



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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The God Vote I:

In the World but not of the World: What it Means to Separate Church and State

- ⁶ “With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:6-8

The God Vote. What in the world do I mean by that?

The candidates want your vote. The media, the politicians and, let's be honest, many in the church, have created something called the Christian Vote. For the next three weeks, I want to examine the idea of the so-called Christian vote and how our faith should affect the political process and influence our votes as citizens.

1. This week I'll talk about our obligation to Live in the World, but not be of the world, and explore the notion of separating Church and State.
2. Next week, I'll talk about the ways our faith influences our vote.
3. The final week, I'll touch on what are often called the Hot Button issues or Wedge Issues for Christians; Abortion, homosexual marriage, evolution, religious freedom and others.

In reality, talking about the Christian Vote is sort of like talking about the Left Handed Welders vote. Anyone who has spent any time around the Church knows that not everyone in the Church thinks the same way. Say it softly folks, but sometimes we disagree on things. Amen? Nevertheless, I venture to say that, in the weeks ahead, you will hear many references to the Christian or Evangelical voting bloc.

So, as we move into this midterm election cycle, I thought it might be good to reflect as a church about where our faith fits into this process. Should our faith inform our vote? If so, how? That is the issue we tackle today. Is our faith even supposed to fit into the equation? What about the Separation of Church and State? What does it mean to say that we separate Church and State?

I.

Let's start with Scripture. In this case, John 17. Jesus is praying to God and he first says:

*11 And now **I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world**, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

Jesus is leaving this world. We proclaim as Christians that God broke into our reality; that God became flesh and walked in this world. Jesus died and ascended to God leaving the Church in this world. Jesus is asking protection for the disciples because he's going and the disciples are staying.

*14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them **because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.** 15 **I am not asking you to take them out of the world,** ... 18 *As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.**

Jesus makes it plain that our ministry is to this world. We are not, as so many Christians insist, focused on some heavenly reward. We are called to be in this world. As Christians, we live in this world but we are not of this world. That means we live in this world as Disciples of Christ. The standards of the world do not guide us. The standards of Christ guide us. At least that is the way it is supposed to work.

Of course there are many other scriptures that relate to this concept. Isaiah 58 defines true worship of God as living lives focused on justice and mercy, taking care of those in need. Matthew 25 calls us to be in ministry to the poor, the hungry, the stranger, the sick. Luke reminds us that our neighbor, like the Samaritan's neighbor, may be our worst enemy. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and reach out to those who hate us. Paul calls us to live as the Body of Christ; the very image of Christ in the world. **What this means is that it is impossible for a Christian to be separate and apart from the world. If you profess Christ as Lord and Savior you are committed to living as the Body of Christ in this world.**

II.

What then to do with the concept of separation of Church and State? If a Christian has to live in the world, then the Christian must confront the institutions of the world, including the political ones. How can we separate out our Christianity? The answer is we can't and shouldn't even try. Because Separation of Church and State doesn't have a thing to do with how we live as Christians.

One of the most misunderstood concepts in the US today is the concept of separation of Church and State. Quite often you will find it spoken of as requiring government and religion to stay separate. That is absolutely wrong. Separation of Church and State doesn't limit the Church in anyway. It does limit the government.

The **government** cannot take steps to either establish one religion over another or to interfere with the practice of religion. The Church can go right on being the Church. And, this is a good thing! If you are a Christian, the requirement that the State be kept out of religion is a good thing! We don't need the state to teach

religion. They aren't good at it! In history, whenever the state has become involved in establishing Christianity, or any religion, it has worked out poorly. Leave teaching of religion to the Church!

But, what about all the Church State issues that cause so much trouble? For instance:

Prayer in Public School Lead by employees of the School or Sanctioned by the Administration:

We can't have it without either requiring the establishment of a State religion or allowing prayers from any religion at the discretion of the teacher or school system. Any way that it works, you have a government authority figure, a teacher, school board, a principle, dictating what religion is honored. I dare say that most Christians who clamor for School Prayer do not want the prayer to be out of the Koran; or the Sacred Texts of the Hindus or the Buddhists. And, even if it is a Christian prayer, who is leading it and what do they believe? I disagree with the teachings of some Christian traditions. Do I want someone who believes that the bible requires the separation of the races to be leading a prayer? I don't think so.

Teaching Bible classes in school: Same problem as with prayer if the instruction is primarily religious. Why the bible? Why not the Koran or the Old Testament without the New Testament? And who will be doing the teaching?

Posting the Ten Commandments: Of all the issues to come down the pike in the last 100 years, this may be the silliest. Of course posting the Ten Commandments is an establishment of religion. It's a governmental endorsement of the Judeo/Christian tradition over others. We wouldn't be carving these words into the stone of courthouses and monuments unless we believed that they had been carved in stone by God. And, anyway, the problem has never been posting the Ten Commandments on the walls of schools and Court houses. The Ten Commandments don't help anyone unless they are posted on the walls of our hearts. Think about it. King David probably had the Ten Commandments posted in his palace, but that didn't stop him from breaking almost all of them when he saw another man's wife and wanted her.

Teaching Evolution: Stopping the teaching of evolution and geology because they contradict the poetry of the First Chapter of Genesis: Read the Bible. The second chapter of Genesis contradicts the first chapter. Which one is "right"? The argument in favor of stopping the teaching of evolution, or teaching the so-called science of creationism, displays a lack of faith. These people are trying to prove the existence of God. Or, trying to prevent science from disproving the existence of God. But, the cornerstone of our faith is belief in a God whose existence cannot be proven! If we can prove God's existence, we do not need faith.

The Bible is not a science text! It affirms that all there is was created by God. Science can help us understand the mechanisms of creation, but our faith affirms the existence of the Creator. Requiring the teaching of biblical creation is an establishment of religion. Government refusing to teach science that "contradicts" the poetry of Genesis is an establishment of religion.

(Insert your Favorite Church/State issue here _____).
Whatever it is, if it restricts or establishes religion, it's a problem.

Christians may well be the greatest threat to religious freedom in this Country today. We have a system that prohibits the government from interfering in religion and Christians keep demanding that the Government jump right into the middle of religious issues!

If you are comfortable in your faith, the separation of Church and State shouldn't be an issue for you. Teach your faith to your children. Let your Churches teach your faith. Keep the Government out of the religion business.

III.

Just as the Government is supposed to keep out of religion, **we are supposed to** bring that religion to our lives as citizens. We need not, and should not, attempt to separate our religious lives from our lives as citizens of this nation. You aren't two people, one religious and one secular. By faith we declare that we are one in Christ. Just as you bring all your political and other beliefs and feelings into Church on Sunday, you are to take your faith out into the world. Because we are to live as Christians in the world we are called to bring our faith to the table on every topic. That is what is meant by living in the world, but not being of the world.

From the Christian perspective, there is not a religious world and a secular world. There is just the world created by God. Some people assert that bringing your faith to political issues is an attempt to force the nation into a Christian mold; shoving our religion down other people's throats. But this isn't true. The salvation of the world is a matter for God. **Our** responsibility is to live as Disciples of Jesus Christ. To live in the world, as best we can, according to the Gospel. We are not only free to bring our faith to our political responsibilities, we are obligated to do so.

Conclusion

As you consider the exercise of your vote in the weeks ahead, I ask that you do this. Whether you consider yourself Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, libertarian, socialist or communist or anarchist, or something else entirely, remind yourself that you are first and foremost a Christian. Don't let the media or someone else tell you what Christians are supposed to believe. If you are old enough to vote you are old enough to read your bible and think for yourself. And, as Christians, you know that prayer is always part of our discernment process. Pray about your political decisions. Seek to discern where the Gospel is calling you and this nation. You are part of the Body of Christ. Dare to live in this world as part of the Body of Christ and bring your faith life into the political market place of ideas.

The Headlong Retreat into Childhood Partisanship

[By Tom Ehrich / Religion News Service](#)

Posted on July 30th, 2014

(The following is reprinted with permission from the [Ministry Matters](#) web site <http://www.ministrymatters.com/>)

When I was a child, I lived in a black-and-white world of all-this or all-that.

Humankind meant my family. The world meant my neighborhood. Religion meant my church. Politics meant my father's beliefs.

Oh, I was aware that more was out there, but it had little claim on my imagination or loyalties. My world was complete. There were no gray areas, no compromises, no maybes.

That was a child's view, reality writ small. In time, I advanced beyond it, until the world became large, complicated and gray, with places beyond imagining, people totally unlike anyone I knew, ideas beyond anything I heard at my parents' table.

It's called growing up. Discovering through knowledge and experience that the little I grew up knowing wasn't enough to know.

We are witnessing today a headlong retreat into the not-knowing and simplistic partisanship of childhood. Ideas that make people uncomfortable are banished. Science that calls faith into question is shouted down. Politics isn't just hardball, it's dumb-ball: I must win, at any cost, and you must lose. I am right, and you are wrong. My tribe is the only tribe that has value and rights.

This is the tragic core of the partisan thinking that is tearing apart our nation and our larger world. It takes the form of religious extremism: There is no God but my God! It takes the form of nihilism in politics: better to bring the entire state down than to compromise with the evil other.

It takes the form of intolerance: Take the Fox News commentator who demanded that 911 operators in Texas stop sending emergency services to anyone who can't speak English.

It takes the form of maniacal greediness: Any benefit you get is money out of my pocket.

In this child's landscape, everything is fragile. If refugee children are allowed in, the entire nation will be lost. If the Affordable Care Act is allowed to work, an entire ideology of government will collapse. In today's partisanship, there can be no give-and-take, no negotiation.

Partisan thinking is worse than legislative gridlock. It is the victory of ignorance. All people disagree, but ignorant people go farther: They demonize the other, declare the other unworthy of consideration.

Partisan thinking obsesses about winning and destroying, as if Jesus was simply wrong in saying "love your enemy" and "the last will be first."

Partisan thinking uses religion as an arsenal of weapons for attaining victory. No respect for other points of view, no humility, no learning from religion's sorry record of extremist excesses.

What is the way beyond partisan thinking?

First, other points of view need to insist on being heard. They need to risk ugliness in the public square. Nothing changes if those being demonized simply withdraw in splendid silence. Two sides shouting will create a lot of noise, but one side shouting leads to repression.

Second, rituals of compromise need to be maintained. The sensible center needs to stay in the room, offering a more hopeful path than extremist invective, even at the cost of being labeled "soft."

Extremist partisans are children out of control. They need "grownups" in the room to remind everyone that poison in the air kills all who breathe it.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Jeanne and I would like you to join us this February on a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We will leave on February 16 for nine days of Biblical discovery, returning on February 25th. We will be part of a larger

group of primarily United Methodists from all over Middle and West Tennessee. This is a special tour organized by Bishop William McAlilly, the Bishop for the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

I first visited the Holy Land in 2000. Jeanne and I went back in 2005 and again in 2012. Before I went the first time I was somewhat cynical about the upcoming experience. I didn't think that it would have much of an effect on me. But, when you stand on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, or travel to the Synagogue at Capernaum, you suddenly realize that you are likely walking ground that Christ walked. When you pray among the Olive trees in Gethsemane, stand in the prison cell contained in the House of Caiaphas, or see the name of Pilate inscribed on a monument in Caesarea, the events surrounding the imprisonment, trial and passion of Christ take on new meaning; a new reality.

Brochures for the trip, including exact costs and travel itineraries, are available in my office. I'll also schedule a time this summer to share photographs taken on my previous trips to Israel and answer questions about the trip. I hope you will prayerfully consider participating in this faith building experience.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

*³¹ If you mistreat the poor,
you insult your Creator;
if you are kind to them,
you show him respect. Pr 14:31 CEV*

A recurring refrain in the law of Israel is the admonition not to mistreat the poor. Under the law of Israel, God distributes blessings as God sees fit but those who receive those blessings are obligated to share them with those in need. At a time when politicians seem to be declaring poverty a 'life style choice' scripture calls us back to reality. Poverty can touch any of our lives for a thousand different reasons. While some people are authors of their misfortune, many are not. It is not a crime to be poor, but it is a sin against God to turn our backs on their misfortune.

¹⁴ My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that kind of faith save you? ¹⁵ If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, ¹⁶ you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? ¹⁷ Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead! James 2:14-17 CEV

James admonition applies to the poor: not the deserving poor. The concept of the 'deserving poor' does not exist in scripture. Those who are poor are encouraged to act in ways that will minimize or end their poverty, but such conduct is not a prerequisite to assistance. Our faith needs to be lived out in relation to others.

Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible study will take a break for the month of July and the first two weeks in August. We will continue with the study of 1 Samuel on August 21st at 10:30 AM.

I believe that the study of scriptures with other Christians is an essential part of our journey as Disciples. If you would like to be a part of a bible study at another time, during the day or evening, please contact me. If we can interest four or five people in gathering at a particular time I would be glad to lead another study.

Still Seeking People Interested in Disciple Bible Study

Disciple Bible Study is a 32 week study of the bible from Genesis to Revelation. It has guided many people to a deeper understanding of scripture and their faith over the years. Many in the Church have completed this study.

I have been approached by two people who would be interested in a Disciple Bible Study to meet from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursday evenings. If needed, we will seek to provide child care for this study. I would like to get at least five or more people to participate in this study. If you have considered undertaking a study of the bible before, this is a wonderful opportunity. If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact me.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

August 10th: Fear and Faith: There are laws of nature. Relationships discovered through years of study by humankind. Mathematical relations like the Pythagorean Theorem; Einstein's famous $E=mc^2$; the relationship between the radius and the circumference of a circle that is known as Pi. Religion has a few such relationships too. One is that fear of the unknown can destroy faith. My texts are John 14:25-27 and Matthew 14:22-33

August 17th: People of Faith: Are Christians the only people of faith? How are Christians to relate to people of other faith traditions? My texts are Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 and Matthew 15:21-28.

Worship Leaders Schedule

August 10

Elaine Rohrig, **Liturgist**

Donnie & Renita, **Greeters**

Marty Bauguess & Herb Haynes, **Ushers**

August 17

Tom Moore, **Liturgist**

Tommy & Jo Cotton, **Greeters**

Mike & Rene Fetting, **Ushers**

Announcements

The **Finance Committee** will meet **Saturday, August 9 at 9:00 AM**. All committee members are encouraged to attend.

The next opportunity to serve will be **Saturday, August 16 at 61st Street Methodist Church**. We will be providing dinner, serving and worshiping with the people there. We will need volunteers to help. We will be there from 4:00 PM until after worship. Please make **Charles Wilson** or **Judy Richardson** aware of your plan to participate in this wonderful ministry.

The "Companions in Christ" Sunday school class has begun a new study. The study is, "**Dare to Dream**" which will help us discern God's dream for us and how we live it out prayerfully and spiritually. We will be creating a "God-Sized" mission for ourselves. Please join us. You will be enriched spiritually and you will enjoy the fellowship and commitment of others.

There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board for volunteers to sign up to assist in the nursery or Sunday school. Please sign up for one or more Sunday's. Thank you for being a part of this vital ministry of our church.

There are sign-up lists on the Bulletin Board for volunteers who will prepare communion as well as hosting the First Sunday meal. Please sign up!

August Birthdays

Mike Rohrig, Sara Jordan, Charles Wilson, Dana Bauguess

Happy Birthday to each of you!