

MY DEAR THEOPHILUS

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NEWS FROM AROUND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Archbishop of Canterbury speaks out on Hagia Sophia
The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and four other Presidents of the ecumenical Churches Together in England (CTE) group have spoken out against the decision by Turkey to turn the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque. Built in AD 537 as the Cathedral of the Patriarch of Constantinople, it was the largest Christian Church in the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, after the Ottoman conquest, it was turned into a mosque.



Dear Parish Family:

What is the relationship between the Church, society and the state? What does the New Testament say about it?

What follows is a very brief attempt to explore these questions by looking at what the Gospels tell us about Jesus before Pilate, the Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's Epistles.

Jesus Before Pilate

Jesus begins his public ministry by proclaiming that “the Kingdom of God is at hand; therefore, turn your lives around (μετανοεῖτε) and believe in the good news (εὐαγγέλιον).” Mark 1:15. Jesus comes proclaiming the Kingdom of God, but what does it look like?

St. Luke writes that Jesus began his public ministry this way:

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his

custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Luke 4:16-21.

The passage from Isaiah gave a glimpse of what the Kingdom of God looked like. Thereafter, Jesus went about preaching, healing, eating with the outcasts and forgiving sins initiating the Kingdom of God. As the Rev. Robert Capon says: "God's program is grace, not scorekeeping; free gift, not reward and punishment in this world." Robert Farrar Capon, *Light Theology and Heavy Cream: The Culinary Adventures of Pietro and Madeline* (2004).

All of the Gospels tell the story about how God became King in and through Jesus "not by the usual means of military revolution, but by the inauguration of sovereignty during Jesus' public career, and the strange but decisive victory on the cross itself. All four report that Jesus was executed with the words 'king of the Jews' over his head; and, as they all knew though many scholars have long forgotten, the ancient Jewish dream was that the king of the Jews would be king of the world. Of course: if Israel's God was the creator of the world, one would expect nothing less." N.T. Wright, *Imagining the Kingdom: Mission and Theology in Early Christianity*, Inaugural Lecture, University of St. Andrew's, Scotland, October 26, 2011.

In the Gospels, although Jesus has quite a lot to say to the religious authorities of the Jewish people, Jesus does not make any statements with respect to the Roman government. Jesus' one encounter with the superpower of the day occurs during the tense scene when Jesus comes

face to face with the Roman Empire. Here is what the Gospel according to John tells us:

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They answered, 'If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.' The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death.' (This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?' Pilate replied, 'I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.' Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.' Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, 'I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' They shouted in reply, 'Not this man, but Barabbas!' Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The Jews answered him, 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him ...

John 18: 28 to 19:8.

First, when Jesus stands before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea who possessed a tremendous amount of power including the sole authority to impose capital punishment, and Jesus is asked about His kingship, Jesus says that His kingdom is not of this world. It is not of this world because God's way of doing things is not the human way of doing things where power can be abused. However, Jesus' kingdom is **for** this world, because ultimately Jesus is Lord. N.T. Wright puts it this way:

His kingdom (yes, he agrees he has a kingdom; Pilate seizes on this) doesn't come from this world. Please note, he doesn't say, as some translations have put it, 'my kingdom is not of this world'; that would imply that his 'kingdom' was altogether other-worldly, a spiritual or heavenly reality that had nothing to do with the present world at all. That is not the point. Jesus, after all, taught his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come 'on earth as in heaven.'

No: the point is that Jesus' kingdom does not come from 'this world'. Of course it doesn't. 'The world', as we've seen again and again, is in John the source of evil and rebellion against God. Jesus is denying that his kingdom has a this-worldly origin or quality. He is not denying that it has a this-worldly destination. That's why he has come into the world himself (v. 37), and why he has sent, and will send, his followers into the world (17.18; 20.21). His kingdom doesn't come from this world, but it is for this world. That is the crucial distinction.

N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone*, 114-15 (2004).

Second, Jesus stands silent before the might of the Roman government. Why did he? Wasn't this an opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate the might and power of God? It is important what Jesus did not say, Jesus did not endorse the Zealots who wanted to overthrow their Roman occupiers, and He could have if Jesus wanted to restore the political kingdom of Israel. (In a twist of irony, Pilate actually releases Barabbas, a Zealot who murdered people during a riot.)

Jesus' silence spoke volumes. The power of the Roman Empire was demonstrated through intimidation, violent coercion and force. In its quest to achieve the *Pax Romana* (the Roman Peace), Imperial Rome crushed any opposition to it by ensuring submission to the authority of Rome. Crucifixion was one way in which Rome achieved its ends.

Jesus standing silent before Pilate showed that God does not work that way. Rather, God's response as King to humanity's rebellion is demonstrated by the power of the cross in self-sacrificing love to the point of death which is then vindicated in the resurrection. Jesus took up the cross to defeat everything which opposes God's holiness, goodness and love. Through the cross, Jesus announced victory, the victory of God. The story begun in Genesis with humanity's turning away from God to follow our own wills only to find tragedy, comes to its culmination with God coming to creation to save it and to make it new again. That new creation finds its roots in the ugliness of Golgotha which ultimately will culminate in a new heaven and a new earth when they are joined together as the Book of Revelation tells us.

The Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the Early Church viewed itself in relation to the society which surrounded it.

After the Ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter boldly proclaims the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and when people heard it, St. Luke, the author of Acts, writes:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:32-47.

In the center of Jerusalem, in the presence of the Jewish and Roman authorities, the Apostles preach and baptize. The early Christians, who were Jews and Gentiles, cared for each other as if they were of one natural family. In contravention to the surrounding culture, the early Christians set aside ethnic and cultural differences; they were no longer important. They were brought together as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, and hence, sons and daughters of God, where the least and the lost, the widow and the orphan, were held on level ground with the entire community. It was the original melting pot.

The Romans did not understand the Christians because they were so utterly different than the society they dwelt in. The Christians were an anomaly in the Roman world. They were counter-cultural. These followers of Jesus set aside their own personal desires and personal gain; these followers of Jesus sacrificed and gave of themselves. They were not selfish, and that is why the Church grew. The Roman world did not understand it. The pagan orator and writer of the day, Aristedes, wrote:

Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit, in God. And if they hear that one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of their redeemer, they all give him what he needs -- if it is possible, they bail him out. If one of them is poor and there isn't enough food to go around, they fast several days to give him the food he needs... This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them.

The early Church took Jesus' words seriously: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35. They proclaimed that Jesus was Lord! This is what the Kingdom of God looks like, people from all walks of life, all ethnicities and cultures dwelling together with all of the societal barriers taken down as the community of faith living into being made in the image of God.

Paul's Conversion and His Epistles

Saul (later Paul), who described himself as a Pharisee and a zealot for the preservation of the separation of the Jewish people from Gentile society, "was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison." Acts 8:3.

When Saul encountered the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was transformed. St. Luke writes about Paul's conversion and how the early Church welcomed him despite their initial misgivings:

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.' The men who were travelling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' He answered, 'Here I am, Lord.' The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of

my name.’ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?’ Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

Acts 9:1-22.

Thereafter, Paul would write: “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:26-29.

This is what the Kingdom of God looks like. The people of God gathered together who pray seriously the Lord’s Prayer that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Paul also said that Christians were to submit to government authority with respect to just laws which conform to God’s law. Romans 13:1-7. However, where the law did not conform to God’s law, for example where Christians were required to worship the Emperor, they did not do so and in fact, many

Christians were put to death because they refused to do so because of their faith. (There is a rich intellectual tradition in Christian theology regarding the law, see for example, St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas' *Treatise of Law*.)

Paul preached where he was not welcome, and he disputed with doubters in public places. To many, Paul was a pest. This is the first charge we hear his prosecutor from the Sanhedrin, Tertullus, make against him as Paul is presented to the Roman Governor Felix for trial. Acts 24:5. Paul paid the price for his proclamation that Jesus was Lord. Paul was imprisoned, beaten, pelted with stones, shipwrecked (2 Corinthians 11:25), run out of town (Acts 14:19; 21:30), put on trial by the Jewish authorities and the Roman Empire and ultimately martyred in Rome. He endured all of this for his love of Christ and because he had been redeemed by Jesus who he proclaimed as Lord enabling him to proclaim: "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

What is the Role of the Church in Society Today?

So what is the role of the Church today in the society in which it finds itself?

Is the Church to take a partisan stand, to side with one political party or another, to endorse one political party over another one? There is nothing in the New Testament which would sanction such an approach. In 2018, the Rev. Timothy Keller wrote an opinion editorial in the New York Times, *How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don't*, where he said that "while believers can register under a party affiliation and be active in politics, they should not identify the Christian church or faith with a political party as the only Christian one." The danger of the Church identifying with any particular political party is that it will fall into idolatry and fail to proclaim that Jesus is Lord.

The role of the Church, the people of God gathered together, is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people and that Jesus is Lord. As the Rev. Robert Capon has written:

[T]he church's primary business is to ... proclaim grace, forgiveness, and the free party for all. It's to announce the reconciling relationship of God to everybody and to invite them simply to believe it and celebrate it.

Robert Farrar Capon, *The Mystery of Christ & and Why We Don't Get It* (1990).

In its activity in societies from the earliest of days, the Church proclaimed the Gospel not only through its preaching and its liturgy, but also through practical means by establishing hospitals for the sick, feeding the poor, clothing the naked, caring for orphans, educating children, and establishing the university system (which were originally maintained to educate the clergy), while simultaneously ministering to all segments of society, all to the greater glory and honor of God because Jesus is Lord. The Church heeded Jesus' words: "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:15-16. It seems that today that there are some segments of the institutional Church that have forgotten the rich mission and history of the Church.

In the face of the proclamation of the Church through word and deed, there will be times when society may find the Church to be a gadfly buzzing around as the Church proclaims the salvation of the world brought by Jesus Christ. This will become more so, as N.T. Wright has noted as the "Western world moves more and more into its post-Christian phase, where, even when churchgoing remains strong, it is mixed with a variety of idolatries too large to be noticed by those who hold them, and where human rulers are more likely to acknowledge the rule of this or that 'force' than the rule of the Creator. ... [a]nd if the church attempts this task of reminding, of calling the powers to account for their stewardship, it will face the same charges, and perhaps the same fate, as its Lord. It is at that point that decisions have to

be made in all earnestness, at that point that idolatry exacts its price.” N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the State*, THEMELOIS (1990).

Your servant in Christ,

The Rev. Chester J. Makowski, Rector

THE COOKING MINISTRY



The Cooking Ministry will be back in August!



***FEATURED HOLY PERSON OF
THE MONTH
WILLIAM WILBERFORCE
July 30
By James Kiefer***

William Wilberforce was born in 1759 and served in Parliament from 1780 to 1825. A turning point in his religious life was a tour of Europe. In the luggage of a travelling companion he saw a copy of [William Law's](#) book, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. He asked his friend, “What is this?” and received the answer, “One of the best books ever written.” The two of them agreed to read it together on the journey, and Wilberforce embarked on a lifelong program of

setting aside Sundays and an interval each morning on arising for prayer and religious reading. He considered his options, including the clergy, and was persuaded by Christian friends that his calling was to serve God through politics. He was a major supporter of programs for popular education, overseas missions, parliamentary reform, and religious liberty. He is best known, however, for his untiring commitment to the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. He introduced his first anti-slavery motion in the House of Commons in 1788, in a three-and-a-half hour oration that concluded: "Sir, when we think of eternity and the future consequence of all human conduct, what is there in this life that shall make any man contradict the dictates of his conscience, the principles of justice and the law of God!"

The motion was defeated. Wilberforce brought it up again every year for eighteen years, until the slave trade was finally abolished on 25 March 1806. He continued the campaign against slavery itself, and the bill for the abolition of all slavery in British territories passed its crucial vote just four days before his death on 29 July 1833. A year later, on 31 July 1834, 800,000 slaves, chiefly in the British West Indies, were set free.

Let us pray: Let your continual mercy, O Lord, kindle in your Church the never-failing gift of love, that, following the example of your servant William Wilberforce, we may have grace to defend the poor, and maintain the cause of those who have no helper; for the sake of him who gave his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

In William Wilberforce, we have an example of someone who lived his life in the public sphere as a devout Christian and was not afraid to proclaim the Good News of Jesus as a citizen who participated in politics as a member of Parliament. There is an excellent movie about his life and work, *Amazing Grace*, which was released in 2007. CJM+



PLEASE LET US KNOW IF SOMEONE NEEDS A HOME VISIT

If you know of anyone who needs a home visit because they cannot get to Church, please call the Parish Office, or let Fr. Makowski know. Either Fr. Makowski or one of our Lay Eucharistic Visitors will call on them. If you have a pastoral emergency, please call Fr. Makowski at 713.299.7675.

THERE IS POWER IN PRAYER

Praying is something that we all can do, young and old, rich and poor, tall and short. Please pray for everyone on our Prayer List.



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***ONCE WE ALL GET TOGETHER AGAIN, PLEASE
BRING PORK & BEANS FOR MANNAFEST!***



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