church is **not to lobby for Christian laws to be passed**, for biblical worldviews to be adopted. Please note that I'm speaking here as the church's responsibility. It may well be that you would have as a citizen, a calling to influence society, but this is **your calling as a citizen, not as a representative of Christianity**.

Let me give you my 10 best reasons for that:

1. **There is no NT mandate for political influence.**
2. **There are no NT examples for political influence.** (see the judge's evaluation of Paul's ministry in Ephesus in Acts 19).
3. **There is a continuum from lobbying to theocracy .**
4. **Christianity is impossible without the Holy Spirit**
5. **Morality does not save.** The Gospel is redemptive – not moralistic. Even if all Americans adopted the 10 commandments, they still would be separated from God, and go to hell.
6. **We are aliens and visitors.** Would you like me as a French tourist here to tell you how to live?!
7. **Lobbying antagonizes those who need the Gospel**
8. **It leaves a painful legacy in church history.** Christians in Europe are known for the crusades, more than for the hospitals.
9. **It's impossible to balance biblical values.** Which is "more" biblical? Freedom or solidarity?!
10. **Difficult to honor those you oppose?** See Peter's command to honor everyone, including the Emperor.

By choosing a certain political camp **we diminish the capacity to reach out with the Gospel to the other camp**. If evangelicals are vocal about a certain party, will the members of the other parties consider that to be a **stumbling block**? Shouldn't the **cross be the ultimate stumbling block**?

The New Testament never asks the church to oppose ungodly practices – but simply to refuse ungodly orders.

- **Exposition of children** for example // abortion. Never denounced – but the life of Christians showed radically different values.
- **Public games** were violent and vile.

The Church ought to silence her adversaries **through good works**. In other words, it should be our lifestyle that questions the lifestyle of nonbelievers.

- Is there **racism** out there? Let the **church** be **incredibly inclusive**.
- Is there **violence** out there? Let the church be **incredibly loving**.
- Is there **immorality** out there? Let the church be **incredibly holy and pure**.
- Is there **abortion** out there? Let the church **love and welcome children**

Mounce, in his commentary, notes: “In contrast to the opponents who are bringing disrepute on the church, the church is to pursue a lifestyle characterized by tranquility, calmness, reverence, and dignity”. Mounce, W. D. (2000). *Pastoral Epistles* (Vol. 46, p. 82). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

And this leads us to the redemptive purpose of our prayers.

The redemptive purpose (2.3-7)

³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Do you remember that Paul wanted us to pray **for all men**? In between the **lines** of this **epistle**, we see that the church in Ephesus made rather sad **distinctions between Jews and non-Jews**. There were discriminations in the church. So Paul stresses prayer for all men. All types of men. The Gospel has a universal calling.

Throughout the planet men like to distinguish themselves.

- racial lines are drawn. The untouchables are an example. You go to Africa, and some clans are racist against others. You go to Europe and some are racists against others.
- occupational lines. The slaves and free in roman world. The rich and the poor.
- Moral lines. Pagans were worse sinners than Jewish sinners and when they were saved there was much animosity to bridge.

Well, from God's perspective, the only **line that truly matters is between saved and unsaved**. That is the most essential and fundamental **distinction**. The worst of sinners in our eyes is not seen the same way by our Lord who seeks his salvation.

And so Paul reminds the church that the **great message we have is redemptive. It's not social or political**.

And there are not that **many passages in Scripture that say that something pleases God!** This is one of them! This is the ultimate motivation for Christians to bring joy to their Savior! This is the extraordinary perspective of the Scriptures:

- **God the Son** became **forever man** to serve as the **perfect bridge** between God and man.
- He's paid the **bill of our sins**, and he has purchased a Bride for Himself.

When it is said that he "gave himself as a ransom for all people", it is not a statement of universal salvation, as if there were no judgments and no hell to be expected. It's the second time that we find the expression "all people" in our passage. And it is to be understood in the context of this epistle, **namely all types of people**: Jews and gentiles, rich and poor – **no cast** is ever **excluded** from the **glorious calling of the Gospel**.

It's about Jesus! **Jesus lived the perfect life that I should have lived** (but I didn't). **Jesus experienced the fear, judgment, shame and death that I deserve** (but that I will never experience). **Jesus rose again in life that I don't deserve** (but that I can live eternally). **His life for mine. My life for his!**

Paul is very well aware of his calling to proclaim and to teach the Gospel. You see, when the **church sees itself not as some sort of moral beacon** but as a **loving proclaimer of the Gospel**, it has an incredible impact.

Rosaria Champaign-Butterfield

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield was one of the most well-known professors of English literature of her time. She was a tenured faculty member at Syracuse University, a convinced lesbian, and a fervent believer in the theories of Freud, Marx, and Darwin. She and her partner were extremely active in social concerns in their community. Rosaria "came out" at 26 years of age, and was proud of her homosexuality.

She hated Christianity, even going so far as to say that pronouncing the name of Jesus was, for her, like swallowing an elephant's tusk.

During her research specializing in LGBT and queer studies, Rosaria began to look into the conservative right in America. Writing an article on the Promise Keepers movement, she says, "I launched my first attack on the unholy trinity of Jesus, Republican politics, and patriarchy."

The article provoked an onslaught of responses which Rosaria put into two bins on her desk: hate mail on the left, fan mail on the right. Only one letter defied classification: a letter from a Presbyterian pastor:

It was a kind and inquiring letter. It encouraged me to explore the kind of questions I admire: how did you arrive at your interpretations? How do you know you are right? Do you believe in God? He didn't argue with my article; he asked me to explore and defend the presuppositions that undergirded it. I didn't really know how to respond to Ken's letter, but I found myself reading and re-reading it. I didn't know which box to file this letter in, and so it sat on my desk and haunted me.¹

She was so bothered by this letter that she finally called the pastor. After a short phone conversation, Ken invited her over for dinner. A true friendship grew out of this first meal with Ken and his wife, Floy.

Before I ever stepped foot in a church, I spent two years meeting with Ken and Floy and on and off "studying" scripture and my heart. If Ken and Floy had invited me to church at that first meal I would have careened like a skateboard off a cliff, and would have never come back. Ken, of course, knows the power of the word preached but it seemed to me he also knew at that time that I couldn't come to church – it would have been too threatening, too weird, too much. So, Ken was willing to bring the church to me. This gave me the room and the safety that I needed to match Ken and Floy's vulnerability and transparency. And so I opened up to them. I let them know who I was and what I valued. I invited them into my home and into my world. They met my friends, came to my dinner parties, saw me function in my real life. They made themselves safe enough for me to do this.²

One morning, she climbed out of her partner's bed and went to Ken's church. She understood the price she'd have to pay if she continued in this path. She understood that something in her was breaking down her opposition to the cross, faith, and the Bible.

~~That Sunday, Ken preached on John 7:17, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." It was at that moment that Rosaria's pride was broken. She knew that she was hard hearted, that she wanted to be the only authority, the only judge, in her life. She didn't want to be judged according to God's standards; she wanted to reason, not to obey.~~

~~But faced with Ken and Floy's love, faced with the clarity of the Bible, she discovered the loving and sovereign God. Her life was turned upside down. She turned to Christ and was changed.~~

~~When Jesus walked upon the earth, he welcomed all sorts of people. He didn't push them away or mock them. He loved them.~~

Imagine what would have happened to Rosaria if Ken and Floy had written her to argue with her about her position on gay marriage. They never would have met. She would have put their letter in the left bin and continued in her hatred for Christians. As for Ken, he would probably have continued to stand up against the world's perversions. We suggest to you that

¹Butterfield, Rosaria Champagne: *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*, Crown and Covenant, 2012, [Kindle edition, 228/2775].

²Ibid., 292.

the Christian's first responsibility is to live out the message of the gospel, to reflect Jesus Christ; to be an example of Christ for the world.

The personal benefits(2.8)

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;”

I don't know what it is, but I'm getting more upset at listening to the news than I used to.

- Maybe it's **old age!**
- Maybe it's the **longing for justice** that the **beatitudes mention.**
- Maybe it's **wisdom** – I now see clearly how society should be organized, LOL!

When it is time for the news, I find myself turning the **radio off** in the car and **listing the reasons for my discontentment.** I may even daydream for a second of what I would do, if I were the president of France!

But... I don't pray. I don't pray for my **president,** I don't pray for my **representatives.** I don't pray for **the men in charge of certain government duties.**

Worse than that, I don't **thank God for the fact that there is a government.** A **judicial system.** **Roads** that are kept – more or less! **Education** that is accessible. For the **freedom to worship** where I want. A **solid and fair police force** by and large.

I've been in a few countries where the government has collapsed, and it ain't pretty. Even a bad government is better than the absence of a good one.

Here is a wrong way to react:

- I criticize the president and his actions to my friends
- I badmouth the government in front of my children
- I dismiss all rulers as hypocrites and worthless.
- Why? Because Peter asks us to honor the rulers... There is not a single ruler who is not there outside of a divine appointment (Dan 4.25)

Look again at the attitude displayed here:

- **Lifting up hands:** sign of **worship and praise.** Sign of dependence upon God.
- **Holy hands:** as opposed to **bloody, dishonest,** mean spirited hands. Hands that reflect God's intent that we should love him and love our neighbour as ourselves.
- **Without anger:** that is **ungodly anger.** In truth, I have not seen much godly anger, the kind that Jesus displayed, when his Father's reputation was at stake. What I have seen, and mostly in my own heart, but in the church as well, is that selfish anger that seeks to hurt those that are in our way... The contrary of anger, is meekness, gentleness, kindness.
- **Without quarrelling:** the word represents here all that is argumentative, and complaining.

Here, in this final verse, I can't but observe how Jesus incarnates so beautifully the type of man we are to become.

- In the **garden of Gethsemane**, just before being crushed by the violence of men and the wrath of his Father, he prayed, in anguish, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22.42)
- He truly is "gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11.29)
- Jesus displays that kind of **loyalty to the Father's purpose**. His trust is complete in the Father's rule. He entrusts Himself into his hands. And by so doing allows the greatest rescue of all times to be performed. He will **endure the wrath** he did not deserve so that we may benefit from a justice we do not deserve.

And by so doing he gives us the example of examples.

- Paul says that he became **all things to all men** to save some. (1 Co 9)
- Paul writes that he endured everything "for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2.10)
- As we **endure**, sometimes, **unfair treatments and decisions**, let's lean on the Lord's providence and see how he will use our reactions to bring people into his kingdoms.

Let Christ's likeness be the drawing card to Christ.

Conclusion

One comment / one prayer

Try to take the following habit. Every time you have an angry thought against your political leaders, replace it with prayers for them.

- Pray for freedom of conscience
- Pray for men and women everywhere to be drawn to Jesus
- Pray that your church would form a micro-society representative of the type of society Jesus would want to see.

Write down your philosophy

Take the time to write 2 to 3 lines to describe what you want to project on social media, as a Christian...

My legacy on social media should be this...