

## CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS

J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000),

Politics means the interactions of citizens in the polis, the Greek city-state. When Aristotle speaks of the human beings as by nature a “political animal,” he means that our essential humanity is marked by our rational interactions with others in the community. Politics is the polis, or civil community, ordering its life together on the basis of the public good. And to be human is to be a participant in that kind of community. J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 12-13.

The very essence of the state lies in the agreement of all members of society to surrender their individual right of self-protection into the corporate power of the whole community so that the latter will be powerful enough to defend the rights of all. Each person retains important rights (to Locke these are summarized as the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of property) but, through the state as social contract, we all act together to ensure those rights for each and all. J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 17.

The Contract theory is not totalitarian. There are clear limits upon what the state may or may not do in accordance with the social contract. But when the state acts properly in accordance with the terms of that contract, it truly is all of us acting together. J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 18.

Every human interest or value having any influence over the will of any person is potentially a form of political power. Anything that can affect human attitudes and decisions may potentially be politicized. J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 25

In our own time we are learning anew the almost awesome power of religion to affect the political will of vast numbers of people of all sorts of religious persuasions. Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Christians – be they fundamentalist or liberal or whatever else – may be touched politically through their religious values. That is an explosive political reality in our time in many countries. The rise of the so-called religious rights in America, the Shiite Muslims in Iran, Buddhists in Burma, and conservative rabbis in Israel all illustrate the influence – potential and actual – of intense religious fervor in public life. J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 25.

Christians have had to deal with politics from the very beginning. One could not characterize the New Testament as a political document, and yet its deep relevance to political thought has affected all subsequent generations. At certain points, such as the thirteenth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, political thoughts are voiced explicitly (“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God” and “the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant

of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.”) J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 35.

Often Christian political thinking has been characterized by the kind of paradox – or ambivalence – that the passage from the *Epistle to Diognetus* illustrates. Christians are *in* the world, but they are not altogether *of* the world. Their citizenship transcends the earthly political order even though their responsibility before God is to participate in that order J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 36).

Christian perspectives on how to balance the scales have varied greatly through the centuries. They have ranged from near-absolute withdrawal from the fallen, sinful world to uncritical endorsement of the civil communities in which Christians have found themselves J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 36/

The ambivalence of early Christian views of the state is understandable. Often persecuted during the first centuries, Christians could not but regard much political authority as evil. (Rev. 13 refers to it as “the beast.”) J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 36.

The greatest of the early theologians was Augustine (A.D. 354-430). His most important political writing, *The City of God*, was prompted by the Gothic invasion of Rome in 410 and the charge that Rome had become vulnerable because it had become Christian. Augustine asserted that the seeds of Rome’s weakness had always been present in its self-centeredness. The city of earth exemplified by Rome, is made up of those who love themselves first – even to the point of being contemptuous of God. The City of God, on the other hand, is made up of those who love God – even to the point of being contemptuous of themselves. The two cities are forever intertwined, but also forever at odds. The state can hold within it people who are really citizens of the city of God, but the reverse is also true. The church, as the best exemplification on earth of the city of God, also has elements within it of the city of earth. Implicitly, the task of the state is to hold the disintegrative tendencies of the city of earth in check to the gracious work of God among humankind can proceed. .”) J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 38.

Martin Luther J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 43

John Calvin J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 43

John Wesley J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 45

Quakers J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 45.

Roman Catholic J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 46.

Rauschenbusch J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 46

Contemporary Christian thinking:

Protestant fundamentalism, holds that the church should have nothing to do with politics since the church's only proper business is the saving of individual souls.

J. Philip Wogaman, *CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICS* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 52.

**The Politics of Jesus P. 65**