



Biblical basis for advocacy

Scripture has much to say about how we are to interact with governments. In the Old Testament, we hear the call from the people of Israel for a king and the subsequent warning on how a king will act (1 Kings 8). Deuteronomy 17:14–20 sets limits on what a king should and should not do.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus' distinction between what is given to Caesar and to God (Mark 12:17), Paul's declaration that governing authorities are instituted by God for the purpose of bringing order (Romans 13:1–7), his instruction to pray for elected officials (1 Timothy 2:1–2), and the sweeping declaration in Colossians 1:15–17 that all rulers and powers are subject to God.

Throughout Scripture there are also examples of people of faith advocating against unjust policies and calling on government authorities to uphold justice and fairness. Elijah called King Ahab to account for his

unjust seizure of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Esther pleaded to the king to spare her people (Esther 7). John the Baptist lost his head as a result of his challenge to the ruler Herod (Matthew 14:1–12).

Anabaptists have long held mixed views of government, while strongly upholding the principle of separation of church and state. Some early Anabaptists articulated a clear distinction between the church and the world, such as in the Schleithem Confession of 1527, which declared that Christians cannot serve in government.

Others, such as Pilgram Marpeck, worked as a government employee. Menno Simons taught that Christians could serve in government and called on government authorities to uphold just policies: “you must see to it that justice is done between two parties in dispute and to free the oppressed out of the hand of the oppressor” (“Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” 1539).

Many Mennonites who migrated from Europe to the United States chose to be “the quiet in the land,” not wanting to get involved in government affairs as long as they were left alone to live out their beliefs. But Mennonites have historically engaged with the government when their own interests were at stake, particularly on the issue of conscientious objection.

When we as Anabaptists engage with governing officials, we should do so out of our lived witness as a church. In other words, if our congregation is not doing anything to address poverty locally or around the world, we probably should not be telling the government how to do it.

But when we are actively engaging issues of justice such as poverty and race in our churches, we quickly realize that these are deeply systemic issues which need to be addressed—not just at the personal or congregational level, but also at the societal level through more just policies.

This gives our witness to government both integrity and humility—recognizing that there are no easy answers, but that we will continue to work faithfully toward a more just and equitable society.



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