

FAITHFUL POLITICS

TEN
APPROACHES
TO CHRISTIAN
CITIZENSHIP AND
WHY IT MATTERS

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CRUZ

Classroom Discussion Questions

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Classroom Discussion Questions

Introduction: Christian Citizenship in the Kingdom and the Country

1. How have you approached the connection (or disconnection) between faith and politics in your life up to this point? In what ways have your theology and ethics influenced your political positions?
2. A common adage for navigating polite society is, “Never talk about religion or politics.” How has this helped or harmed our ability to discuss and discern these topics? Can you think of an example where you have seen discernment of faith and politics done well?
3. Political leaders occasionally make the case that Christians should rightly – and only – vote for their party. What arguments have you heard politicians make to this end? What assumptions do political parties and politicians make about Christian voters?
4. *“We need a robust framework for bringing our faith convictions to bear on our political participation. Such a framework will enable us to be more faithful to Christ in our political lives and to respect fellow Christians who arrive at different political conclusions,”* (page xiii). Have you considered how Christians in different historical or theological traditions from your own approach faith and politics? What have you thought of Christians who have polar opposite political convictions from your own? In what ways have political differences created rifts instead of unity among Christians?
5. Do you see your political actions and positions as part of the way you contribute to God’s mission in the world? Reflect on how your political behavior is a part of your Christian witness.
6. Because faithfulness requires Christians to be well informed, how have you worked to discern true and helpful information from misinformation or disinformation? Do you have any tips or suggestions for the group that you have found useful in becoming, and staying, well informed?
7. How have you viewed compromise in politics – is it good, bad, or a necessary evil? How can Christians be uncompromising in their allegiance to Christ, yet compromise in policy making?

Chapter 1 – Citizens of the Kingdom

1. Have you considered the paradigm of dual citizenship for understanding and articulating your Christian and American identities? In what ways does dual citizenship provide a helpful framework for connecting your faith and politics in a positive way?

2. The earliest Christians wrestled with how to live in a pagan society, often as the object of ridicule and persecution. How do you think this experience influenced early ideas of Christian citizenship? Do any of these ideas still dominate Christians' approach to society and politics?
3. Augustine of Hippo's distinctions between the City of God and the earthly city have been foundational for Western Christianity since the fifth century. What are the differences he articulates?
4. Augustine cautions against the extremes of attempting to build a utopian society or becoming cynical, and seeing all earthly affairs as meaningless. How might a renewed understanding of the City of God prevent us from embracing these extremes today?
5. The Kingdom of God is universal, whereas earthly countries must have boundaries (see page 7). What does this mean? Where have you seen the universal nature of God's Kingdom in contrast with the bounded nature of an earthly country?
6. What are the different bases for economies in the Kingdom of God and in the United States? In what ways have you seen these mixed up, confused, or conflated?
7. What are the four opposing values of the Kingdom of God and the United States of America? Which of these do you consider to be the most disparate in its application in the Kingdom of God versus the United States?
8. When considering your dual citizenship in God's Kingdom and the country in which you live, what shifts can you make to better regard the former as primary and the latter as secondary?

Chapter 2 – Biblical Dual Citizenship

1. What role has the Bible played in informing your political positions? Why have you used (or not used) the Bible in this way?
2. What models of civil government are represented in the Bible? In what ways can these models of political engagement speak to our present situation and context?
3. Christians from all political persuasions have used (and misused) the Bible in their political rhetoric and positions. Why is it important to exercise caution in applying the Bible to our present political situation and context?
4. “[Samuel Langdon and John] Winthrop, along with others, read the United States as God's second chance for a chosen people to hold up their end of the covenant by succeeding in faithfulness where the Israelites had failed,” (page 25). Have you encountered the idea that America is a divinely blessed and ordained nation? If so, what language, concepts, or notions have you seen used to tie the United States to ancient Israel?

5. What are some dangers of the belief that America is a replacement for ancient Israel? How can Christians contribute to more theologically sound discourse about this?
6. American individualism is deeply rooted in our nation's body politic, but God calls Christians to seek the common good. In what ways can individualism and the common good be in harmony, or in conflict, with one another?
7. Both Romans 13 and Revelation 13 provide a basis for Christian engagement with earthly governments. One calls for submission; the other calls for resistance. How is a Christian to know when one is called for over the other? What safeguards can we put in place to ensure we are not simply imposing our political views of government onto the Bible?

Chapter 3 – Salty Citizenship

1. *"The body of Christ is not a political party, and Scripture is not a policy agenda,"* (pages 39-40). In what ways have you witnessed American Christians conflate these things? As individuals, or as a group, create a correlative to this quote: "Instead, the body of Christ is _____, and Scripture is _____."
2. Have you considered participation in party politics to be appropriate for a Christian? Why or why not? What are the benefits and risks of partisan affiliation for Christians?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a two-party political system? In what ways does this system benefit or complicate Christians' choices in elections?
4. What is "bland partisanship"? Have you experienced the temptation to become bland in your politics? Name an instance in which you have experienced or witnessed bland partisanship.
5. How does bland partisanship harm the church and the Christian witness? In what ways have you witnessed, or participated in, the "othering" of people with different political views from your own? How can Christians avoid an "us vs. them" mentality going forward?
6. What is "salty party participation"? How does one remain salty, while still participating in a party's political activities? Why might it be difficult to critique those who share your political beliefs, while still participating in a political party together?
7. What steps can you take to become more aware of, and reflective about, your political party's positions, actions, and candidates?
8. Teaching a Christian ethic (however it is understood in a given theological tradition) will inevitably step into the realm of politics. How can a church, as an institution, as well as church leaders, be political without being partisan?

Chapter 4 – Keeping the Kingdom out of the Country: Three Separatist Approaches

1. Do you believe the church's mission includes propping up the political order? Does the intertwining of church and state, in any way whatsoever, create a danger of conflating the two? Why or why not?
2. What encounters or experiences have you had with Christians who hold a separatist position?
3. In what ways did the Anabaptists' history shape their conviction of total separation from the state and society? How has this conviction continued to shape the Christian communities within the Anabaptist traditions today?
4. The first separatist position discussed in chapter 4 is radical isolation. What groups fall into this category? What do you find compelling or challenging about this approach?
5. The second separatist approach explored is prophetic witness. How does this position differ from radical isolation? What are the strengths and potential weaknesses of these two Anabaptist approaches?
6. The commitment to nonviolence plays a key role in both Anabaptist approaches to separatism. Why does this belief, above all others, demand complete separation between the church and state? What are the benefits and risks of such a commitment to nonviolence?
7. The third separatist approach, strategic withdrawal, comes from the evangelical tradition. What is this approach, and how is it different from those in the Anabaptist traditions? What theological and historical influences shaped this approach?
8. *“Evangelicals and like-minded Christians who strategically withdraw are also likely to strategically engage when the political circumstances appear favorable to their success,”* (page 81). In what ways does this statement illuminate differences between the separatism of the Anabaptist traditions and that of the evangelical tradition?
9. Can a Christian be faithfully separatist? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Chapter 5 – Keeping the Country out of the Kingdom: Two Separationist Approaches

1. What are the differences between a separatist view and a separationist view? What are the benefits and risks of these approaches, compared to other approaches that are more heavily involved in politics?
2. What is the historical basis for a separation of church and state? In what ways has this approach shaped American history, society, and politics? Do you believe this approach has been beneficial to society and/or the church? Why or why not?

3. For historic Baptists, what is the historical and theological reasoning for maintaining a separation between the church and the civil government?
4. The second form of separationism outlined in chapter 5 comes from the Lutheran tradition. What is Two Kingdoms (or Two Spheres) separation? How does it compare and contrast with the historic Baptist separationist position?
5. What unique advantages or disadvantages does the Two Kingdoms approach present? In what ways might American society be different, if this approach had stronger influence in American history?
6. What insights can the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany offer us regarding a separation between the church and the state?
7. Can a Christian be faithfully separationist? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Chapter 6 – Bringing the Kingdom into the Country: Social Gospel Approaches

1. *“Most Christians believe that our faith should influence society in some way; some believe that way should be directly through politics,”* (page 103). Do you believe Christians should directly influence society through political action? Why or why not? In what other ways can Christians influence society, outside of politics?
2. Have you ever been part of a church or faith community that was influenced by the social gospel movement? What were their chief concerns regarding social justice in society? In what ways did you work to further that mission?
3. What elements of history and theology most heavily influenced the social gospel movement?
4. What are some churches or groups today that have been shaped and influenced by the social gospel?
5. Why do you think politically liberal Christians tend to be attracted to the social gospel? Do you believe that one must be politically liberal in order to claim the theological tradition of the social gospel?
6. What are some of the strengths and advantages of the social gospel?
7. What are some of the criticisms of the social gospel and its movements? Do you agree or disagree with these critiques? Are there other critiques of the social gospel not mentioned in the book?

8. Can a faithful Christian adopt the social gospel approach? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Chapter 7 – Keeping the Country Under the Kingdom: Two Calvinist Approaches

1. Briefly describe John Calvin's political theology. How does it differ from Luther's Two Kingdoms approach? How did Calvin implement his political theology during his lifetime?
2. What is the direct Christian influence approach? Why do you think so many conservative Christians have found it compelling?
3. What role has direct Christian influence played in American history? In what ways have you seen direct Christian influence expressed today?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the direct Christian influence model?
5. What is the principled pluralism model? In what ways does it differ from direct Christian influence?
6. What do you think conservative Christians and liberal Christians each find attractive about principled pluralism?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the principled pluralism model?
8. Can a faithful Christian hold to a Calvinist political approach, whether direct Christian influence or principled pluralism? If so, how? In what instances, if any, might such an approach become an unfaithful way of living for the Christian?

Chapter 8 – Invading the Country to Establish the Kingdom: Dominionist Approaches

1. Before reading this book, had you heard of dominionism, the Seven Mountains Mandate, Christian reconstructionism, or the New Apostolic Reformation? If so, what was your understanding and impression of these movements?
2. In what ways does Christian reconstructionism build on Calvin's political theology? How is it different from the models of direct Christian influence and principled pluralism discussed in the previous chapter?
3. Rushdoony said, "*Christianity is completely and radically anti-democratic... [and is] committed to a spiritual aristocracy,*" (page 158). What does Rushdoony mean by this? Why do you believe some people find dominionism compelling?
4. For Rushdoony, what was the goal of human morality, and how was this goal to be accomplished?

5. What role does postmillennialism play in reconstructionist theology?
6. According to the Seven Mountains Mandate, what are the seven areas of society that need to be brought into conformity with a Christian worldview? In what ways have you seen the Seven Mountains Mandate put into practice?
7. What role does spiritual warfare play in the worldview and eschatology of the New Apostolic Reformation?
8. What reasons does the author give for rejecting dominionism as a valid, orthodox form of Christian theology and political engagement? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

Chapter 9 – Eroding the Distinction Between Kingdom and Country: Christian Nationalism

1. What is nationalism?
2. What is Christian nationalism? Have you heard of Christian nationalism before reading this book? If so, where?
3. *“Instead of being a Christian approach to politics, [Christian nationalism] is a political approach to Christianity,”* (page 176). What does the author mean by this statement?
4. How do Christian nationalism and patriotism differ from one another?
5. What role has Christian nationalist thought played in American history? Where does Christian nationalism appear today?
6. In what ways is white (European) supremacy foundational to Christian nationalism?
7. What lessons can be learned from nationalist movements in the past and present that might help guard against such movements in the future?
8. What reasons does the author give for rejecting Christian nationalism as a valid, orthodox form of Christian theology and political engagement? Do you agree or disagree, and why?

Conclusion: Kingdom Citizenship

1. *“While Christian faithfulness can lead to a range of political approaches, underlying any approach should be a discernable Christianness,”* (page 193). What does “discernable Christianness” mean?
2. According to the author, faithful Christian political engagement (i.e., Kingdom citizenship) consists of what five elements? Do you agree with this list? Why or why not?

3. What are Kingdom citizens, and what three characteristics should describe them? How can these characteristics lead us to more reflective engagement in politics? How might these characteristics affect the way non-Christians view Christians' participation in political discourse?
4. According to the author, in what two ways should Christians act within the political realm? How can these actions impact your personal Christian witness in your neighborhood and community?
5. In what ways can you personally contribute to a more loving, healthy, and constructive political discourse?
6. In what specific ways can you seek shalom in your neighborhood, city, state, and nation?
7. What role(s) do you believe a church, as an institution, should play in local, regional, and national politics? How might a church's mission and witness be affected by such a role?
8. What role(s) should Christian leaders play in political engagement and discernment within the church or other Christian institutions? What are the risks and benefits of Christian leaders guiding political engagement in their official capacity?