



Hope in stormy political times

For many, politics at the moment is exciting. For others, it is scary.

Radical parties are gaining in strength. Some are relieved that finally there are politicians championing critical issues that more centrist parties appear to have been ignoring. Others believe that these radical parties are offering simplistic and sometimes dangerous solutions.

This article is part of our election resources which is designed to help Christians pray, reflect and vote with discernment. Most of all, these resources are designed to remind us that our hope is in Jesus Christ alone, that He is the only one who can allay our fears.

What is really going on in politics?

We all have opinions. We all have helpful insights. But none of us fully understand. That includes media commentators and the politicians themselves. What follows are some thoughts to help Christians reflect, pray and be Good News People in this time of anxiety and division.

Fear of losing one's job. Fear of terror attack. Fear of invasion & war. Fear of losing one's cultural identity and community. Fear of climate disaster. Fear of demonization because of who I am or what I believe and say. Fear of freedoms disappearing. Fear of the world changing and I/we/my nation/Europe will be left behind. Fear of loneliness. Fear of a poor and painful old age.

There are so many understandable worries. Some have already come to pass and people are hurting, while some might never happen but we still worry. Many of us simply don't understand why others do not see the importance of our own concern but choose to prioritise another. Many of us look into the future and sense disaster approaching. We long for leaders who can save us.

We demand that politicians take our fears seriously and, indeed, it is their job to help. However, no politician has guaranteed solutions. This fallen world will be full of trouble until Jesus returns. Politicians cannot give us rock solid security. Promises of simple answers will disappoint. Divisive rhetoric fosters a sense of grievance and victimhood. It also makes finding genuine answers even harder; the well-being of nations is improved when people help to work towards it with each other, not just leaving it to the authorities to sort out.

Politics is about ideologies. Some of these are traditional political labels, e.g. left-wing, liberal or conservative. Laid over these are beliefs like secular humanism, faith heritage or loyalty to nation. Political parties offer different visions and disagreement is normal. However, things go wrong when any of these ideologies become idolatrous. This happens when they are given blind loyalty or claim that they alone have the answers. But it is only Jesus' return which will bring about true Shalom. While

they may not know it, politicians are always under God's sovereignty and His law^[1]. The Lord will not tolerate those who blatantly act as if they are above Him.

So what should Christians do?

Firstly, we need to hold onto God in prayer, knowing that our security and satisfaction are in the Lord alone, our hope is in Him and that it is Jesus' return alone which will bring an end to all evil and suffering. God has not promised us an easy life. The future may mean that we face greater challenges than those of today but the Lord holds us safe. Our identity is in Him, our primary citizenship is of His eternal Kingdom. These things cannot be removed. We may be loyal to other identities but they must never have our ultimate allegiance.

Secondly, we need to understand our responsibilities as Kingdom builders, sharing the Gospel of salvation in word & deed, shining brightly as people of hope to all, including to those who vote differently to us.

When Paul urged Timothy to pray for rulers^[2], it was at a time of horrific persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. We are called to intercede for all in politics. If we do not like the political choices on offer, let's pray for better people to step forward to stand for election next time. Let's pray for people of integrity, servant hearts and good will, including many Christians, to join different political parties. Let's pray that there will be more Christian salt and light, fighting the rot, bringing flavour and life to public life. But we should also welcome the good that non-Christians contribute.

Christians are called to be peace makers. Part of this is to model how to discuss politics well, including how to respect those with whom we profoundly disagree. There are people sitting next to you in church, at work or along your street whose views you hate. Maybe we avoid political conversation, maybe we have argued too strongly. Can we initiate an opportunity for respectful listening, seeking to understand, discovering some common ground and beginning to break down the walls between us?^[3] Or maybe there is a longer journey of understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation that is needed. The Lord can help us to make steps in the right direction.

We are called to pray, discern and reflect as politicians compete for our vote. This election pack can help you with thoughts about biblical foundations and questions to ask. These are helpful for individuals but they can also be used in church and small group contexts.

Ultimately, we need to remember that the command to "Love your neighbour" has socio-political dimensions. All Christians are called to be salt and light, at home, in our neighbourhoods, at work, in all our lives. Let's allow our hearts and minds to be shaped through prayer and Bible study so that we have a renewed, biblical vision for what Shalom looks like and can offer the hope that this dark world needs.

If you want to explore political ideologies & idolatries in more depth, including secularism, liberal dogmatism, nationalism, left-wing populism and the yearning for security, we recommend EEA's Issachar papers found at <https://www.europeanea.org/resources-issachar-project/>.

^[1] Bible verses include Deuteronomy 17:18-21 and 1 Kings 21.

^[2] 1 Timothy 2:1-2

^[3] The European Evangelical Alliance has developed 2 discussion resources to support respectful conversation. On issues of refugees & migration, go to <https://www.europeanea.org/peace-between-dialogue/>. On nationhood, go to <https://www.europeanea.org/loving-our-nation-well-a-resource-for-christians-and-churches/>