

Bishop's Message: E-Chronicle, August 2016 (On Politics)

Aloha o ke Akua:

"I really believe that the fundamental principle on which Christians stand as followers of Jesus Christ is what Jesus taught and embodied in his life: love God, and love your neighbor. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.' In Matthew's version Jesus says, 'On these two hang all the law and the prophets,' which is basically saying that everything in the religious faith — everything — has to do with love of God and love of neighbor. It may say it in a different way or form, or apply it differently, but that is the bottom line.

If we who are Christians participate in the political process and in the public discourse as we are called to do — the New Testament tells us that we are to participate in the life of the polis, in the life of our society — the principle on which Christians must vote is the principle, Does this look like love of neighbor? If it does, we do it; if it doesn't, we don't.

We evaluate candidates based on that. We evaluate public policy based on that. And that has nothing to do with whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, liberal or conservative. It has to do with if you say you're a follower of Jesus, then you enter the public sphere based on the principle of love which is seeking the good and the welfare of the 'other.' That's a game-changer."

*– Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, March 2016
(quoted in <https://sojo.net/articles/god-not-finished-world>)*

I begin with this quote from the Presiding Bishop in the days after the Conventions of the two major political parties in the United States have concluded. As Christians and as Episcopalians, we are called to be engaged citizens and to vote in civil elections. In our constitutional republic, the Church and clergy should not endorse candidates or a particular party, but I do think Christians have an obligation to speak on issues of public policy, the morality of laws and particular statements by individual politicians. Further, as citizens, faithful Christians must view

candidates and policies in relation to our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to take a look at the “Election Engagement” webpage (<http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/EpiscopaliansVote>) from The Episcopal Public Policy Network. “This page is dedicated to assisting you in navigating some of the important issues in this election season such as addressing poverty, protecting voting rights, and engaging in civil discourse.”

I have found the following books helpful in my reflection on faith as a Christian engaged in also being a citizen in a participatory democratic republic:

- *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity* by Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz (Brazos Press, 2016). Volf is the Henry B. Wright Professor of Systematic Theology at Yale Divinity School and founder and director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, and McAnnally-Linz is an associate research scholar at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. This is a careful reflection on major policy issues facing the United States with faith in a pluralistic society.
- *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* by Miroslav Volf (Brazos Press; Reprint edition, 2013). This is Volf’s reflection on how a Christian can faithfully engage with politics in a pluralistic culture.
- *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics* by John Danforth (Random House, 2015). Danforth served as a United States senator from Missouri and as the United States ambassador to the United Nations. He is an ordained Episcopal priest. In this book, he offers a thoughtful reflection on the relationship between religion and politics.
- *Faith in the Public Square* by Rowan Williams (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). This was the final published work by Bishop Williams before he stepped down as Archbishop of Canterbury. Though written for England, his theological reflection of politics

and social issues can provide a valuable guide for the thinking Christian.

In addition, I have found the following books helpful as I consider our world, and the meaning of both plurality and character as we consider the future.

- *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* by Jonathan Sacks (Schocken, 2015). Rabbi Sacks served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013. He explores the roots of violence and its relationship to Abrahamic faith traditions. "The use of religion for political ends is not righteousness but idolatry. . . To invoke God to justify violence against the innocent is not an act of sanctity but of sacrilege."
- *The Road to Character* by David Brooks (Random House, 2015). Brooks is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*. He challenges the reader to move from seeking "résumé virtues" (wealth, fame, and social) to building our "eulogy virtues" (kindness, courage, honesty, faithfulness).

In the United States, we will again go to the polls in less than one hundred days. As we do, I urge you to reflect on the relationship of your faith in Jesus Christ to your responsibility as a citizen. Please keep our nation in your prayers.

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Aloha ma o Iesu Kristo, ko mākou Haku,
+Bob

The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick
+ Keali'ikoaokeakua