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Parker McCloud

Loyola Marymount University, pmccloud@lion.lmu.edu

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McCloud, Parker, "Jesus and Paul's Teachings Today" (2013). *Writing Programs*. 6.
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Parker McCloud

Jesus and Paul's Teachings Today

The ideal relationship between faith and politics in the New Testament is outlined in the teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostle Paul. In the Christian religion, Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God, and comes to Earth to sacrifice himself for the sins of all people. Paul was an avid follower of Judaism, but later became a key figure in Christianity. These two teachers were expressing their ideals during a time of Roman occupation. From this occupation sprouted Christian dogma on how one should interact within the political sphere of the land. It is true that the ruling power in the nation was foreign, but the teachings of early Christianity apply to many situations of the political spectrum. Both Jesus and Paul's teachings now influence how modern American Christians treat other citizens and express their morals through their government.

Dating all the way back to Christianity's Judaic beginnings, "loving thy neighbor" has become a virtually universal Christian endorsement. Originally this idea was meant to only apply to the people of the Jewish community. One of Christianity's trade mark themes is expanding the covenant of the Old Testament to include all peoples. Jesus Christ was a master at this inclusionary expansion. His preferable medium was the parable. In this case Jesus tells the Good Samaritan parable which illustrates how one must show love to all people. In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. The story goes as such, "So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he

put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'" (Luke 10:30-35). This means love must transcend borders, political stances, and cultures. The parable is one of the most important influences on Christians today. When combining this aspect of unprejudiced love in politics, a particularly interesting dynamic is created. Many Christians today interpret this scripture as a command to give aid to all that need it, regardless of political borders. This thought process is embodied by the many missions taken on by private citizens to try and help create better lives for those in impoverished nations. Christian Americans travel to just about all countries, including hostile or unfriendly places of other religions or political ideology, to spread the word of their religion. It is very common for the young people of the Southwestern United States to participate in these trips. In addition, the United States government provides very large amounts of money to impoverished nations in an act of good will. This aid is given without discrimination of religion.

In this era it seems logical that aid should be given out indiscriminately; however, in Paul's time interaction with people of different religions was not so simple. With Roman Paganism being the predominately practiced religion in the area, it was hard for early Christians to even eat with other religious groups. This was due to food being dedicated to Pagan gods. If Christians refused to dedicate their food to the Roman gods, the offense was punishable by death. Professor Siker comments, "Valerian then ordered the execution of church leaders who refused to set an example for others by offering sacrifices to the gods." In addition many Messianic Jews still clung to eating kosher foods. This example is a large juxtaposition to

modern Christians' respect to other cultures and religious practices today. Today, however, many Christians are not tolerant of other religions' practices as Jesus and Paul have guided them to be.

The teachings of Jesus and Paul have done much to influence the morals, ethics, and political decisions of those that practice the religion. Christians in America have been strongly politically organized for quite some time. Recently Christians have mobilized in political controversies such as abortion, the death penalty, and war. In relation to the death sentence the significance in Jesus and Paul's testaments only act as reinforcement. Jesus and Paul both taught that to take a life was wrong. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment'" (Mark 5:21). Christians today argue that the reason life is sacred and must not be taken from anyone is because life is a gift from God. By taking something that was given by God, you are committing the ultimate sin. Christians do believe that the offended party is worthy of justice, but just through other means. It is that logic that has led many states to repeal their laws that allow death as a possible court decision. Instead less severe alternative sentences have been seen fit to replace that of death.

Another government issue that deals with murder is war. This is a much trickier subject because it deals with the security of the whole country rather than the justice of a family or a community. The Old Testament is full of text that can be used as justification for protection of oneself, family, and country. However the New Testament does differ to some degree. Jesus and Paul preached of a brotherhood of no boundaries that conflicts with idea of war: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mark 5: 44). It is strange to think that this verse pertains to Christianity especially when looking back on the Religion's history. Christians have been fighting Holy Wars for centuries that have been juxtaposition to the

“love your enemy” mentality. In the modern era the “enemy” that should be receiving love from Christian Americans has been in Islamic states of the Middle East. Instead there have only been years of fighting and too many deaths on both sides of the battlefield. Representatives voted into office on the basis of their piety have not necessarily embodied the doctrine of Christianity they are supposed to. War has always been an exceptionally hot topic in Christian communities, but there are domestic ones just as volatile.

In recent years there have been numerous debates in regard to laws regulating abortion. Separation of church and state are supposed to keep issues like this strictly secular. The democratic set up of this country as a republic allows personal religious beliefs to enter the political world through sheer mass numbers. Simply put, if enough religious people speak out on an issue, religion can influence government. Christians argue abortion is wrong by quoting Paul when he says, “But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased” (Galatians 1:15). Paul says that God plays a role in his life before birth. This allows the scripture to be interpreted as saying that God has blessed the baby from conception. This means that to interfere with the pregnancy is to tamper with life already sanctioned and approved of by God himself. The faith that Christian practitioners display overlaps with the political climate of the nation.

The role of American Christians in the political sphere is defined by their interactions with others and how they influence the United States government. The themes that they express do not only belong to one country, however. The world contains seven billion human beings; nearly one third of the entire population believes in the Christian religion. These believers are on every continent and have crossed every sea. What connects these peoples is the belief in the teachings of Jesus and influential believers such as the apostle Paul. The theology of Christianity

combined with mass numbers and dispersion have been able to penetrate and influence large numbers of political environments on a world wide scale.

Works Cited

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