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Christians in Politics

By Baruch Maoz

Originally written for the Russian Language Magazine, *Grace and Truth*
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The Church of Christ ought not to be insulated from the circumstances within which it bears witness. The church is influenced by the very circumstances it is called to challenge. Christian language, thought patterns and assumptions are impacted by realities. To some extent, this is legitimate.

Christian women in India dress differently than, say in Russia. Churches in Korea have adopted western hymns. Latin Christians consume moderate amounts of wine without compunction, while Christians in other parts of the world consider abstinence a Christian standard. Each position is defended by arguments from scripture, forged on the anvil of day-to-day realities. We are far more influenced by the world than we recognize, and not always helpfully so.

Over the years, in different countries and at different times Christians have adopted widely differing views of the role they should play in the political arena. In the USA, conservative Christians tend to vote for one side of the political scene rather than the other. In the Netherlands there are three Christian political parties, distinguished more by nuance, emphasis and political methodology than by essential principle. In formerly Communist countries, the church shies away from political involvement due to the abuse of the political system adopted in former years.

What role should Christians play in the political arena? Does the church as such have a role in this context?

Christians in the Political Arena

The obvious biblical text from which we should commence our discussion is, surely, Rom. 13:1-7:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves for rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you, for he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

1. Political Authority is from God

Every authority that exists, in this case every political authority, has been established by God. This is not only true in general; it is true of particular authorities that might exist at any given time. It is worth remembering in this context that the reigning Caesar in Paul's day was the infamous, corrupt, cruel Nero.

2. Political authority requires Obedience

Obedience to established political authority is required of all who would serve God. So far as the authority acts within its God appointed domain, it must be obeyed.

3. Political Authority is an Instrument of God

Political authorities have a duty before God. That duty delineates the boundaries of their authority as well as its purpose: The boundaries of political authority have to do with what promotes the good of society and would therefore include the moral and political order: social justice, public security, overt moral issues. By definition, political authority has no authority in the realms of conviction, ideology and religion.

4. Political Power is Enforceable

Political authorities have authority from God to inflict punishment, even ultimate punishment: he does not bear the sword for nothing. As God's servant, he is an agent of wrath to bring punishment on wrongdoers. This does not necessarily mean that political authorities have a monopoly on the use of force, but it certainly means that they are the ultimate arbiter of any use of such.

5. Obedience should be Sincere

Obedience to political authorities should be a matter of conscience, not merely outward: They is God's servant... Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment. This is also why taxes should be paid. Political obedience should be characterized by moral motivation which issues out of our love for and obedience to God. As Christians, we should seek the best for our societies.

The Church in the Political Area

There is an important difference between Christian political involvement and that of the church. Christians act out of personal convictions, recognizing the valid existence of differences of opinion among them.

When churches act, they not only act in the name of a community of people who may agree among themselves, but they act with an authority individual Christians do not have – church's acts are accorded divine authority. No divine authority should be claimed for political programs.

This is not to say that the church has no role in society. Political agendas have implications that impinge upon the Gospel. The church must fulfill the prophetic role accorded to it. It must be the voice of God addressing society's conscience.

The church is a spiritual body with spiritual and moral authority. It must never employ political means.

The Grounds of Political Involvement

Scripture is full of references to the structure and function of society. Policies adopted by the rulers of Israel and Judea, the social and commercial behavior of the wealthy were at the forefront of much of the prophetic message. The New Testament does not deviate from the line adopted by the prophets: no area of human life is to be conducted without reference to God and to his commanded will. Man is always subject to God's law. All exist to glorify God and accomplish his will on earth.

James, the brother of our Lord, spoke clearly to the rich who withheld their employees' salaries, unjustly harvested their fields and caused their owners to turn to God for justice:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty (James 5:1-4).

To those who were wronged he said:

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming". See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door (James 5:7-10).

Man must engage in industry, commerce, taxation, employment and social conduct in the fear of God, recognizing that he will give account to God. James was simply reiterating the message of the prophets: Woe to those who make unjust laws, issue oppressive decrees, deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed and weak (Isa. 10:1-2). Such a view of society should characterize us as Christians. We are messengers of God for the good of society, and should be engaging that society in the name of God.

What the church may not do as a church, individual Christians can and should do. We should be intelligently, actively and prayerfully involved in the political process. We should both vote and present ourselves as candidates. God used many political figures in the course of history. Many of these served in contexts that were decidedly ungodly, and were an influence for good.

Of course, there is more than one moral option to many situations. There is, therefore, room for differences of political and moral opinion among Christians. Our policies are "Christian" only to the extent that we formulate them in obedience with the word of God, as are those of some who disagree with us. We must keep an open mind, seeking the best of all options and examining our motives to ensure that our hearts are enlisted in the service of God, not in self-seeking.

Personal and Ministry News

After repeated delays, Baruch's **Joel and Amos** has been sent to the printer. It has been decided **to produce the Psalms, Proverbs and Job as a separate volume of the Modern Hebrew Bible**. Production is expected toward the middle of next year. Baruch is presently editing Psalms and Proverbs.

He is also working on a short series on **Romans**, recently requested of him, while writing a commentary on **Micah** and editing his **Judges and God and His World**. His **book on church**

structure and function is being edited by Inna Vasquez, who has been hired to assist in research, editing and proof reading.

On alternate Wednesdays, Baruch is teaching one of the churches in central Israel a series on **Romans**, to be followed by one on **Galatians**. These will later be produced as books. He was asked to present a paper on **Jewish Christian Israeli Identity** for a closed theological forum to be held soon and has begun preaching on a monthly basis in his own (new) church. He will commence a series on the book of **Hosea**. Later in April he has been asked to preach for an Arab congregation in Galilee and was privileged to preach for a local Hebrew-speaking congregation in Haifa. Opportunities for ministry and slowly presenting themselves, for which we are grateful.



Our 9 year old granddaughter, **Noam**, has **Juvenile Diabetes**. Her parents are now freshly challenged. Please pray for her and for them. Little **Maya** is jealous of all the attention her older sister is receiving...

Our second daughter, **Shlomit**, is awaiting her USA immigration papers that will enable her to work, while **Keith** is seeking further employment at the same time as he is employed on a part time basis with a local congregation in Cleveland OH.

Tamar, our youngest, has given birth to a boy (Yotam). Yotam weighed 3.5 kg. Mother and child are well. They returned home a day after Yotam was born.

Bracha is spending April and may in the States, assisting Tamar and Marcus, following which she plans to visit the other two girls and their families



Visit our **Breaking News** page, updated almost daily at www.TheMaozWeb.com

Our next issue is to continue Baruch's biography, unless events in the Middle East force us to give more space to other matters.

Help us to spread the message. **Recommend MaozNews** to friends.

Warm thanks are due to you all for your prayers, encouragements and support.

God willing, Baruch and Bracha will visit the USA in 2010, during which time Baruch will be available for ministry. Interested parties are invited to write as soon as possible at bmaoz@GMX.com

TAX-deductable **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of Berean Baptist Church and posted to **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**, earmarked "**for the Maoz Ministry (Soli Deo Gloria)**", or "**for Maoz Support**". Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**.. Please inform Max Sharp at Berean Baptist Church by email of the details of the transaction (date, transfer number, sum and designated purpose). All contributions are tax deductible. Receipts are sent at the end of the calendar year or at the donor's request. Please do not send contributions directly to us.

Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose. As necessity arises, we reserve the right to use for the ministry funds sent for personal use.