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Dear Christians in America

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Dear Christians in America

Abstract

"Political conversations among Christians these days are often less about a difference of opinions and more about downright division. They're polarizing. Binary. And they're creating distance between us."

Posting about civil political discourse from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/dear-christians-in-america/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Dear Christians in America

 [all in allthings.org/dear-christians-in-america/](http://allthings.org/dear-christians-in-america/)

September 28, 2016

Aaron Baart

A few weeks ago, I preached a chapel message at [Dordt College](#) that started with images of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump sharing a split screen. It immediately felt as though everyone in the room backed into their pew just a little bit. And if anxiety could be measured like temperature, it wouldn't have taken much to tip the room past its boiling point. In fact, whether it's a family conversation around the dinner table or a quick chat over coffee after church, tensions around political views among believers has the potential to escalate quickly, causing many to shy away from the conversation altogether.

This is probably because political conversations among Christians these days are often less about a difference of opinions and more about downright division. They're polarizing. Binary. And they're creating distance between us. It has escalated to the point where if someone is voting for the candidate that we're not voting for, then secretly, we might just be questioning their judgment, if not their salvation. It's deeply concerning that we are finding less of our primary identity in Christ and more of it in our political party membership. But truth be told, when Jesus said, "Whoever is not against you is for you," he wasn't talking about our affiliation with a political party (Luke 9:50).

Sadly, as a result of this movement, we're losing our ability to engage in healthy civil discourse. Even worse, I'm afraid that at the root of this problem is that within our own Christian enclaves, we've propagated a certain anti-intellectualism. In it, we each choose the Christian leaders whose voices, we believe, represent our own and then we begin to unquestioningly fall in line. In other words, many of our leaders have assumed their role to be telling us *what* to think, not *how* to think. And this approach is failing us. It's not unlike how we choose our 24-hour news channel—find the voices who reflect what we already believe and then let the preaching to the choir commence. No cognitive dissonance. No stretching. Just a lot of reinforcement of previously-held ideas and a further distancing between the political polarities.

Perhaps this is why the Christian leaders who we've appointed to do our thinking for us feel the need to come out and publicly endorse political candidates. It has been so discouraging to watch the manner in which many influential Christian voices offer up their white-washed political endorsements, especially because there are two main flaws to this approach.

First, these endorsers often prey on people's worst fears with Chicken-Little-like language: "The sky is falling! The sky is falling! . . . If so-and-so gets in." This argument is severely reductionistic, contending that each election really comes down to a single cut-and-dry partisan issue. However, even stereotypical partisan lines fall apart within this line of reasoning. Take for example, the classic Christian "rallying cry" issue of abortion. This might surprise many to know, but abortion rates in the US have actually fallen more under Obama (a Democrat!) than any other US president.¹ Or conversely, consider the issue of immigration. Despite all the news channel talk around Trump's harsh immigration plans, it has been Barak Obama's administration that has quietly deported 2.4 million people, almost twice as many as his two predecessors combined!² In other words, reducing your vote to a single partisan issue such as the likelihood of the next president's role in appointing Supreme Court justices is simply put, too simple. (Sorry, Dr. Dobson.)

The second major flaw in the way that leading Christian voices' approach political endorsements is their over-stated hope in the individual they are endorsing. It's unrealistic. The language turns nearly messianic at times, creating a bloated ballot getting stuffed into a political box not big enough to hold it. Endorsers employ language to describe a politician that Christians should reserve solely for Christ and his church. In fact, our Christian leaders should be continually calling us back to placing our hope for change where it can only belong—global transformation through Christ-centered fascination. Theologian, Preston Sprinkle said it poignantly in a recent online article: "Of all people,

Christians in America should be the first ones to raise questions about our relationship to the State. Should we stand? Or—should we sit? Should we give our allegiance to the State? Or to Jesus? Or can we somehow do both? . . . The Christian identity has always been a quiet threat to the way of Rome. *Submit to the State?* Yes. But submission must come with a confident grin that a better way, a superior narrative, a crucified empire is peacefully crashing in on the empires of the world. . . . Christians in America are more like Israelite exiles living in Babylon than Jewish (*sic*) reigning in Israel.”³

And herein lies the problem. When the Christian blogosphere lights up over the politically-charged headlines de jour capturing American attentions, and Facebook and Twitter become the vehicles of catharsis for Christians across the country, what are we doing, really? The beautifully unique story of God’s plan for the Church to rise up, in Christ’s name, as the agent of transformation in the world gets sucked up into the news channel vortex. It pulls us into a weaker, more anemic, cultural narrative.

Go ahead and vote. Be engaged. Pray for our leaders. But let’s steel ourselves against getting swept up in overly simplistic and binary human-made divisions. And friends, please, let’s always invest our deepest hope not in the next occupant of the oval office but rather, in the one occupying the throne that even the most powerful office on earth must answer to.