

# The Christian and Politics

Harry Langerak

Watergate: As I was contemplating the subject of the Christian and politics this term repeatedly crossed my mind. It struck me that Watergate is a prime example of the evil that the world gets involved in with its brand of politics. Politics, as you may or may not realize, is inseparably connected with our government. It is the art of winning and holding control over government. It may also include the ability to guide and influence our governmental policies. In our particular government we do this democratically, that is, through the will of the people. The people in turn elect representatives to serve them so that their will may be carried out as to how the government is to run. To facilitate matters, parties have sprung up which have particular ideas on how government should be run and candidates usually are elected under the banner of one of them. Watergate is an attempt by a few to get the reign of government into their hands through the illegal use of this political system. They have used money, robbery, invasion of privacy and mechanical genius of our age for bugging in order to gain their ends. How could this happen in our political system which is supposed to be so full of checks and balances so as to avoid this type of tyrannical happening? Watergate should not surprise the child of God. He knows himself and how he must fight his own selfish inclinations for power and prestige, and how much more then those who do not have to worry about fighting it.

Politics is an invention of men to facilitate control over government. Man, who by nature wants to lord it over his neighbor, has tried to build in a system whereby this attempt is minimized. As Watergate has demonstrated no amount of built-in mechanics will insure against this power hungry mania. I believe the child of God must see politics as a creation of this world to facilitate control of government by the world. Only then can we see Watergate in its proper light. At the risk of sounding pessimistic, I would assert that there will be more Watergates. The antichrist must come and it is only through the centralization of power that this will happen.

The concerned Christian might ask how it is possible for him to participate if politics is an area where the world has such influence and is such a corrupt business. Is it possible that the Christian has no place in the arena of the political process of our government? It is my contention that not only may the child of God participate, but he must. In this article I would like to express some ideas on why this is so.

Before I start, I would like to lay down one fundamental fact that every child of God no matter what he does must remember. The child of God lives in this world as a pilgrim and a stranger. He must realize he has no permanent resting place here and yet he is in this world and is called to live in it. It is this tension that causes much of the problem with regard to answering our question. There are those who would simply withdraw themselves from the political scene and not participate in any form or fashion. This is the Anabaptist point of view. Their argument runs something like this. The world is corrupt and we are to steer clear of corruption; therefore, we must live separately and can disobey government. Article 36 of the Belgic Confession denounces the Anabaptist with these words “. . . we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates, and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods, and confound that decency and good order, which God hath established among men.” This is the argument used by those who would contend that politics is a corrupt business and therefore, we ought not involve ourselves because our influence is so small in this sea of depravity. If this is so, the Christian could use this argument anytime he pleased

and therefore, justify total withdrawal and be no better than the Anabaptist. I might add this is an accusation often wrongly thrown at us.

There are others who would answer our question by simply throwing out the pilgrim status of the Christian and joining hands with the world in causes and practices. They would have us believe the antithesis is something of our imagination. To them the cause of Christ is to redeem this world and what better way than using the might of this world's political forces. They accuse those who oppose them of being a stick in the mud who have no idea of the social character of Christian or the church. This position must be heartily condemned because it demands that we give up our pilgrim status and denies Christ is coming again to redeem the world.

We must recognize the indisputable fact that we are pilgrims and strangers. The apostle Peter states this very clearly in I Peter 2:14. "Dearly beloved I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from the fleshly lust, which war against the soul." This world is not our home. We are just passing through. We are citizens of the eternal kingdom and as such we do not feel at home. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:" This world as we know it and all that it contains will pass away and be cleansed by fire. This idea must always be before the mind of the Christian pilgrim as he lives in this world. He must realize this world with all its problems and frustrations will not improve with age, but will wax worse and worse until the cup of iniquity is full. Can you imagine the frustration one would experience if after trying to improve this world he sees things as they are today? If you find this hard to believe, examine what politicians are trying to do today to make peace, get rid of poverty, and improve race relations.

I imagine you are wondering how a Christian pilgrim can participate in politics. Government is an institution of God and was ordained to serve His purpose on earth. This is especially brought out in Romans 13:1-7, and also in the Belgic Confession Article 36. "We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, hath appointed kings, princes and magistrates, willing that the world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency." We are under a government that allows its citizens the right to participate in its politics. We are obligated therefore to see that the purpose of our Lord is fulfilled by our participation. We as children of God should be the most exemplary citizens and purposeful politicians because we live the life of Christ on the earth.

We also participate in this world's politics because we have a calling to do so by our king Jesus Christ. To understand our calling we must see ourselves first of all as citizens of the heavenly kingdom because we have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light. This calling by Christ relates our present earthly existence to our heavenly eternal existence so that the latter permeates the former. The new life of Christ now directs and controls our earthly existence. All we do in every sphere of life is characterized by the new life of Christ. We are now the office bearers of Christ on the earth. He has made us partakers of His kingship. This fact is substantiated by question and answer 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism. What this means is that we press all things into the service of Christ. It is this that obligates the child of God to participate in politics. We must be careful to add that we participate as a pilgrim who seeks God's glory. Do not forget this is our distinguishing characteristic as I Cor. 10:31 teaches, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

We also must be aware that when we participate we are His witnesses. We have been given that new life of Christ so we can shine out as lights in the midst of darkness. We reflect the

light of Christ that has been shed abroad in us through the work of the Spirit. This idea is brought out for us in Matthew 5:14-16. While we are here on earth we must strive with all that is in us in whatever we do to walk as renewed children of God. Because of this antithetical walk the Christian in politics will be aware that he is much different with regard to his solutions to the world's problems. It should not surprise the Christian politician that his influence is small, but this should not deter him. The darkness hates the light. "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." The world did the same to Christ and the servant is no greater than his master.

How do these facts make themselves felt in actual participation of the Christian pilgrim in the area of politics? The child of God realizes his involvement in politics is for the sake of Christ and His kingdom. This means he does not seek to redeem this world. The world is sinful and will continue in its sin until it is cleansed with fire in the last day. We know from Scripture that the forces of evil will increase until they will almost swallow up the church. Therefore, the Christian pilgrim realizes that he is only a very small force in the world and yet he must serve his king as a living witness. A difficult task for the Christian politician? Yes, indeed, but a very important one.

Neither can the Christian pilgrim participate in politics on the same basis as the worldly politician. This would be yoking oneself to the method, principles and organizations of the wicked. Scripture expressly forbids this in II Corinthians 6:14-17. The child of God is called to separate himself so he will not be identified with all that the ungodly stand for. The antithesis must exist even in the area of politics. The Christian politician must always have this before his mind or else he risks bearing the yoke of the ungodly.

We must be very careful not to bear the yoke of the ungodly in their purposes. The purpose of the worldly politician is to redeem the world for their own ends. All they do politically is geared for the world's redemption and is of the earth earthy. The purpose of the world is therefore enmity against God. To fulfill their purpose, the world in its politics works at getting rid of the symptoms of the illness in the world. They think by correcting such problems (which will never happen) as war, crime, civil rights, poverty, and ecology they will make this world a better place to live. What they have failed to do is get at the root cause which is sin. It is in this point that the Christian politician separates from the causes of the world. Do not get me wrong, it is not that he does not want to have all these things the world mentions, but he sees the root cause of sin and all these things are the result of sin. He knows the only real relief from them will be the purging of the world of all sin in judgment at the last day. I would like to add a warning in connection with the causes of the world. At times it might be tempting to take up their banner particularly when they sound appealing to our cause. I have in mind the anti-abortion banner known as the Right to Life. Many Christians have taken up the cause but have lost their particular pilgrim identity by refusing to call abortion what it really is. Abortion is murder and must be condemned on the basis of Scripture. It is this type of identity that the Christian who participates in politics must be wary of.

There are two levels at which the Christian pilgrim can participate in the area of politics. One is at the individual level and the other is at the group level. At the individual level the Christian can operate to influence the politics of our nation through such means as letter writing to officials, voting, articles in newspapers, talking with the neighbor, appearing at meetings to encourage or discourage. These while they do serve a purpose in our political system do not work as effectively as work done on the group level. Although at present for lack of a good distinctive organization, I would encourage their use.

The political organizations the Christian belongs to must display this distinctiveness.

Presently there are two major parties in our country. Each has been formed to win elections and form government policy. Each party bears the common banner of the world to make this world a better place in which to live. It is impossible for the Christian pilgrim to fly the banner of either party and maintain his pilgrim status and identity. By joining with the world in this unholy alliance the Christian has broken down the antithetical wall that separates him from the world. By joining their parties he accepts their wisdom, principles and methods. I would go so far as to say he could not maintain the principles of the child of God and use the argument of Scripture (which is foolishness to the world) and stay in either party. They would not want a pilgrim who talked the language of Scripture. One just does not win elections and influence people that way. I often wonder if this is why Scripture makes the statement in I Corinthians 1:26-27. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;" The pilgrim realizes that in this world he will be of little consequence as far as his great influence is concerned. Does this mean he stops his witness? I should say not. He must join himself to an organization that will bear the standard of Christ and His Word. Do not confuse this organization with the church. The church has no business in politics. Its sole purpose for existence is to preach the Word. No, the organization I am talking about must subject the politics of this world to the rule of Christ and His Word. This means this political organization will use the principle of Christ and the arguments of Scripture as a guide to the problems of the world. This will involve a number of realizations for this to be an effective organization of the pilgrim. It must be realized that God chose to use the weak and base things of this world to bring to nought the power of the world. I Corinthians 1:26-28. This party must and will be of very little consequence in the world. It will not play power politics. The only weapon this party may use is the Word of God in its witness. If the use of Scripture will not convince then the only alternative is to submit. Why you ask must this be so? The answer lies with those who make it up. In the first place, they are pilgrims and strangers which means they are despised. In the second place, they are the light of the world according to Matthew 5:14-16 and will bear the wrath of the world because darkness hates the light.

The organization must also realize that this present evil world is under control of the forces of evil. They are stranger's here for a reason. The politics of this world is of this world and is used by it to attempt to wrench the kingdom of Christ away from Him. The Christian pilgrim must not let this deter him in his witness, but it must be an incentive because he has behind him the power that will overcome the world.

By this time you are asking, Is there such an organization? No, I don't believe so, but I would add that we cannot possibly fulfill our obligation as prophets, priests, and kings on this earth and maintain our identity as pilgrims until we can join one. All we are doing at most at present is supporting one party or another, and then the only choice we have is between tweedle-deedee and tweedledeedum. Hardly are we voting out of any principle. I for one feel the tremendous need for an organization that would give the child of God a choice based on principle. I feel this need more and more as I observe the political scene. The time is soon coming when even the lesser of two evils will be too bad to vote for.

I find it very hard based on the present political situation for the Christian pilgrim to engage in politics on a group basis. This I would say is particularly true of running for office. The only alternative at present would be to participate on an individual basis.

Originally Published in:  
Vol. 33a No. 4 August September 1973