

What Is the Spectrum of Major Views on Political Theology? A Proposed Taxonomy of Seven Views on Religion and Government¹

ANDREW DAVID NASELLI

Andrew David Naselli is Professor of Systematic Theology and New Testament at Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and he serves as lead pastor of Christ the King Church, Stillwater, Minnesota. He earned his first PhD from Bob Jones University, Greenville, South Carolina and his second PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. He is the author of numerous articles and books such as *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament* (P&R, 2017), *How Can I Love Church Members with Different Politics?* (with Jonathan Leeman, Crossway, 2020), *Predestination: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2024), and *How to Read a Book* (Canon, 2024). Andy is married to Jenni, and they have four daughters.

Christians have increasingly discussed political theology over the past several years—at least in my conservative evangelical circles. A lot of Christians are both interested and confused. They are fascinated by the topic, but they are having trouble thinking clearly about it because it is so complicated. This article is my attempt to add some clarity by framing a debated topic. I proceed in three parts: (1) I start by briefly defining religion, politics, and political theology; (2) then I propose seven views on religion and government; (3) and I conclude with seven reflections.²

PART 1. STARTING WITH DEFINITIONS: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Let's start by defining three basic terms: *religion*, *politics*, and *political theology*.

- *Religion* is “an organized system of beliefs that answers ultimate questions and commends certain actions or behaviors based on the answers to those questions.”³ Those questions concern ultimate reality (i.e., God), the nature of the universe, the nature of mankind, what happens to a man at death, and how we know right and wrong.⁴ As a Christian, I believe that the religious institution God has ordained is Christ's church.
- *Politics* is the science and art of governing men (to paraphrase Aristotle).⁵ In this article I'm referring specifically to politics at the civil level of *the government* or *the governing authorities* or *the state*.⁶
- *Political theology* is a theology of politics—particularly how religion and politics should relate. Thus, a particular view of political theology is a philosophy or system of ideas that attempts to explain how religion and politics should relate.⁷

Throughout this article I typically refer to the broader categories of *religion* and *government* instead of the narrower categories of *church* and *state*.

- I use the label *religion* instead of *church* because *religion* is broader than the Christian church. Religion encompasses organized institutions like Islam. In a sense, religion also includes less formal belief systems like secularism (i.e., the view that the state must be separate from religious institutions), but secularism is not an *organized* religion.
- I use the label *government* instead of *state* because *government* can be broader than *state*. For many people the word *state* refers to a modern nation-state, but the term *government* broadly encompasses all sorts of civic rule.⁸

It is challenging to use terms for political theology that apply equally well in all historical settings. In the ancient world, *religion* and *politics* are fitting terms. In the Middle Ages and magisterial Protestantism (which includes Christendom), *ecclesiastical government* and *civil government* are fitting terms. In early modern political thought, *church* and *state* (and the *separation of church of state*) are fitting terms.

Historical Setting	Fitting Term for <i>Religion</i>	Fitting Term for <i>Government</i>
Ancient World	Religion	Politics
Middle Ages ⁹ and Magisterial Protestantism	Ecclesiastical Government	Civil Government
Early Modern Political Thought	Church	State

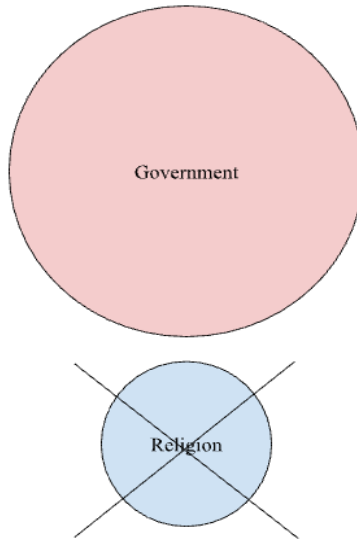
PART 2. SEVEN VIEWS ON RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT

In this article I propose a taxonomy of seven views on religion and government. In other words, people have held at least seven distinct major views on political theology. (I am including both Christians and non-Christians for breadth.) I am proposing a taxonomy in the form of a spectrum that moves from views that *separate* religion from the government to views that *combine* religion and the government. I concisely describe each view and then conclude with some reflections.¹⁰

Introductory Qualification

My concluding reflections include some qualifications, but I should mention one upfront: *The people and groups I list to illustrate a view—both historic examples and modern examples—do not necessarily share the exact same political theology.* There is a spectrum of views within each view, and those I list within a particular view may be different in significant ways. But they share some similarities given the criteria I lay out. This article is simply my attempt to sketch a spectrum of views on political theology—both historically and currently—in order to gain clarity on a complicated topic so that we better understand before we evaluate.

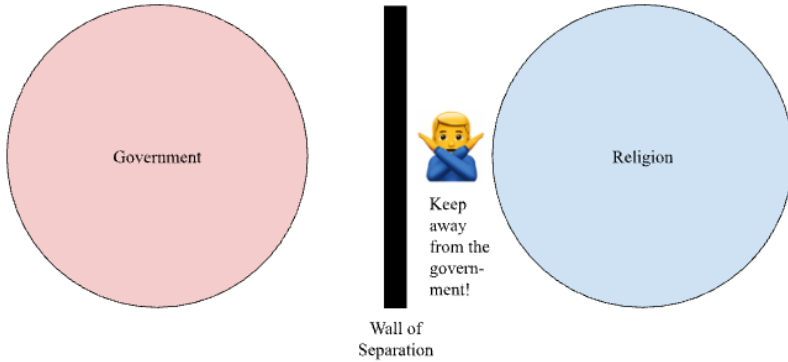
View 1. Secular Suppression: *The secular government suppresses religion.*



- *Position:* The government and religion should be totally separate in the sense that the government should be secular because God does not exist. The government should not merely separate from religion but should suppress religion. (A militantly atheist government does not consider its belief system to be a religion).
- *Historic example:* Karl Marx.¹¹
- *Modern examples:* the former Soviet Union (Marxist-Leninist atheism), North Korea (officially an atheist government); secular progressivism.

For view 1, the government affirms secularism in a way that I would call religious, but I contrast secularism with religion in the heading because secularism is not an *organized religion* in the same sense as Christianity or Judaism or Islam.¹² In the headings for views 1–7, the term *religion* refers to *organized religion*. For view 1, the government protects itself from being contaminated by religion. For view 2, religion protects itself from being contaminated by the government.

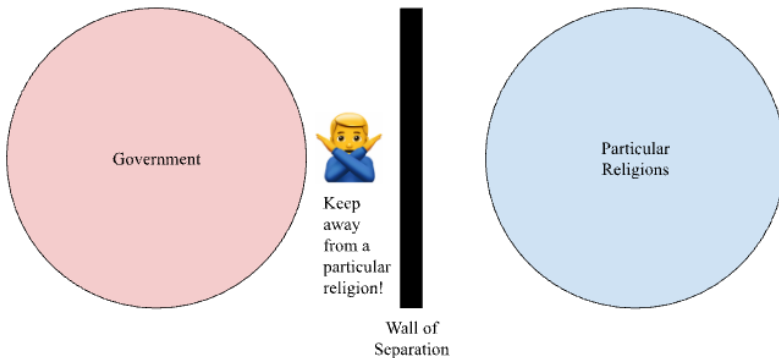
View 2. Religious Separation: Religion must radically separate from the government.



- *Position:* The government and religion should be totally separate in the sense that they are distinct spheres that must not overlap because the government is worldly. Consequently, individual Christians must separate from the government by not wielding the sword as combatants or as magistrates because to do so would be to cooperate with a sinful institution.
- *Historic example:* Anabaptists.¹³
- *Modern examples:* traditional Mennonites,¹⁴ Stanley Hauerwas,¹⁵ Greg Boyd.¹⁶

Views 1 and 2 see hostility between the government and religion. View 3 envisions neutrality with no intermingling.

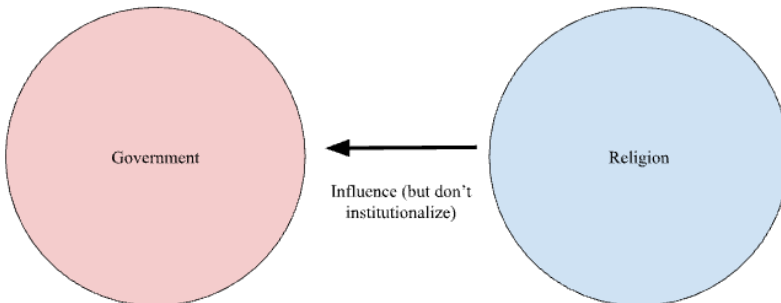
View 3. Religious Neutrality: The government must be religiously neutral.



- *Position:* The government and religion should be separate in the sense that the government should be religiously neutral and particular religions should not influence the government. The government may be religiously neutral in one of two ways: (1) by promoting *no religion*—that is, a pluralistic secularism that does not necessarily deny God’s existence but wants to keep the peace between opposing religions—or (2) by promoting *a civil religion*, which is “a set of practices, symbols and beliefs distinct from traditional religion, yet providing a universal values paradigm around which the citizenry can unite.”¹⁷ Either way, the public square should be religiously neutral; religious people should publicly argue based on natural law and not their particular religion.
- *Historic examples:* classical liberalism (John Locke, John Stuart Mill, etc.; emphasis on a free market; to some degree America had a Protestant civil religion until the 1950s),¹⁸ libertarianism (emphasis on individual autonomy),¹⁹ progressive liberalism (emphasis on the welfare state and freedom from traditional sexual ethics).²⁰
- *Modern examples:* John Rawls, who emphasizes religious neutrality in the government;²¹ Darryl Hart, who emphasizes political neutrality in the church.²²

For view 4 (in contrast to view 3), the public square should not be religiously neutral.

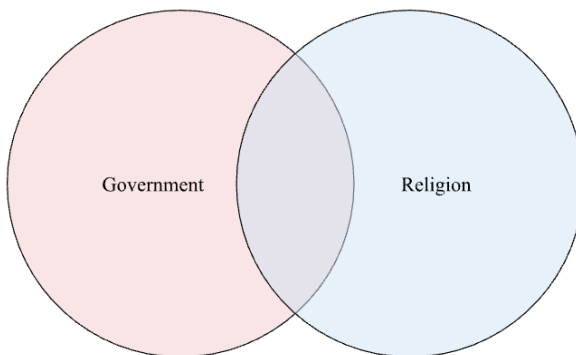
View 4. Religious Influence: *The government should not promote only one particular religion, yet religion may influence the government within limited parameters.*



- *Position:* The government and the church are separate in the sense that they have distinct God-authorized jurisdictions. God authorizes the government to wield the sword (which a government may justly do against an individual Christian who has broken the law), and God authorizes the church to exercise the keys (which a church may rightly do by refusing to affirm that an individual person with governmental authority is a Christian). The government should not exclusively promote a particular religion (e.g., the government recognizes religious freedom and does not institute a state church or spread doctrine that is explicitly Christian), and the government should not restrict the spread of false religious beliefs (e.g., the government should not refuse to allow a Mosque to be built in the town square).²³ But religion may influence the government. An individual governmental authority (like a United States senator) may argue for a political position based on religion, and the government may adopt that position—but not on the basis of religion. The public square cannot be religiously neutral; it is a religious battleground. For Christians, the church’s mission is to make disciples; individual Christians should significantly influence the government; and the government should not institutionalize Christianity (e.g., the government should not put the Apostle’s Creed in the constitution).
- *Historic examples:* most Baptists²⁴—e.g., Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689),²⁵ Isaac Backus;²⁶ English non-conformists/Separatists such as Congregationalists and Quakers.
- *Modern examples:* Wayne Grudem,²⁷ Jonathan Leeman,²⁸ John Piper,²⁹ Andrew Walker,³⁰ Scott Aniol,³¹ David VanDrunen,³² Robert George.³³

For view 5, religion should not merely *influence* the government. The government should identify as a Christian government.

View 5. Christian Government: *The government and religion overlap.*

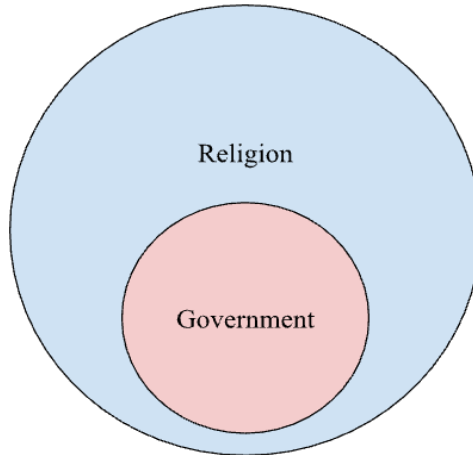


By labeling view 5 as “Christian government,” I am using the specific adjective *Christian* instead of the more general adjective *religious* because this view is peculiar to Protestant Christianity.

- *Position:* The government and the Christian church are two God-ordained institutions that have distinct and overlapping God-authorized jurisdictions, and they should work together under God’s ultimate authority. For Christians, the church’s mission is to make disciples of all nations; individual Christians should significantly influence the government; and the government may institutionalize Christianity to some degree (e.g., by putting God in the constitution and by having a religious test for office). The government should identify as a Christian government in the sense that the laws and customs it promotes derive from the ultimate authority of God. The governing authorities should know that they are accountable to God for how they rule (cf. Daniel 4:26), and it is fitting for the government to exhort citizens to fear the living God (cf. Daniel 6:26). The government should pursue justice by promoting the natural law (which the Ten Commandments summarize) as much as prudently possible. The government should (along with the church and society) help create cultural conditions conducive for conversion and for the common good.³⁴ While the government should promote and to some degree enforce a just social order based on a right understanding of God and man (e.g., the government should promote marriage and the family and demote no-fault divorce, adultery, homosexuality, transgenderism, and pornography), the government should not force citizens to follow Christianity since only the Spirit’s regeneration produces a heart change; the church’s weapon is not the sword but instead the word, water, bread, and wine. This model is not feasible long-term if many of the citizens are not genuine Christians.
- *Historic examples:* magisterial Reformers (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, Richard Hooker, Johannes Althusius),³⁵ the Reformed scholastics, the church of England,³⁶ John Gill,³⁷ American Puritans (e.g., John Winthrop, William Bradford, John Cotton, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards), the basic approach in various colonies and states at the time of America’s founding.³⁸
- *Modern examples:* Brad Littlejohn,³⁹ Doug Wilson,⁴⁰ Joe Rigney,⁴¹ Daniel Strand,⁴² some versions of “Christian nationalism” (though many who hold this position do not prefer that label).⁴³

For view 5, the government enforces a particular ethic that is tied to a religion. For view 6, religion controls the government to such a degree that the government enforces the religion itself.

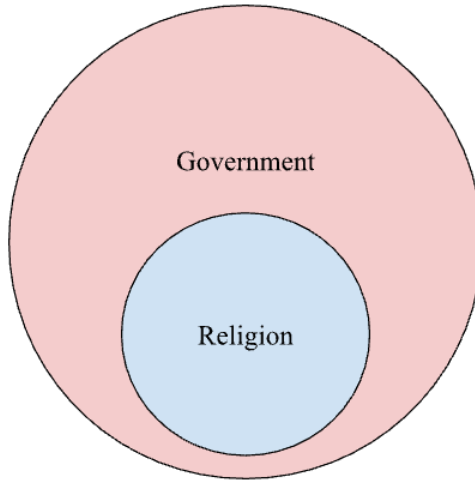
View 6. *Religion over Government: Religion governs the government and directs the government to enforce religion.*



- *Position:* A particular religion governs the government and directs the government to enforce that religion. Some call this view the doctrine of the two swords in which the sword of religion trumps the sword of the government. (For medieval Roman Catholics, both swords belong to the Pope, and the Pope directly wields the spiritual sword and indirectly wields the temporal sword by commanding government authorities.) God ordains the government to ensure peace in society, which includes to some extent governing church assemblies, ensuring that the church maintains orthodoxy, and punishing people who refuse to comply. The magistrate might say, “The Pope is telling me that John Doe is a heretic, so the government must punish him.”
- *Historic example:* the two-swords view of medieval Roman Catholicism.⁴⁴
- *Modern example:* I’m not sure what to suggest as a good modern example. Some might classify Rousas J. Rushdoony in this view, but Andrew Sandlin, a former colleague of Rushdoony, disagrees in his *Christ Over All* interview.⁴⁵ Sandlin argues that Rushdoony, the basic architect of Christian reconstructionism (i.e., reconstruct America as a Christian republic by rebuilding it on the foundation of the Mosaic law’s moral and civil aspects), does not include governmental coercion of Christian religion in his political theology. Rather, Rushdoony advocates a principled application of the Mosaic law—something closer to what I propose as view 5 above.⁴⁶

Both views 6 and 7 are a single, unified polity with two distinct authorities—government and religion. View 6 is *religion over government*, and view 7 is *government over religion*.

View 7. Government over Religion: *The government governs and enforces religion.*



- *Position:* The government governs religion with a state “church” and forces citizens to follow (or at least to not oppose) a particular religion. (In a sense, the distinction here between government and religion breaks down in that the government is a political religion. Government and religion are integrated.)
- *Historic examples:* ancient Egypt (e.g., when its Pharaoh was oppressing God’s people prior to the exodus), Roman emperor worship,⁴⁷ maybe Constantine,⁴⁸ Erastianism (e.g., Henry VIII),⁴⁹ typically Islam when it is a nation’s dominant religion.⁵⁰
- *Modern examples:* Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan.

PART 3. SEVEN CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Here are seven concluding reflections on my taxonomy of political theology:

1. My taxonomy is describing rather than evaluating.

It is important to evaluate each view of political theology, but that is not the point of this article. Accurately describing a view of political theology is foundational to evaluating it. Before you can properly evaluate a particular view of political theology, you should first understand it so well that you can articulate it in a way that its adherents would affirm. My aim is that this spectrum of major views on political theology will help clarify a complex topic so that we are not talking past each other when we move from describing to evaluating.

2. Trying to systematize the various views on political theology is challenging, but that should not prevent us from trying.

My colleague David Haines told me that trying to systematize political theology is like trying to lasso a tornado. There is a reason that so few political theology experts try to do it—it is messy and incredibly complicated (hence all my qualifications in this article!). For any proposed taxonomy, one can easily criticize, “Yes, but . . .” (which is what some friends said to me when they gave me feedback on this article!). Even if it is impossible to compose a perfect taxonomy, an imperfect taxonomy can be helpful for gaining clarity.

To understand political theology well requires skill in at least four fields: exegesis, systematic theology, history, and political theory. I do not have formal training in political history and political theory, so that makes it more challenging for me to systematize views on political theology. I am an evangelical pastor and a seminary professor who is joyfully loyal to King Jesus. My main formal training equips me to carefully read the Bible (i.e., biblical exegesis) and to systematically correlate how the whole Bible beautifully coheres in line with reality (i.e., systematic theology). The ability to do exegesis and systematic theology well are important components for a Christian’s political theology, but to understand political theology well also requires understanding *history* (both religious history and political history) and *political theory*. Since I do not have as much formal training in political history and political theory, I have been reading widely and conversing with experts in order to develop a better systematic understanding of political theology. The further I have waded into the field of political theology, the more I have become aware of how much I don’t know. I’ll open a door only to discover ten more doors behind it.⁵¹

If you're not an expert on a challenging topic, does that mean you should "stay in your lane" and avoid addressing it? Maybe, but not necessarily. Two scholars have encouraged me by their examples: (1) D. A. Carson is a world-class New Testament scholar, and he applied his skills at reading and thinking to address postmodernism, culture, and tolerance.⁵² (2) Carl Trueman is a distinguished historian of the Reformation, and he applied his skills at reading and thinking to address the modern self.⁵³

If a person has learned how to read and think rigorously and systematically, then he can apply that skillset to more than what he has formal training in. I think it would be misguided to tell authors like Carson and Trueman, "Stay in your lane!" Granted, when you get out of "your lane," there is more of a learning curve, and it is difficult and dangerous because you may lack sufficient knowledge and nuance. But it can be done well. And I think Christians should encourage (rather than discourage) big-picture, integrative thinking. It is challenging to systematize the various views on political theology, but that should not prevent us from trying. (And I warmly invite constructive feedback on my attempt, especially from those with an expertise in history and political theory.)

3. *There is a lot more to say.*

My taxonomy is a provisional attempt to simplify a debated topic that is extraordinarily complex. This article could easily become a series of books that explores connections between the various views and how and why they answer questions like these:

- *What does each view presuppose about reality?* For example, is what C. S. Lewis calls "the Tao" real?⁵⁴ Does God exist? If so, is God the triune God of the Old and New Testaments? Has God created the family, the church, and the government as overlapping institutions with distinct jurisdictions? If so, how do we determine the boundaries of those spheres? Is Jesus the Messiah the King of the universe?
- *What is each view's political philosophy?* For example, what is religious liberty, and should it exist? Where does political authority come from—that is, who may rule legitimately, and by what authority? What are the duties of a citizen? Should churches receive tax exemptions?
- *How does each view argue exegetically and theologically?* For example, should the government enforce both the first and second tables of the Ten Commandments

or just the second table or neither? What do “good” and “bad” and “wrong” and “evil” refer to in Romans 13:3–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–16? Does the government have any legitimate jurisdiction over churches in doctrine or practice? May the government mandate church attendance? Should Christians pay taxes? If so, when does a tax become tyrannical? Should individual Christians be involved in political affairs? What is the mission of the church? Should the church attempt to build the culture? If so, how? What is the nature of the end times, including the millennium? And how does that inform the mission of the church and its relationship to the state? Finally, what is appropriate for religious leaders to preach and teach regarding the government (e.g., regarding an upcoming election in a democratic government)?

4. My taxonomy may mislead one to think that the various views on the spectrum are distinct in neat and tidy ways.

At least seven factors further complicate the categories of political theology:

1. My spectrum is more like a sliding scale, including nuances for various positions *within each view* (as I mention in the “Introductory Qualification” at the beginning of this article). Here are three examples:

- For views 3 and 4, one could argue that it would be better to combine those as a single view called *liberalism*. The reason is that it is possible to simultaneously desire that the government should be religiously neutral in some sense and to desire that religion should influence the government in some sense.
- For view 5, some proponents support a state church (e.g., Brad Littlejohn, an Anglican), and others argue that we could improve on the first version of Christendom by not establishing a state church but instead institutionalizing “mere Christianity”—Christendom 2.0 (e.g., Doug Wilson, a Presbyterian).
- For view 6, a particular religion may exercise a lighter hand in government matters (e.g., by giving the government a long leash and only occasionally stepping in to restore order), or a particular religion may exercise a heavier hand in government matters (e.g., by mandating and enforcing specific religious and educational activities).

2. Two people who share the same basic view of political theology may reach similar conclusions but for different reasons. Those reasons may include different theological methods and hermeneutics.

3. What is small and local may look different when it is large and national. For example, a small Anabaptist community (view 2) might seem more like view 5 or 6 on a large national scale with the church telling the community

how to govern men. Does John Calvin's Geneva fit under view 5 or 6?⁵⁵

4. Different approaches to political theology may be more pragmatic and prudential in particular contexts.⁵⁶ For example, a Christian in a totalitarian state that persecutes Christians is more likely to take an Anabaptist approach to the government. Or a Christian in America today may think that the New England Puritans had a better government than America's current government, but he may conclude that since it is unlikely that Americans will replace classical liberalism with the Christian ethics of the Puritans anytime soon, Christians today may attempt to make incremental gains within the context of classical liberalism (e.g., by minimizing specific evils such as abortion and transgenderism).

5. The outermost poles of the spectrum have more in common with each other than the middle views in that views 1, 6, and 7 are totalitarian—either in an atheistic way that separates government from religion (view 1) or in a religious way that combines government and religion (views 6 and 7).

6. My spectrum is based on the single main issue of how religion and the government relate. Considering other factors would complexify matters. For example, if my current spectrum is on a horizontal axis, I could add a vertical axis to depict a spectrum of views on one's disposition toward the current regime.⁵⁷ On one end, some are generally pro-regime and favor incremental change, and on the other end, some are anti-regime and favor regime change. Different instincts regarding the current regime explain why two people can share the same basic political theology but make significantly different prudential judgments.

7. Another issue that complicates the spectrum is the broader issue of how Christ and culture relate. Carson explains, "In some sense debates about church and state are subsets of more comprehensive debates about Christ and culture."⁵⁸ Kevin DeYoung describes four basic ways that Christians relate Christianity and politics (riffing on Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* categories):⁵⁹

- *Christianity-against-politics*: "Christianity is largely seen as something that stands opposed to the messy, often idolatrous world of politics. ... [This] approach is strong on warning Christians against putting too much hope in kings and in earthly kingdoms. ... Christians with this approach are often uninterested in learning the intellectual contours of political science or in the long history of moral philosophy. They can also be unrealistic about how political and social change happens."

- *Christianity-above-politics*: “Christianity is seen as the Truth that transcends all earthly systems. ... This approach understands that Christianity is not to be identified with any particular political philosophy, political party, or intellectual tradition. On the negative side, the gospel critiques can often be superficial and lead to a sloppy moral equivalence. Thus, the ‘Christian’ approach ends up being the supposed golden mean between conservatism and progressivism, or the imaginary midpoint between Marxism and capitalism.”
- *Christianity-as-politics*: “The message of Christianity and the task of the individual Christian is seen as irreducibly political. ... Christians with this approach understand that Jesus is Lord over all. ... This approach often has too much ‘already’ and too little ‘not yet.’”
- *Christianity-under[girds]-politics*: “Christian ideas and Christian communities are seen as essential to a healthy political order. ... This approach understands and appreciates the role Christianity has played in the development of Western culture and in the establishment of a free and prosperous people. There is also wisdom in recognizing that Christianity does not offer a full-blown political philosophy, but that the best moral philosophy will be built upon a Christian view of the human person and of human nature. On the negative side, this approach can reduce the Christian faith to something of utilitarian value.”

DeYoung suggests in a lecture some illustrations for these four approaches:⁶⁰

- *Christianity-against-politics*: John Piper⁶¹
- *Christianity-above-politics*: Tim Keller⁶²
- *Christianity-as-politics*: Doug Wilson⁶³
- *Christianity-under[girds]-politics*: Hillsdale College⁶⁴

DeYoung recognizes strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches, and he personally resonates with these four approaches in reverse order.⁶⁵

5. Christians are becoming more interested in political theology because what seemed to be a neutral public square is now an increasingly polarized battleground.

One reason political theology is surging in popularity for many Christians in Western contexts is that they have lost confidence in classical liberalism. Progressive liberals have co-opted classical liberalism, and some blame classical liberalism itself for the decline. Classical liberalism can work well but only when coupled with cultural Christianity (a condition that is true for other political theologies as well).⁶⁶

Whether or not you agree with Aaron Renn in all the details of his argument, I think you can concede that he is onto something by explaining that our culture has moved from a *positive* world for Christianity to a *neutral* world to a *negative* world.⁶⁷ Christians in America are feeling threatened now in ways that are making them wonder, “Am I a Christian nationalist?”⁶⁸ Almost nobody was asking that question a decade ago. Christians today are increasingly open to theological retrieval to learn from thinkers prior to America’s founding—theologians such as magisterial Protestants.⁶⁹

Some Christians today feel conflicted about thinking deeply about political theology because it seems counter to the New Testament for Christians to lead a civil government. This reminds me of a conversation that Philip Yancey recounts:

Several years ago a Muslim man said to me, “I find no guidance in the Qur’an on how Muslims should live as a minority in a society and no guidance in the New Testament on how Christians should live as a majority.” He put his finger on a central difference between the two faiths. One, born at Pentecost, tends to thrive cross-culturally and even counterculturally, often coexisting with oppressive governments. The other, geographically anchored in Mecca, was founded simultaneously as a religion and a state.⁷⁰

For some Christians it feels awkward to think about what the best political theology is because they seem to think that the church is most faithful and healthy when the civil government is persecuting Christians. But God commands us to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions” for this purpose: “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Why? Because “this is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:1–3).

Some Christians today feel more at home when they are a persecuted minority. They think that *martyrdom is better than Christendom*. They might question whether they are being faithful to God if they constituted the majority of citizens in a nation, and they have not contemplated how Christians should steward such a responsibility if they did possess the power to lead a civil government. And they are alarmed by fellow Christians who have contemplated such matters and who reach conclusions aligned with the magisterial Reformers and many of America’s colonists and founders.

6. Christians should beware of prematurely separating from each other based on different political theologies.

It is challenging to sketch a spectrum of views on political theology. It is even more challenging to evaluate those views on the basis of exegesis, theology, history, and political theory.

The differences between the seven views in my taxonomy are significant. But how significant? For example, can Christians within views 3, 4, and 5 work closely together in Christian ministry? Does disagreeing entail that Christian colleagues (like pastors or professors) can't closely work together? I think it depends on the nature of the disagreement and the nature of their fellowship in Christian ministry.

While it is reasonable that some Christian ministries may want their primary leader (e.g., a lead pastor or president) to hold to a particular view of political theology, it seems to me that brothers in close ministry partnership may harmoniously and respectfully serve together while not completely agreeing on aspects of political theology.

At this moment in my American context, I think it is wise for Christians not to prematurely separate from each other based on different political theologies. The reason is that the orcs are not just at the gates; they are infiltrating the city as citizens and magistrates. While a sexual revolution is rapidly transforming our culture, I don't think fellow Christians should divide right now over the hypothetical scenario—which might occur decades in the future—of how to govern a nation if the vast majority of its citizens are Christians. There are more pressing matters to band together to address—evils such as abortion and wokeness and LGBT ideology and socialism.⁷¹ The strategy for faithful Christians right now involves basics that we should be able to agree on—such as be a good egg, love your wife, stay in fellowship, worship every week, teach your kids, work patiently, and keep politics in perspective.⁷²

As Kevin DeYoung insightfully explains, Reformed evangelicalism has painfully splintered over the past decade into at least four groups, which DeYoung labels *contrite*, *compassionate*, *careful*, and *courageous*.⁷³ The Christians in my circles are largely in the *careful* and *courageous* groups.⁷⁴ Must those third and fourth groups splinter even further over political theology?

I am not saying that all that matters is rooting out evil ideologies. We don't want to be only defensive; we want to go on the offensive with God's truth—

especially the truth of the gospel. We pray for revival! And if in God's mercy the vast majority of America's citizens become Christians, then it will be increasingly important for Christians to think through how to be wise stewards of the government. But while we are living under a government that persecutes or marginalizes Christians, is this the time to sharply separate over what the ideal political theology would be in the future hypothetical situation that most citizens are genuine Christians? When I think about political theology in light of theological triage, one of my burdens is that Christians not *unnecessarily* divide over differences on political theology.⁷⁵

7. No civil government will be flawless until King Jesus returns.

When I asked my mentor Don Carson for feedback on this article, he replied, "What starts off as an even-handed analysis of a variety of power-sharing patterns quickly becomes topsy-turvy as soon as the patterns of diverse relationships are overwhelmed by the actual issues on the ground. There is only one ultimate solution: Even so, come, Lord Jesus."⁷⁶ Yes, as 1 Corinthians 16:22 says, *Maranatha*—Lord, come!

¹ This article originally appeared at Christ Over All website on November 10, 2023 and is used with permission: <https://christoverall.com/article/longform/what-is-the-spectrum-of-major-views-on-political-theology-a-proposed-taxonomy-of-seven-views-on-religion-and-government/>.

² Thanks to friends who graciously offered feedback on drafts of this article (sometimes critical feedback that I didn't heed to their satisfaction!), including Josh Abbotoy, Anthony Bushnell, Ardel Caneday, Michael Carlino, Don Carson, Ben Crenshaw, Kevin DeYoung, Abigail Dodds, Tom Dodds, Ben Dunson, Ben Edwards, Nathan Finn, Greg Forster, David Haines, Brian Hanson, Michael Haykin, Zach Howard, David Innes, Tom Jones, Steve Keillor, Jonathan Leeman, Brad Littlejohn, Kevin McClure, Glenn Moots, Charles Naselli, Jenni Naselli, Jon Osburn, Joe Rigney, Aaron Rothermel, David Schrock, Levi Secord, Rick Segal, Colin Smothers, Brian Tabb, Andrew Walker, Mark Ward, Lael Weinberger, and Doug Wilson.

³ Garry R. Morgan, *Understanding World Religions in 15 Minutes a Day* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 16. On challenges to defining religion, see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁴ Morgan explains, "Because religion significantly impacts our worldview, religious beliefs and practices are highly interconnected with culture." Morgan, *Understanding World Religions*, 14. D. A. Carson defines *worldview* as "a reasonably comprehensive interpretation of reality (whether thought through or not) that affects all we do. Everyone has one." D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 120n14.

⁵ Cf. Algernon Sidney, *Sidney: Court Maxims*, ed. Hans W. Blom, Eco Haitsma Mulier, and Ronald Janse, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24; Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith, *Pocket Dictionary of Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 81. Jonathan Leeman is more specific: "Politics refers to (1) the institutional activity of governance (2) over an entire population (3) backed by the power of coercion, which in varying degrees will be regarded as legitimate." Jonathan Leeman, *Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 62.

- ⁶ For an accessible introduction to politics, see David C. Innes, *Christ and the Kingdoms of Men: An Introduction to the Study of Politics* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). Innes defines politics as “the shared life of liberty that involves ruling and being ruled in turn among equals for the common good: life, prosperity, piety, and moral flourishing” (207).
- ⁷ Cf. Oliver O’Donovan’s definition: “The name ‘political theology’ is generally given to proposals ... which draw out an earthly political discourse from the political language of religious discourse... It postulates an analogy—not a rhetorical metaphor only, or a poetic image, but an analogy grounded in reality between the acts of God and human acts, both of them taking place within the one public history which is the theatre of God’s saving purposes and mankind’s social undertaking.” Oliver O’Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.
- ⁸ Cf. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 154–59. Jonathan Leeman explains in one of his articles, “Throughout this article, I will generally use the term ‘government’ instead of ‘state.’ The latter term fits with the particular kinds of governments people associate with the nation-states of the mid-nineteenth century to the present. The term ‘government,’ however, better applies to a broad range of ruling institutions from throughout history—from the ancient empire to the chief and elders of a migratory indigenous tribe and everything in between.” Jonathan Leeman, “The Relationship of Church and State,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2020.
- ⁹ On political thought in the later Middle Ages: see Antony Black *Political Thought in Europe: 1250–1450*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- ¹⁰ Some resources that have helped me better understand the spectrum of political theology include Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1989); Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 176–85; P. C. Kemeny, ed., *Church, State, and Public Justice: Five Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007); Wayne Grudem, *Politics—According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 23–154; Robert Benne, *Good and Bad Ways to Think about Religion and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Amy E. Black, ed., *Five Views on the Church and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Leeman, *Political Church*, 55–97; Brian C. Collins, “Government,” in *Biblical Worldview: Creation, Fall, Redemption* (ed. Mark L. Ward Jr.; Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2016), 236–83.
- ¹¹ William D. Dennison summarizes Marx’s view: “Communism begins with the abolition of religion, so that the plague of illusory happiness can be turned into real happiness. The criticism of religion is to provide a chain reaction, so that the true, secular form of societal happiness can be experienced in the full life of communism.” *Karl Marx*, Great Thinkers (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 74.
- ¹² Cf. Wikipedia’s definition: “Organized religion, also known as institutional religion, is religion in which belief systems and rituals are systematically arranged and formally established, typically by an official doctrine (or dogma), a hierarchical or bureaucratic leadership structure, and a codification of proper and improper behavior.” “Organized Religion,” accessed 25 September 2023.
- ¹³ See the Schleithem Confession (1527), article 6. Cf. Daniel L. Akin, “An Expository Analysis of The Schleithem Confession,” *CTR 2.2* (1988): 362–65.
- ¹⁴ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); “FAQ about Mennonites,” Mennonite Church USA.
- ¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
- ¹⁶ Boyd argues that all civil government is “demonic,” and he asserts, “Functionally, Satan is the acting CEO of all earthly governments.” Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 21–22.
- ¹⁷ John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 20. Cf. Ronald Beiner’s definition: “the appropriation of religion by politics for its own purposes.” Ronald Beiner, *Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.
- ¹⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: And a Letter Concerning Toleration* (ed. Ian Shapiro; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Greg Forster, *John Locke’s Politics of Moral Consensus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Greg Forster, *Starting with Locke*, Starting with ... (London: Continuum, 2011); Greg Forster, “How to Get a Do-It-Yourself MA in Political Philosophy,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 10 September 2012; John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty,” in *Continental Drama*, ed. Charles William Eliot, The Harvard Classics (New

- York: Collier & Son, 1910), 203–325.
- ¹⁹ Jason Brennan, *Libertarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ²⁰ David Koyzis, *Political Visions and Illusions: A Survey and Christian Critique of Contemporary Ideologies*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 27–62.
- ²¹ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). For a friendly critique, see Hunter Baker, “The Secularist Biases of Rawls’s ‘Neutral’ Rules,” in *John Rawls and Christian Social Engagement: Justice as Unfairness* (ed. Anthony B. Bradley and Greg Forster; Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2015), 91–103.
- ²² Darryl Hart, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State* (Chicago: Dee, 2006).
- ²³ Daniel Heimbach argues that we should distinguish two definitions of religious liberty: (1) the old definition is that there is no state church—not that the government treats all religions the same way; (2) the new definition is that religions should be free from the government forcing them to act contrary to their religion. See Daniel Heimbach, *Fundamental Christian Ethics* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 419–20.
- ²⁴ Cf. Thomas S. Kidd, Paul D. Miller, and Andrew T. Walker, eds., *Baptist Political Theology* (Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic), 2023; Nathan A. Finn, “Against Religious Establishment in Baptist Political Theology,” *Church Matters: A Journal for Pastors* 1 (2023): 212–17.
- ²⁵ Cf. James M. Renihan, *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: A Contextual-Historical Exposition of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*, *Baptist Symbolics* 2 (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2022), 449–59.
- ²⁶ Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty, Against the Oppressions of the Present Day* (Boston: Boyle, 1773); Isaac Backus, *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754–1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).
- ²⁷ Grudem, *Politics*.
- ²⁸ Jonathan Leeman, “What Would An Ideal Polity Look Like From a Christian Perspective?,” *ERLC*, 16 January 2015; Leeman, *Political Church*; Jonathan Leeman, *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age* (Nashville: Nelson, 2018); Jonathan Leeman, “Conservatives Clash on the Goal of Government,” *Providence*, 6 September 2019; Jonathan Leeman, “Bringing the Apocalypse to Drag Queen Story Hour,” *Providence*, 23 September 2019; Leeman, “The Relationship of Church and State”; Jonathan Leeman, “Christian Nationalism Misrepresents Jesus, So We Should Reject It,” *9Marks*, 31 October 2022; Jonathan Leeman, “For Religious Liberty: Why My Kids and Yours Need Religious Freedom,” *American Reformer*, 1 December 2022; Jonathan Leeman, “A New Christian Authoritarianism,” *Church Matters: A Journal for Pastors* 1 (2023): 22–47; Jonathan Leeman, “Say No to Christian Nationalism,” *Church Matters: A Journal for Pastors* 1 (2023): 64–71; Jonathan Leeman, *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023).
- ²⁹ John Piper, “My Kingdom Is Not of This World’: The Lordship of Christ and the Limits of Civil Government,” *Desiring God*, 15 June 2023.
- ³⁰ Andrew T. Walker, *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone’s Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021); Andrew T. Walker, “Protecting Christian Political Theology from the Shibboleth of Christian Nationalism,” *Public Discourse*, 19 January 2021; Andrew T. Walker, “American Culture Is Broken. Is Theonomy the Answer?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 31 March 2021; Andrew T. Walker, “What We Lose in the Decline of Cultural Christianity,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 5 May 2021; Andrew T. Walker, “Against Catacomb Christianity: Christianity Belongs at the City Gates, Not the Margins,” *American Reformer*, 18 October 2021; Andrew T. Walker, “A Baptist Engagement with *The Case for Christian Nationalism*,” *9Marks*, 9 December 2022.
- ³¹ Scott Aniol, *Citizens and Exile: Christian Faithfulness in God’s Two Kingdoms* (Douglasville, GA: G3, 2023).
- ³² David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).
- ³³ Ryan T. Anderson and Robert P. George, “The Baby and the Bathwater,” *National Affairs* 41 (2019): 172–84; Andrew T. Walker, ed., *Social Conservatism for the Common Good: A Protestant Engagement with Robert P. George* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023).
- ³⁴ Cf. Timon Cline’s phrase “coercive conditions conducive to conversion” in “A Protestant Political Theology Roundtable,” *The London Lyceum*, 6 June 2022 (starting at 1:38:49).
- ³⁵ See especially Johannes Althusius, *Politica: An Abridged Translation of Politics Methodically Set Forth and Illustrated with Sacred and Profane Examples*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995).
- ³⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) says this under chapter 23, “Of the Civil Magistrate”: “The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the word and sacraments, or the power of the keys of

the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.” (The American revision in 1788 completely rewrites this paragraph.)

- ³⁷ John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or, A System of Practical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (London: Button and Son, 1815), 719. Cf. Ian Hugh Clary, “‘The First Care of Government’: John Gill (1697-1771) on the Magistrate and the Church,” *Reformation Today* (October–December 2022): 22–27.
- ³⁸ On how America began in some sense as a Christian nation, see Mark David Hall, *Did America Have a Christian Founding? Separating Modern Myth from Historical Truth* (Nashville: Nelson, 2019)—Hall prefers the term *Christian founding* instead of *Christian nation*; Hall demonstrates that Christian ideas profoundly influenced America’s founders. See also Aaron Menikoff, *Politics and Piety: Baptist Social Reform in America, 1770–1860*, Monographs in Baptist History 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 48–53; Mike Sabo, “What Is Christian Nationalism?,” *The American Mind*, 6 October 2023 (see under the headings “The History of American Christian Nationalism” and “A Christian American Culture”); Thomas G. West, *The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Rights, Public Policy, and the Moral Conditions of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). West focuses on philosophical founding principles centered on natural rights and recognizes that the founders understood and applied those natural rights within a historic Protestant context. For an argument that America did not begin as a Christian nation (as advocated by proponents like David Barton) but that acknowledges that Christianity was a key source for America’s founding principles, see John D. Wilsey, *One Nation Under God? An Evangelical Critique of Christian America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). On how Americans first understood the separation of church and state to refer to anti-establishment religious liberty at the federal level (i.e., no national state church) and then changed to the more modern view that wants to keep church and state completely separate, see Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Cf. Robert Joseph Renaud and Lael Daniel Weinberger, “Spheres of Sovereignty: Church Autonomy Doctrine and the Theological Heritage of the Separation of Church and State,” *Northern Kentucky Law Review* 35.1 (2008): 67–102.
- ³⁹ W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology*, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017); W. Bradford Littlejohn, *The Two Kingdoms: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Davenant Guides (Lincoln, NE: Davenant, 2017); Brad Littlejohn, “Against ‘Religious Liberty’: The Inescapability of Public Religion,” *American Reformer*, 29 November 2022; Brad Littlejohn, “Christian Nationalism or Christian Commonwealth? A Call for Clarity,” *Ad Fontes*, 7 December 2022.
- ⁴⁰ Douglas Wilson, “The Two Kingdoms That Weren’t,” *Ezra Institute of Contemporary Christianity*, 22 May 2020, 47:43-minute video; Douglas Wilson, “General Equity Theonomy,” *Reformed Basics* 13 (Moscow, ID: Christ Church, 25 February 2022), 17:25-minute video; Douglas Wilson, *Mere Christendom* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2023); Douglas Wilson, “‘My Kingdom Is Not of This World,’ Which Is Why We Were Instructed to Pray for It to Come,” *Blog & Mablog*, 21 June 2023.
- ⁴¹ Joe Rigney, “Identity or Influence? A Protestant Response to Jonathan Leeman,” *9Marks*, 11 November 2022; Glenn A. Moots and Joe Rigney, “The Myth of ‘Liberal, Secular America’: A Reply to D. G. Hart,” *American Reformer*, 4 July 2023. Cf. Glenn A. Moots, *Politics Reformed: The Anglo-American Legacy of Covenant Theology*, Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy: Studies in Religion and Politics (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2010); Glenn A. Moots, “American Separationism: When It Comes to Religious Establishment, American Protestants Have All Become Baptists,” *Law & Liberty*, 15 December 2022.
- ⁴² Daniel Strand, *Gods of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming)—a historical study of Augustine’s political theology in *The City of God*.
- ⁴³ See Josh Daws, “Christian Nationalism: A Primer for the Layman; A Guide and Some Advice for the Uninitiated,” *American Reformer*, 4 October 2023.
- ⁴⁴ The two-swords view goes back at least to a letter that Pope Gelasius I wrote in 494. Brian Collins explains the view: “The medieval Roman Catholic Church flipped the state-over-church position on its head, claiming a church-over-state view instead. If the pope is Christ’s representative on earth (Christ’s ‘vicar’), then of course the pope has authority over any other human leader. The Roman Church recognized that the state had its own rightful sphere in which it functioned, but when Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 800, it was the pope who did the crowning—implying that he had authority over the emperor. Four hundred years later, another pope put all of England under an interdict when the English king didn’t like the pope’s appointment of

- an English archbishop. And it was the English king who had to give in the end. Also, the Inquisition carried out by the Roman Church punished heretics with the sword of the state.” Collins, “Government,” 271.
- 45 <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/transcript-interview-with-p-andrew-sandlin-and-joe-boot-on-christian-nationalism/>
- 46 Cf. R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2009); Rousas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law: Volume 1*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2020); Rousas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law: Volume 2, Law and Society*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 2010); Rousas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law: Volume 3, The Intent of the Law*, 2nd ed. (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1999); Michael J. McVicar, *Christian Reconstruction: R. J. Rushdoony and American Religious Conservatism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
- 47 Cf. Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Sourcebook in Roman Social History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 386–91.
- 48 I say “maybe” because there is a lot of scholarly debate about how to understand Constantine. E.g., see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).
- 49 “In practice, the term ‘Erastianism’ is elastic. Generally, it signifies that the state is supreme in ecclesiastical causes, but Erastus [1524–83] dealt only with the church’s disciplinary powers. When Roman emperors became Christian, the relations of civil and ecclesiastical rulers became a real problem. It became universally accepted until modern times that the state could punish or execute heretics. The name ‘Erastian’ emerged in England in the Westminster Assembly (1643) when outstanding men like John Selden and Bulstrode Whitelocke advocated the state’s supremacy over the church. The assembly rejected this view and decided that church and state have separate but coordinate spheres, each supreme in its own province but bound to cooperate with one another for God’s glory.” Alexander MacDonald Renwick, “Erastianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 278.
- 50 On Islam, see D. A. Carson, “Is There Anything Distinctive about a Christian—and Specifically Biblical—Understanding of the Relationship between Church and State?” *SBJT* 11.4 (2007): 102–3.
- 51 This was my experience as a 2023 Cotton Mather Fellow with American Reformer as I learned from experts in political theory and history.
- 52 D. A. Carson, *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*; D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).
- 53 Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022).
- 54 See Joe Rigney, “The Tao in America: Culture War and *The Abolition of Man*,” *American Reformer*, 19 September 2022.
- 55 Tuininga’s research suggests that Calvin fits better under view 5 than view 6: Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin’s Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ’s Two Kingdoms*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 56 D. A. Carson: “There may be a place for emphasizing certain elements in the heritage of the ‘Christ against culture’ pattern because of the existential realities of persecution. . . . Although there are better and worse examples of how these tensions might play out, there is no ideal stable paradigm that can be transported to other times and places: every culture is perpetually in flux, ensuring that no political structure is a permanent ‘solution’ to the tension.” Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 60, 207; cf. 194.
- 57 Cf. Josh Abbotoy, “What Is the Regime? Part 1: An Explainer,” *American Reformer*, 30 August 2023.
- 58 Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 145.
- 59 Kevin DeYoung, “Does Christianity Transcend All Our Political Disagreements? Right and Wrong Ways to Think about Christianity and Politics,” *WORLD Opinions*, 20 October 2022. The most detailed I have heard Kevin DeYoung speak on political theology is in six lectures from his Systematic Theology 3 course at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina (uploaded to YouTube in August–September 2023): “Lecture 1: Introduction to James Bannerman and Patronage,” “Lecture 2: Defining the Church / Church & State,” “Lecture 3: Church & State / Ecclesiology & Sacraments,” “Lecture 4: God & Government,” and “Lecture 5 & 6: The Nature and Extent of Church Power / Church Power in Doctrine & Worship.”
- 60 Kevin DeYoung summarizes and reflects on his article “Does Christianity Transcend All Our Political Disagreements?” at the beginning of “Lecture 3: Church & State / Ecclesiology & Sacraments,” 1:30–19:16 min., and he suggests these illustrations from about 15:30 to 16:10 min.

- ⁶¹ E.g., John Piper, “Policies, Persons, and Paths to Ruin: Pondering the Implications of the 2020 Election,” *Desiring God*, 22 October 2020.
- ⁶² E.g., Timothy Keller, “How Do Christians Fit Into the Two-Party System? They Don’t,” *New York Times*, 28 September 2018. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “Winsomeness Can Be a Virtue or a Vice: Winning Some vs. Pleasing Some,” *American Reformer*, 24 August 2023.
- ⁶³ E.g., Douglas Wilson, “All of Christ for All of Life,” *Blog and Mablog*, 10 October 2010.
- ⁶⁴ E.g., <https://online.hillsdale.edu/course-list>.
- ⁶⁵ DeYoung, “Lecture 3: Church & State / Ecclesiology & Sacraments,” about 16:10 to 17:12 min.
- ⁶⁶ Kevin DeYoung argues, “Lockean liberalism is not the problem; the problem is when this liberalism exists without the communal aims of classical republicanism and the theological assumptions of Christianity.” “Liberty, Pandora, and the Serpent: What Undergirds the American Experiment?,” *WORLD Opinions*, 10 November 2022. Someone might ask, “So what is the point of trying to have good civil governments if they are all subject to cultural decay?” Consider what Josh Daws writes in “Christian Nationalism: A Primer for the Layman”: “Looking to formerly Christian nations as examples of the inevitability of decline tells us little about how we should order society. In a fallen world, no worthwhile endeavor is going to be perfectly executed and resist the inevitable decline. That’s just the state of the world we live in. To go back to the Christian School comparison, one could easily point to Harvard, Princeton, and Yale as examples of why Christian colleges never work, but that shouldn’t stop us from trying to provide a Christian alternative to secular Universities. While there’s much to learn from history, we should take care not to let past failures prevent us from starting new endeavors. Given a long enough timeline, you could easily conclude that Paul’s missionary endeavors were pointless because many of those areas are now dominated by Islam.”
- ⁶⁷ Aaron M. Renn, “The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism,” *First Things*, February 2022. See also the videos from the “Welcome to Negative World” conference on September 9–10, 2022, featuring Aaron Renn, Joe Rigney, and James Wood (hosted by C. R. Wiley).
- ⁶⁸ Step one in any debate is to define your terms. On Christian nationalism, see Josh Daws, “Christian Nationalism: A Primer for the Layman.”
- ⁶⁹ Cf. Glenn A. Moots, “Was the Protestant Reformation a Radical Revolution?,” *Law & Liberty*, 29 October 2021. Innes cautions, “We should not be too quick to judge the peoples of Old European Christendom for not being us. The Christian faith was woven through all their social relations and institutions, holding everything together. These Christian premoderns quite reasonably understood that open attacks on the faith were attacks on society itself. Hence blasphemy and Sabbath laws. We see this same understanding today in Islamic countries, and we are appalled with modern, liberal democratic indignation. But people in our own recent Christian past would be just as puzzled as these Muslim societies are by the objection.” Innes, *Christ and the Kingdoms of Men*, 83.
- ⁷⁰ Philip Yancey, “The Lure of Theocracy,” *Christianity Today* 50:7 (1 July 2006): 64.
- ⁷¹ See Daws, “Christian Nationalism: A Primer for the Layman.”
- ⁷² Those are some of the headings from Doug Wilson’s serious and joyful believe-and-obey-the-Bible approach in his documentary “How to Save the World (in Eleven *Simple Steps).” The documentary is based on a short book: Douglas Wilson, *Gashmu Saith It: How to Build Christian Communities That Save the World* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2021).
- ⁷³ Kevin DeYoung, “Why Reformed Evangelicalism Has Splintered: Four Approaches to Race, Politics, and Gender,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 9 March 2021.
- ⁷⁴ Cf. Naselli, “Winsomeness Can Be a Virtue or a Vice.”
- ⁷⁵ Cf. the MacArthur Center’s podcast episode on theological triage: “The Drivetrain” (6 September 2023).
- ⁷⁶ D. A. Carson, email to Andy Naselli, 8 August 2023, shared with permission.