

Discussion of Christianity and politics from perspective of scriptures and Social Principles.

Christianity and Politics

Definition of Politics: “1. The art or science of government. 2. The activities or affairs of a government, politician, or political party. . . . 4. The methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government. . . . 6. A person’s general position or attitude on political subjects.” (The American Heritage Dictionary, 1985)

What do the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church have to say?

Political Responsibility (2016 Book of Discipline, ¶164(B))

The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens. We believe that the state should not attempt to control the church, nor should the church seek to dominate the state. Separation of church and state means no organic union of the two, but it does permit interaction. The church should continually exert a strong ethical influence upon the state, supporting policies and programs deemed to be just and opposing policies and programs that are unjust.

The Social Principles speak to issues of public policy on almost every page. For example:

We also believe responsibility for education of the young rests with the family, faith communities, and the government. In society, this function can best be fulfilled through public policies that ensure access for all persons to free public elementary and secondary schools . . . (¶164(E))

We further support measures designed to remove the social conditions that lead to crime. (¶164(H))

We in the Church have an opportunity and responsibility to help shape the future of urban-suburban life. Massive programs of renewal and social planning are needed . . .

Health care is a basic human right. Psalm 146 speaks of the God “who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry”. . . . We also recognize the role of governments in ensuring that each individual has access to those elements necessary to good health. (¶164(V))

We further support efforts to revise tax structures and to eliminate governmental support programs that now benefit the wealthy at the expense of other persons. (¶163)

To begin to alleviate poverty, we support such policies as: adequate income maintenance, quality education, decent housing, job training, meaningful employment

opportunities, adequate medical and hospital care, and humanization and radical revisions of welfare programs. (§163(E))

Some examples from the Bible showing a faith community's responsibilities and actions concerning government and public issues.

- Deut. 6:4-5. This is the prime directive for Israel, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.” The command is to a corporate body (Israel), not just to individuals.
- Ex. 18:13-26. Moses, who had been trying to do everything himself, delegates authority and sets up subordinate leaders – a government.
- Gen. 41:25-57. Pharaoh, under the influence of Joseph, stores surplus food for use during a later time of famine.
- Acts 5:17-41. The apostles have been imprisoned by the Pharisees for teaching in the name of Jesus. When they are released, they do it again, a good example of confrontation of an issue. A Pharisee on the council convinced the council not to have the Apostles killed.
- Ezek. 22:12,27. The prophet chastises the people and officials for exploiting vulnerable people to build their own estates.
- Eph. 3:8-12; John 9:1-39; Jer. 22:1-5. A function of the church is to expose systems which exploit people and to work for transformation of people and institutions.
- Neh. 2:17-18, Neh. 3. The prophet organizes merchants, priests, goldsmiths, families and other organizations to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which is in the self-interest of the people for their protection from invaders. Much of the material is furnished by the government. This is a classic example of community organization and a church and government coalition.
- Isa. 58:6-7; Amos 5:21,24; Deut. 15:7-8,10; Psalm 146. The church is to be on the side of the poor, oppressed, and exploited.
- God's people are to practice charity to the poor (Deut. 15:10-11), to be concerned about deteriorating human conditions (Isa. 61:1-9), and to advocate the cause of the powerless (Jer. 22:13-27).
- Confrontation is found throughout the Bible (e.g. Matt. 23:23-28). Jesus used confrontation against scribes, Pharisees, and priests all the time. Only once did he become violent – cleansing of the temple (Mark 11:15-19). Yet, Jesus was tender and loving toward the rejected and marginalized of his society.