

## Living Conscientiously in a Political World

“These days everything is politics...” – Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard wrote those words with a sense of frustration almost two centuries ago. How little things have changed. Our sense of moral and social concern has shifted from the local to the national, from the person in the community to the senator in the congress. If we are not careful we will quickly lose our sense of being a church and quickly become just another half-rate political punditry show or think-tank.

The immediate response is to withdraw. To proclaim a primordial divide between church and state. Let us worry about religion at church and people can worry about politics the rest of the week. This has been the protocol of Christians for quite some time. The obvious flaw is that this leaves 6 days for the political world to shape our cares, concerns, and desires—much less our affiliations and identities—and only one day (with some private moments dotted in between) for the Divine to have some say in the matter.

The great Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel (who can be seen in the famous picture of MLK Jr's march on Selma. He's one of the only white guys in MLK's vicinity) was for most of his life (in Poland around the 1940's) a profoundly religious person whose life was lived outside of the sphere of politics; at least until the Nazi's began their genocidal rampage. Heschel escaped. His mother and some of his siblings did not. In a speech in America he described himself as a “brand plucked out of the fire.” Many years earlier he had written a book on the Old Testament prophets—who themselves spend most of their time declaring God's wrath on a *nation* given to exploitation and other injustices against the poor. It was in revising this manuscript for publication in the States that he became convinced of the absolute necessity for conscientious religious persons to have some voice in the social world around them.

This does not yet mean becoming political pundits and think-tanks, but it does mean that we are not able to so easily separate our religious and socio-political lives. We are citizens both of heaven and of cities and countries on earth. Jesus's greatest commands were to Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength *and* to love your neighbor as yourself. That is, to blend the love of God with the love of neighbor, our sense of connection and establishment in God to our sense of responsibility in the world.

I say all that to say this: over the last couple of weeks it has become known that the current administration has used separating children from their families as a deterrent against further illegal immigration. I (Brandon) have chosen to speak on political matters sparsely, often to the frustration of some of my friends and members. I confess that I did not know exactly what to say or how to say it when I first was informed, but I knew in my heart that this was something that required some action.

It was when bible verses started getting thrown around in defense of this statement that I said “enough.” A magnificent tweet from a Muslim woman explained that they know what it feels like to have their scriptures abused in defense of atrocious acts. So I penned a little statement arguing that Romans 13 does not mean obey the government blindly (the guy who wrote it was executed by the state for breaking laws, for goodness sake), but that our consciences should be such that we are not even tempted to read it that way.

There were some interesting responses to the article (you can go read them, they’re on the Stamford Church of Christ Facebook page), one of which suggested that this statement is little more than socialist democratic propaganda. I thought that was a particularly curious accusation, given that in the article I cited no less than Franklin Graham—a Republican, fundamentalist preacher who mostly drives me crazy. A host of bipartisan rage has emerged against the inhumanity of this policy. Republicans and Democrats and everything in between have voiced their opposition.

Which is to say that this is not a democrat vs. republican thing. This is not a Trump vs. Hilary thing. This is not a matter of taking potshots or “going political.” It is a matter of conscience and humanity. At the end of the day what happens in the political world is not just measured by efficacy and pragmatism, but by justice and righteousness, and by the kind of society it creates. There should not be a single Christian voice that says it is okay to forcibly separate children from their parents, incarcerate them, and put them into “the system” at best, or lose them to child traffickers at worst.

We have to stand against this policy. It is not even a stand against the President or the republican party to stand against this. This is a human crisis that is being buttressed by a blasphemous appropriation of Scripture. And if there is anything the church has a right and obligation to speak into, it is matters of justice, righteousness, human lives, and our own holy texts.

So I encourage you all to protest this injustice. Call your representatives, give money to non-profits and other organizations that are helping, or do your research online to figure out the best way for you to be a part of the work of God—which if it is anything, it is caring for the vulnerable.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27)

“Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:23-24)