

EXCERPT



Faithful Politics

Ten Approaches to Christian Citizenship and Why It Matters

August 20, 2024 | \$24, 232 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0749-5

Christians who share similar faith convictions can arrive at different political conclusions. In this nonpartisan overview, Miranda Zapor Cruz shares ten theological approaches Christians throughout history have used to navigate political participation, helping us form a vision of faithful citizenship in an increasingly polarized society.

Citizens of the Kingdom

In the weeks leading up to my first Fourth of July weekend as a Texas resident, I started to notice signs that I wasn't in New Jersey anymore. I had moved to Waco, also known as "Jerusalem on the Brazos," after living in New Jersey for five years. Rounding the corner on my church, I was surprised to discover that the sidewalk surrounding the building was lined with American flags. I soon learned my church celebrated Independence Day by meeting for only one weekend service, instead of the usual five, with music led by a patriotic band. I realized this wasn't unusual for the region, as I noticed billboards and radio ads promoting various "God and Country" services.

For some, this may be a familiar and unremarkable element of celebrating the Fourth of July. For others, it may be confusing or even off-putting, seemingly conflating worship of God with worship of the United States. The different reactions to a church lined with American flags illustrates the range of positions on the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the country. Are Kingdom and country mutually exclusive, or do they complement each other? Do they merely coexist, or are they mutually supporting? What does it mean to celebrate and participate in both citizenships?

Understanding what it means for Christians to be citizens of the Kingdom of God and of the United States requires us to recognize crucial distinctions between the two. I say "crucial," a word whose root is *crux* or cross, because the distinction is, indeed, the cross of Jesus Christ. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the core reality that defines the Kingdom of God, and it is not the core reality that defines the United States—at least not constitutionally or legally. The Kingdom of God is not the United States, and the United States is not the Kingdom of God. What is the difference? And why does the difference matter?

A building's foundation determines how it functions. Whether it is the house built on the rock versus the sand (Matthew 7:24-27), or on concrete slab versus cinder blocks, the foundation determines the permanence, purpose, and stability of the structure. The Kingdom of God and the United States are built on different foundations; therefore, the two function very differently. Where the Kingdom of God is eternal, the United States is temporal; where the Kingdom is universal, the country has boundaries; while the Kingdom has abundant resources, the country has limited resources. These opposing foundations demonstrate the differences between Kingdom and country and should raise questions about the character of Christian citizenship in the country.

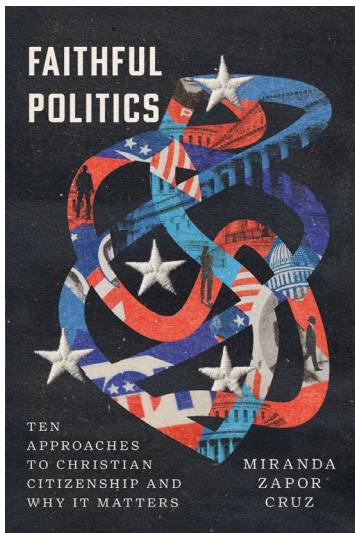
Eternal vs. temporal. Those of us who watched in horror as the Twin Towers collapsed on September 11, 2001, felt something similar to what the Romans felt in 410. The attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon shook to the core many American Christians who had assumed America was unshakable, or even uniquely ordained to stand as a symbol of God's providential favor. Americans have trouble conceiving of the United States as inherently temporal. We learn the history and mythology of the country's origins in grade school, but in learning about how the country began we do not also consider how it might end. We learn about the collapse of empires around the world and throughout history, but as a country we prefer not to imagine a similar fate might one day befall the United States. We think our military or our economic dominance will secure our future, or our system of government will prevent collapse. Other countries may disintegrate, but the United States will endure until, well, forever.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media



ivpress.com/media



EXCERPT



Faithful Politics *Ten Approaches to Christian Citizenship and Why It Matters*

August 20, 2024 | \$24, 232 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0749-5

Christians who share similar faith convictions can arrive at different political conclusions. In this nonpartisan overview, Miranda Zapor Cruz shares ten theological approaches Christians throughout history have used to navigate political participation, helping us form a vision of faithful citizenship in an increasingly polarized society.

Augustine gives us a stark reminder that “earthly kingdoms perish.” Only God and his Kingdom are imperishable, and we cannot ascribe imperishability to anyone or anything other than God. Even as we work to preserve and protect the stability of the United States, we must not pretend it is eternal. Whether its demise is geopolitical or eschatological, the United States will come to an end. It is temporary, perishable, impermanent, by its very nature. This temporality of the United States stands in stark contrast to the eternal Kingdom of God. As unsettling as the collapse of earthly kingdoms might be, the permanence of God’s Kingdom has been and should continue to be a source of profound comfort to the people of God.

The Hebrew people invoked God’s eternal reign repeatedly in circumstances of temporal threat. The prophetess Miriam declared, “the Lord will reign forever and ever” as she watched the destruction of Pharaoh’s army (Exodus 15:18). The author of Lamentations, writing in the midst of devastating exile, cried out, “But you, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations” (Lamentations 5:19). And John of Patmos wrote of a choir of angels proclaiming, “he will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). In times of earthly upheaval, the eternal Kingdom is a source of hope for Christians.

At the time of the September 11 attacks, I was taking a sociology course with a professor who was a Christian from Bethlehem and had grown up as a refugee in Gaza. In the wake of the tragedy, even as he urged his family to remain at home for fear of anti-Middle Eastern violence and prejudice, he taught us about the temporality of earthly kingdoms. He had grown up in the liminal space that was created when one earthly kingdom supplanted another. While the attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon was shocking to him, it did not cause existential fear the way it did for many of his students and colleagues. He knew that earthly kingdoms pass away, and that we are only secure when our identity and hope are firmly settled in the Kingdom of God. He handled our shock and fear gently, while also urging us to reconsider our perceptions of American strength and permanence.

Earthly kingdoms are temporal, and we await the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. While we wait, we work for the stability and wellbeing of the earthly cities we inhabit, even as we recognize that we are sojourners awaiting the return of our King.

—Adapted from chapter one, “Citizens of the Kingdom”



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media



ivpress.com/media

***Faithful Politics***

Ten Approaches to Christian Citizenship and Why It Matters

August 20, 2024 | \$24, 232 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0749-5

Miranda Zapor Cruz is professor of historical theology at Indiana Wesleyan University. She holds a PhD in religion, politics, and society from Baylor University's J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies and an MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Engaging Politics as Faithful Christians

What led to your interest in and now sharing about political participation and Christianity?

Miranda Zapor Cruz: My motivation is to equip Christians to think carefully and faithfully about our approaches to politics and the ways we engage with people who come to different conclusions. My students' questions about how to think about and participate in contentious political contexts drove me to write a response. I am addressing the need for Christians to have frameworks for carefully considering the ways we participate in politics, beyond simplistic party alignments.

What is your main thesis in *Faithful Politics*?

Cruz: The United States is not, has never been, and will not become the kingdom of God. Therefore, no single political party or ideology is entirely compatible with Christian convictions. Thus, Christians who are faithfully following Christ will come to different conclusions about political participation and different positions on divisive issues. We can understand and respect our differences, while adding salt (flavor, preservative) to the political process.

My approach is strictly nonpartisan and integrates Christian history, theology, and biblical interpretation to explore different faithful approaches to politics. It is academic, while being accessible and written with laypeople in mind.

Who did you have in mind as you were writing this book?

Cruz: Christian adults who are politically engaged (or politically confused) and want to think critically about politics, especially during election years. The book is well-suited to church book discussion groups and to college courses on faith and politics.

What do you hope your book contributes to the study of Christianity and politics?

Cruz: I outline approaches to political engagement to a degree that no other book does. It goes far beyond "four views" type books, while also being more specific than books that urge unity in Christ or simply lament divisiveness.

The chapters examine the historical roots of each of the ten approaches, rooting the present in the past in a way that allows us to learn from the Christians who've gone before. This makes it useful and instructive for political science and church history, among other disciplines.

The book helps the reader think carefully and critically about her own political convictions and choices, and it gives a framework for options he might not have considered.



Karin DeHaven, academic publicist
kdehaven@ivpress.com or ivpress.com/media