

## **Political Engagement in a Post-Christian Secular Context**

Many European countries have a strong Christian heritage but are now thoroughly secular. Evangelicals in particular often find themselves in a tiny minority. This reality requires that we approach our political engagement and campaigning in a different way and with different expectations. We are not living in the same situation as great Christian reformers such as William Wilberforce. We will examine Biblical models for political engagement in an exilic context and see that we need to speak boldly for Jesus and advocate freedoms for all rather than demand privileges for Christians. In particular, we need to advocate for true religious freedom and freedom of speech.

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### **1. The History of Christian Political Engagement**

- a. Roman Catholic social theory
- b. Reformation & Puritan Society
- c. Clapham Sect
- d. William Wilberforce and slavery
- e. Martin Luther King and civil rights
- f. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Nazi Germany
- g. Liberation Theology
- h. "Moral majority"

### **2. The Challenge of a Post-Christian Secular Context**

- a. Christians a small minority in society
- b. Evangelicals a marginalized minority
- c. Church power and influence declined
- d. Secular/Progressive Liberal consensus
- e. Moralistic Conservative Nationalism

- f. Human Rights as universal moral standards

### **3. The Fundamental Values of Post-Christian Secular Society**

- a. Individual autonomy – especially in sexuality
- b. Freedom of Choice
- c. Right of consenting adults to act to their own detriment
- d. Equality & non-discrimination
- e. Community cohesion

### **4. The Christian Call to Political Engagement**

- a. OT Prophets
- b. John the Baptist
- c. Jesus
- d. Paul

### **5. What is the Goal of Christian Political Engagement?**

- a. How do we advance the Kingdom of God?
  - i. Enforcing God’s moral law
  - ii. Serving the “common good”
  - iii. Ensuring civil peace and gospel freedom (1 Timothy 1v2v1-6)
  - iv. Relationship between Church and State (Romans 13v1-7; 1 Peter 2v13-17)

### **6. Understanding and Accepting Our Exilic Context**

- a. 1 Peter 1v1
- b. Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
- c. Revelation

### **7. Christian Political Engagement in Our Exilic Context**

- a. Don’t compromise the gospel for political advantage
- b. Make evangelism a priority

*“But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity. It is in morals as in physics; unless a source of practical principles be elevated, it will be vain to attempt to make them flow on a high level in their future course...By all, therefore, who are studious of their country’s welfare...every effort should be used to revive the Christianity of our better days.”* (William Wilberforce)

- c. Expose sin and call for repentance
- d. Claim and defend your civic rights (Acts 18v12-17; 22v22-29; 25v1-12)
- e. Maintain the separation between church and state
- f. Don’t advocate for the imposition of Christian morality on unbelievers (1 Cor 5v9-13)
- g. Defend the weak and vulnerable against abuse and oppression
- h. Stand up for the rights of all, not just the privileges of Christians
- i. Reject violence as a political tactic
- j. Respect and honor the authorities established by God (1 Peter 2v13-17)
- k. Make the most of your democratic rights
- l. Practice civil disobedience when there is a conflict between obedience to God and to the state (Acts 4v19-20; Exodus 1v15-21; Daniel 3)
- m. Always act with Christian character (love, gentleness, truth, humility)
- n. Expect to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ
- o. Develop an apologetic of the positive blessings of Christianity to society
- p. Remember that God is sovereign, and his kingdom will triumph

## **8. What Do We Need to Fight For?**

- a. Freedom of speech
- b. Freedom of religion
- c. Freedom of proselytization
- d. Protection of the unborn, disabled, poor, elderly, sick
- e. Respect for the rights of women and minorities in society

***Suggested Readings:***

Russel Moore, *Onwards: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*

John Piper, *Think it Not Strange: Navigating Trials in the New America*

Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*

D A Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*

D A Carson, *The Gagging of God*

Alvin J Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*

John Stevens, *Knowing the Times*