



An Anabaptist Guide to the Coming Elections

"We believe and confess that God has ordained power and authority, and set them to punish the evil, and protect the good, to govern the world, and maintain countries and cities, with their subjects, in good order and regulation; and that we, therefore, may not despise, revile, or resist the same, but must acknowledge and honor them as the ministers of God, and be subject and obedient unto them, yea, ready for all good works, especially in that which is not contrary to the law, will, and commandment of God..." Dordrecht Confession of Faith Section XIII (1632)

To what extent do you owe allegiance to your nation? For many citizens, patriotism and faithfulness intertwine and the American and the Christian flags stand together in the sanctuary. Believers of all stripes are urged to be politically active and vote their values. Recent events clamor for Christ-followers to stake their identity and future on mantras supporting various causes. How can Anabaptist Christians acknowledge and honor God-ordained powers and authorities and yet resist them when contrary to God's law, will, and commandment?

"But our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20)

A door stands open in Revelation, and we witness worship of the Lamb. In a brilliant display of concentric circles—animals representing every strata of creation, elders representing the faithful, angels and every stripe of humanity radiate out from the Lord's throne. The heavenly hosts sing to the one who was slain "to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12)

This worship takes place simultaneously as humans reign upon the earth while we remember our hope and future reside in Christ rather than earthly rulers.

The tension inherent between honoring the government and faithfulness to Christ is most clear during times of persecution. Our spiritual ancestors, the early Anabaptists, discovered modeling good citizenship and seeking city's peace was not enough for Lutheran, Catholic, and Reformed governments. Professing their allegiance to the Lamb via adult baptism, shared communion, and a commitment to love even enemies made them suspect in the eyes of many. Their martyrdom is a good reminder that even Christian nations have persecuted and killed fellow Christians who refuse to forsake biblical commandments in order to bow their knee.

Due to this history, Anabaptists have historically been distrustful of governmental promises and calls for allegiance. This might be seen today in concerns over blending of faith and patriotism as well as worries about governmental overreach.

Yet the response to civil allegiance and civic engagement is quite diverse. Some refuse to say the pledge of allegiance or swear oaths. Others refuse to register for military selective service. Among Swiss-German Anabaptists there is a history of non-voting, a position shrinking since the 1960's. On the other hand, many modern Anabaptists are heavily involved in government to influence society for the better, an option not so readily available to their spiritual ancestors.

~Continued on page 2

During the current presidential election, Anabaptists are being challenged again with discerning how to proclaim Jesus as Lord while honoring authorities and having a wider positive influence and witness. How does one “vote our values” when candidates from both parties are committed to certain positions that undermine basic Christian beliefs? With growing “us” vs. “them” language and pressure to vilify the other side, we are constantly tempted to replace God’s Kingdom and Christ’s return as agents of lasting change with human efforts through party platforms. Whether you choose to vote or not this election cycle, consider the following points.

1. Love your political enemies and pray for those who oppose your views. We all want life, liberty and happiness for our families and our neighbors. Yet rarely does one party’s platform perfectly express the range of Christian commitments to sanctity of life (the unborn, elder care), human dignity (immigration, disabilities, injustice), peacemaking (military spending), and seeking the city’s welfare (social services network, creating a climate for businesses to thrive), etc. How does one rightly prioritize these issues when all matter to Jesus? Forced into choosing the “lesser of two evils” where no single candidate fits all Christian discipleship criteria, how can we fault others for making a different assessment even when we share the same desire to be faithful?

2. Remember religious liberty and the Separation of Church and State. Although it has been enshrined as a pillar of American democracy, it is worth remembering separation of church and state was originally an Anabaptist commitment, bought and paid for by the blood of Anabaptist martyrs. Instead of seeking to establish any one particular understanding of Christianity or privilege Christian faith expressions via law, we should be committed to

the more difficult productive work of changing individual hearts and challenging unjust systems in our society and in our country. Rather than seeking human power over others, let us cultivate our witness to Jesus Christ’s salvation and the Holy Spirit’s power to bring transformation.

3. Continue to put your full trust and faith in Jesus Christ and His kingdom above all others. Remember a door stands open in heaven and there is a Lamb who rules over all. And while any country’s fate affects its citizens, Christ-followers know who holds the future. Before any other allegiance, we are residents of God’s strong and unshakeable kingdom, standing firm in times of plenty and famine. Jesus set an example in how he responds to prostitutes, lepers, soldiers, tax collectors and religious leaders—all whom possessed different views on allegiance. Like “Hippocratic Oath” doctors who promise to treat all patients regardless of background or station in life, let us care for all who come our way. Our ability to serve in the middle, amidst all the tension, might be the glue that holds our communities together. *~Written by Evana Pastor Tyler Hartford*

A New Location for FLOURISHING 2021!

We are so excited as we gear up for our annual leadership retreat at the beautiful **Christian Retreat Center (Christianretreat.org)** in the sunny beach town of Bradenton, FL. The retreat will be held **February 13-17, 2021.**

The event is open to any Anabaptist church pastors, their spouses, or lay leaders within Evana or outside the network. It will be a time of relaxation and rejuvenation as we focus on the theme of Worship. The event will also include a fun Valentine’s banquet for all the couples that attend. You won’t want to miss it! Early-bird registration will be opening soon! Watch for more info on our website **Evananetwork.org**