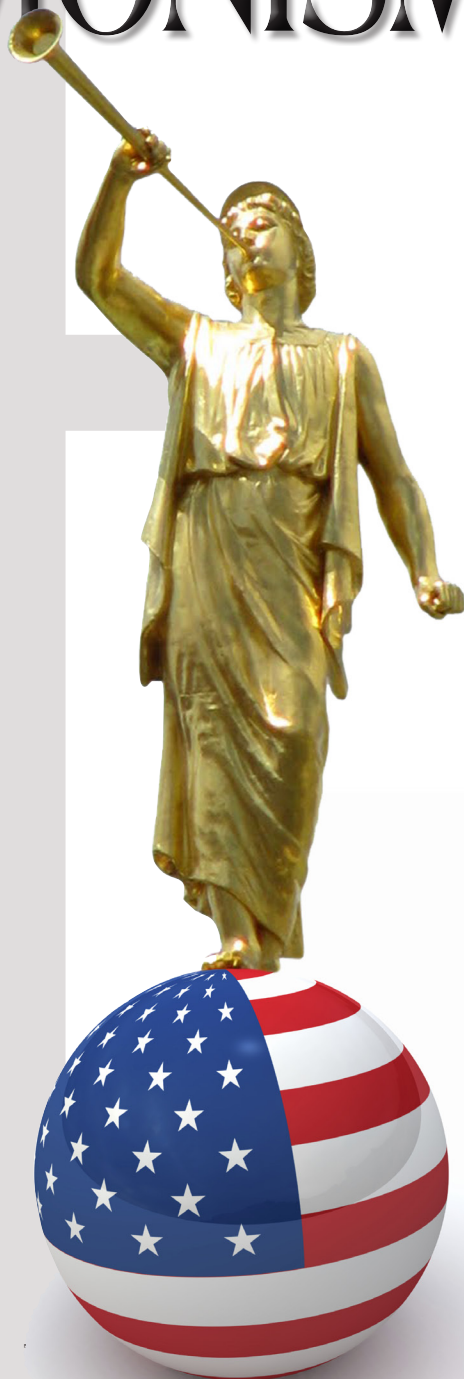


# MORMONISM

in the  
public  
and  
political  
square

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a pastoral  
response



## Dear friends in Christ,

On October 7, 2011, Robert Jeffress, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, endorsed Rick Perry for President of the United States. He also shared his thoughts on Mitt Romney, another candidate for president, specifically with regard to Romney's Mormon faith. In his comments, Pastor Jeffress called Mormonism a "cult." This statement has sparked many to ask, "Is Mormonism a cult?"

We, the pastoral staff of Concordia, have received *many* questions regarding Mormonism. In response, we have prepared a document titled, "A Pastoral Response to Mormonism in the Public and Political Square." In it, we cover three areas which are salient to the current discussion. Here is a broad overview of the document.

### Mormon Theology

Theologically, we must understand that Mormonism cannot be considered a part of historic, orthodox Christianity. Its teachings concerning the Trinity, the nature of God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are far removed from biblical and historical Christian teaching. Mormonism does not confess the Trinity nor does it believe that a person is saved by God's grace through faith in Christ *alone*. Rather, Mormons believe they are saved by grace *and* their pious works.

### Mormon Religion

In this section, we tackle the question *du jour*, "Is Mormonism a cult?" Theologically, we can say that Mormonism is a cult, for it claims new, advanced, divine revelation in addition to the Bible. Psychologically and sociologically, the validity of calling

Mormonism a cult becomes less clear. A cult, as the word is used in its secular sense, denotes a body which is explicitly psychologically and sociologically subversive. Mormonism does not necessarily bear this hallmark of a cult. Therefore, when we call Mormonism a “cult,” it is important that we define the term.

## **Our Christian Duty**

With a Mormon presidential candidate among the frontrunners this election cycle, many are asking, “May I vote for someone who is not a Christian?” The short answer is, “Yes.” We may prefer a Christian candidate, but because those in political offices rule in the kingdom of the world and not in the Kingdom of God, they can be competent to rule even if they are not Christian. Christians are free to pick the most competent candidate, even if he is not a Christian candidate, for political office.

There is much more discussion of these three points in the document. I would encourage you to take the time to read it and familiarize yourself with this important matter so that, as Christians, we can respond together to the questions of our culture for the sake of the gospel.

God bless you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Tucker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Bill Tucker  
Senior Pastor

# A Pastoral Response to Mormonism in the Public and Political Square

**W**ith the election cycle kicking into full gear, politicians, pastors, and pundits are beginning to offer endorsements with regard to who they would like to see elected President of the United States. At the Values Voter Summit, in an endorsement for Rick Perry, a Republican candidate for president, Robert Jeffress, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, asked, “Do we want a candidate who is a good, moral person, or do we want a candidate who is a born-again follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?”<sup>1</sup> Following his remarks, Pastor Jeffress was asked to clarify his comments and explain specifically what he thought of Rick Perry over and against another frontrunner candidate, Mitt Romney, to whom he seemed to allude when he spoke of a “good, moral person.” The pastor replied, “Rick Perry’s a Christian. He’s an evangelical Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Mitt Romney’s a good, moral person, but he’s not a Christian. Mormonism is not Christianity. It has always been considered a cult by the mainstream of Christianity.”<sup>2</sup> These remarks sparked a firestorm, with many voters and reporters alike indignant that the pastor would designate Mormonism as a “cult.”

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1 Robert Jeffress at the Values Voter Summit, October 7, 2011, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700186158/Video-of-Pastor-Robert-Jeffress-at-Values-Voters-Summit.html>.

2 Associated Press, “Perry Backer: Romney in a ‘Cult,’ Not a Christian,” <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/10/07/perry-backer-romney-in-cult-not-christian/>.

Because of the attention and ire that Pastor Jeffress' comments have drawn, we have received many questions concerning the Mormon Church<sup>3</sup> and its relationship to mainstream Christianity. In light of these questions, we thought it would be appropriate to briefly address the teachings of Mormonism theologically, the status of Mormonism religiously, and the duty Christians have as voting citizens vocationally.

## The Teachings of Mormonism

First, we turn to the teachings of Mormonism from a theological perspective. *Theologically, we must understand that Mormonism cannot be considered a part of historic, orthodox Christianity.* Indeed, Mormonism explicitly rejects claims that it is part of the Christian tradition. Mormonism teaches that before May 15, 1829, there was no true Church on earth. It was on this day that John the Baptist allegedly visited Joseph Smith and conferred upon him and his friend, Oliver Cowdery, the Aaronic priesthood. Before this prophetic encounter with John the Baptist, Mormons claim, "There was no one living in mortality who held the keys to this Priesthood."<sup>4</sup> In other words, before this time, Mormons teach that no one had the priestly pedigree to be a part of true Christianity. It had been completely lost from the days of the apostles. Thus, according to their own statements, Mormons claim to be the restoration and repristination of Christianity and not a part of the history or orthodoxy of the Church over the past two thousand years. Therefore, we should take Mormons at their word and not call them "Christians" in any historic or orthodox sense.

A brief survey of Mormon beliefs reveals that Mormons are indeed

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<sup>3</sup> "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints" is the official and legal name of what is colloquially called "the Mormon Church." Both names are used interchangeably throughout this statement.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1922) 68.

far removed from traditional and foundational Christian doctrines.

### *The Trinity*

To begin with, Mormons reject the doctrine of the Trinity which states that there is one God, consisting of three co-equal and co-eternal persons: “Latter-Day Saints reject the doctrines of the Trinity as taught by most Christian churches today.”<sup>5</sup> Mormons also have beliefs about the individual persons of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that are at wide variance with traditional Christianity. For instance, they teach, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.”<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this flatly contradicts the Scriptural witness that “God is spirit” (John 4:24)<sup>7</sup> and “a spirit does not have flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). Moreover, Mormons teach that God was once a man: “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!”<sup>8</sup> This, of course, denies the immutability and the eternity of God (cf. Malachi 3:6, Psalm 90:2).

### *Christology*

As for Christ, Mormonism teaches that Jesus is the spirit brother of Lucifer. Mormons espouse that when the world was in need of a Savior, both Jesus and Satan presented their cases before the Father as to who would make the better Redeemer. Then, “after hearing both sons speak, Heavenly Father said, ‘I will send the first.’ Jesus Christ was chosen and ordained to be

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5 Daniel Peterson and Stephen Ricks, “Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity” (March 1988) <http://lds.org/ensign/1988/03/comparing-lds-beliefs-with-first-century-christianity?lang=eng>.

6 *Doctrine and Covenants*, 130.22, <http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/130?lang=eng>.

7 Scriptural citations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2001).

8 *Achieving a Celestial Marriage: Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1992) 129.

our Savior.”<sup>9</sup> Certainly this fanciful meeting between the Father, Son, and Satan is far outside the pale of biblical Christianity. Jesus is consistently referred to as God’s “only Son” (John 1:14, 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9) and, as such, was not chosen to be the Savior over any other Messianic contenders, especially Satan. Instead, God planned our salvation in Christ from “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Salvation in Christ was God’s original and eternal plan.

### *Salvation*

With such a skewed Trinitarian theology and Christology, it is no surprise that the Mormon gospel of salvation is really no gospel at all. For Mormons, salvation is two-fold. First, salvation is a person’s personal progression to divinity. That is, Mormons believe humans can become gods. Joseph Smith explains: “Here, then, is eternal life – to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves...To inherit the same power, the same glory and the same exaltation, until you arrive at the station of God, and ascend the throne of eternal power.”<sup>10</sup> This is not only an untrue statement, but resonates all the way back to the Garden of Eden where Satan tempted Adam and Eve to believe they could usurp God’s position and prerogative. This is why he says to Adam and Eve, when he is trying to entice them to eat God’s forbidden fruit, “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). Mormons jettison a fundamental distinction of Christian theology: the distinction between the created and the Creator. They imagine that creatures can become like the Creator. This is flatly false.

Second, Mormons teach that salvation is ultimately a product

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<sup>9</sup> *Gospel Principles*, Chapter 3, <http://lds.org/library/display/0,4945,11-1-13-6,00.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Smith cited in R. Philip Roberts, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1998) 55.

of a person's moral progression. Though Mormons believe that humans are saved by grace, they do not believe they are saved by grace *alone*. A famous and oft-quoted passage from the *Book of Mormon* makes this clear enough: "For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*."<sup>11</sup> Contrast this with the apostle Paul's famous words concerning God's grace: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus' work on the cross for our salvation is complete. There is no work we can do to contribute to our salvation.

This is only a small sampling of the false teachings promulgated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Other teachings, as well as the historical and moral veracity of Mormonism's sacred writings, are highly suspect as well.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, whatever one may believe about Mormonism's moral value or theological worth, it cannot be said that Mormonism is "Christian" in any traditional sense of the term.

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11 *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1981) 2 Nephi 25:23.

12 For instance, *The Book of Mormon* makes an inaccurate historical claim that Jesus was born in Jerusalem (Alma 7:10). He was born in Bethlehem. *The Book of Mormon* becomes morally suspect when one realizes that Joseph Smith plagiarized large portions of the King James Version of the Bible and inserted them wholesale into his work (e.g., compare Moroni 10 with 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 2 Nephi 14 with Isaiah 4, and 2 Nephi 12 with Isaiah 2). Moreover, Joseph Smith claimed to have translated *The Pearl of Great Price*, part of the Mormon canon of scriptures, from Egyptian scrolls which he explained, "Contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc." (*History of the Church* 2:236). Egyptologists have since found that these papyri are nothing more than standard Egyptian funereal documents, speaking of Egyptian gods and goddesses ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book\\_of\\_Abraham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Abraham)). Richard John Neuhaus says of Mormonism, "There is...the surpassingly awkward fact that not a single person, place, or event that is unique to the *Book of Mormon* has ever been proven to exist. Outside the *fanum* of true believers, these tales cannot help but appear to be the product of fantasy and fabrication" (<http://www.irr.org/mit/neuhaus.html>).

Albert Mohler summarizes the problem with Mormon theology well:

Mormonism borrows Christian themes, personalities, and narratives. Nevertheless, it rejects what orthodox Christianity affirms and it affirms what orthodox Christianity rejects. It is not orthodox Christianity in a new form or another branch of the Christian tradition. By its own teachings and claims, it rejects any claim of continuity with orthodox Christianity. Insofar as an individual Mormon holds to the teachings of the Latter-Day Saints, he or she repudiates biblical Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

In short, Mormonism is not Christianity, nor is it a branch or part of Christianity. If you'd like to learn more about Mormonism and its theological teachings, you can find a wealth of resources at [www.evidenceministries.org](http://www.evidenceministries.org).<sup>14</sup>

## The Status of Mormonism

Having addressed the teachings of Mormonism theologically, we now move to discuss the status of Mormonism religiously. Pastor Jeffress called the religion a “cult.” Is it?

In its original context, the word “cult” did not carry with it the negative connotations it has today. The word comes from the Latin *cultus*, originally describing merely the worship of a deity. Today, however, this word carries with it a wide variety of definitions, many of them sounding sinister. For the sake of

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Mohler, “Mormonism, Democracy, and the Urgent Need for Evangelical Thinking” (October 10, 2011) <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/10/10/mormonism-democracy-and-the-urgent-need-for-evangelical-thinking/>.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the religious worldview of the Mormon Church, click the third slide on the Evidence Ministries home page. This article was written by the Mormon Church and appears in one of their official teaching manuals. In the opinion of Evidence Ministries, it is the best thing a Christian can read in order to understand the clearly non-Christian nature of Mormonism.

brevity, we will examine two definitions of this word – the first being theological in nature and the second being psychological and sociological in nature – and evaluate the status of Mormonism as a cult accordingly.

Theologically, a good definition of a “cult” can be found in the book, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation*. In this work, sociologists Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge define a “cult” thusly: “The cult is something new vis-à-vis the other religious bodies of the society...The cult adds to that culture a new revelation or insight justifying the claim that it is different, new, ‘more advanced.’”<sup>15</sup> According to this definition, Mormonism clearly qualifies as a cult. It is a new revelation and religion which objects to the historic, orthodox Christian position as something corrupt and apostate. Indeed, the very byline of *The Book of Mormon*, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” is a claim of additional, peculiar, and advanced revelation. In this sense, then, Pastor Jeffress is correct. Mormonism is considered to be a cult by most major evangelical denominations and is often called a cult within our

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15 Rodney Stark & William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 25-26. Surprisingly, the authors later assert that Mormonism is not a cult, even though they admit that, according their own definition, Mormonism qualifies to be classified as such: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints presents problems of classification. Clearly it is not just another protestant sect...The Mormon Church has added so much novel doctrine to the Christian-Judaic tradition that it represents a new religious tradition in its own right, and there can be no doubt that this tradition is deviant...Clearly, Mormonism fits our definition of a cult. However, because the Mormons succeeded in building their Zion in the empty deserts of the West, most Mormons do not experience life as members of a religious minority. In Utah, Mormonism is the dominant religious tradition, and this feeling sustains Mormons in nearby states as well. For this reason...we classified schismatic Mormon groups in Utah as sects, coding such groups as cults only if they developed outside of Utah” (245). Stark and Bainbridge do not classify Mormonism as a cult simply because of the number of Mormons in some western parts of the country.

own church body, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.<sup>16</sup>

Psychologically and sociologically, we can use a definition of a “cult” from Louis Joylon West:

A cult is a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or thing and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control (e.g. isolation from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it, etc.) designed to advance the goals of the group’s leaders.<sup>17</sup>

According to West, a cult is that which is explicitly psychologically and sociologically subversive. It brings to mind people such as Jim Jones and David Koresh and their movements rather than The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.<sup>18</sup> Much of the outrage in the media over Pastor Jeffress’ words calling Mormonism a cult would seem to stem from defining the word “cult” psychologically and sociologically rather than theologically.

As Christians, who are called to think theologically about issues such as this, we can indeed call Mormonism a “cult” because of

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16 For instance, Edgar P. Kaiser’s short book, *How To Respond to the Latter-Day Saints*, is filed under “Cults” in Concordia Publishing House’s cataloging system.

17 L.J. West & M.D. Langone, “Cultism: A conference for scholars and policy makers. Summary of proceedings of the Wingspread conference on cultism, 9-11 September” (Weston: American Family Foundation, 1985).

18 It should be noted that Joseph Smith was known to be quite coercive, threatening damnation on young ladies so that he could procure them as his wives (<http://www.irr.org/mit/neuhaus.html>). In this sense, Mormonism, during its formative stage, displayed some cult-like tendencies as they are defined above.

its claim to additional revelation apart from and outside of Holy Scripture which results in the maligning of Christian theology. This designation, however, does not necessarily imply that Mormonism has all the psychological and sociological hallmarks of a cult. A Christian's designation of Mormonism as a cult is primarily a theological rather than a psychological and sociological one.

## Our Duty as Christians

Lastly, we move to consider how we, as Christian citizens, can respond to this controversy vocationally. The word "vocation" is from the Latin *vocatio* and means "calling." The doctrine of vocation states that all Christians have been called by God to serve in different stations in life – whether that be the station of an employee, an employer, a husband, a wife, a mother, a father, a child, a volunteer, etc.<sup>19</sup> One of the vocations, or callings, God has given to Christians is that of "citizen." On the one hand, we are citizens of God's Kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:19). On the other hand, we are also citizens, either by birth or by naturalization, of a particular country. This earthly vocation of citizen, in turn, comes with both duties (e.g., Luke 20:21-25) and privileges (e.g., Acts 22:25) as determined by governing authorities which are themselves instituted by God.<sup>20</sup> One of the duties and privileges United States citizens carry is that of voting for the country's president. As Christians, the question arises: "How can I vote

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19 For more on vocation, see Gene Veith, *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in all of Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002).

20 Lutherans have always affirmed a legitimate role for government in the kingdom of this world. Accordingly, we ought to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Timothy 2:2). For a good discussion on the government's role in the Christian's life, see *Render Unto Caesar...A Lutheran View of Church and State*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (September 1995) <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=465>.

in a way that is faithful to God while also seeking to elect a person who will do the best job leading the country?”

It must be noted that there is no easy – or singular – answer to this question. Nevertheless, there are some guiding principles which can help us cast an informed vote.

First, it is important to understand that, while we, as Christians, live in two kingdoms – the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of man – the leaders we elect rule over only one kingdom – the kingdom of man. Thus, our primary concern should be with their competence to lead in this kingdom. This means that when we vote, we should consider a candidate’s familiarity with our Constitution and laws and his ability to navigate the intricacies of our legislative process. If he is inept in either of these areas, this should give us pause. A public official’s inability to operate effectively inside our nation’s governmental system can spell disaster for our public policy and welfare, for the official will be unable to execute the demands of his office. Competence is key.

Second, we must also understand that some of the spiritual concerns of the Kingdom of God are part of the natural, moral law which God has placed in this world and thus pertain to the political and public policy making of the kingdom of man.<sup>21</sup> Issues such as abortion, which pertains to the natural,

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<sup>21</sup> Whether or not a person is a Christian, the Bible reminds us that God has instilled in each human being a natural, moral compass: “For when Gentiles [i.e., pagans], who do not have the law [of God], by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (Romans 2:14-15). These verses remind us that there are basic moral strictures incumbent on every human being whether or not they are Christians.

moral duty we have to uphold human life (cf. Exodus 20:13),<sup>22</sup> homosexuality, which goes against the natural design of creation (cf. Romans 1:26-27), and care for those who cannot care for themselves, to which we are naturally inclined despite our depravity (cf. Matthew 7:9-11), ought to be taken into consideration as we decide for whom we will vote. If a candidate runs a platform contrary to natural, moral law, this too should give us pause, for this candidate can potentially do harm to our nation's citizens.

With these two criteria in mind, then, we have a Christian duty to vote for candidates who, on the one hand, are capable and competent to rule in the kingdom of man, for this is what they are called to do, while, on the other hand, are at the same time aligned with those concerns of the natural, moral law of God which pertain to the political and public policy making in the kingdom of man.

All of this is to say that a candidate does not have to be Christian to be a suitable candidate for public office, though we can certainly be thankful that there are Christians in public and political offices. Ultimately, Luther would advise us to vote for a competent candidate, even if he is not personally moral or Christian:

The reasonable question has been put whether it is better to have a good but imprudent ruler...or a prudent but personally bad one. Moses here certainly calls for both [ref.

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22 Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder," is one of the Ten Commandments. Lutherans have classically understood the Ten Commandments to be an expression of natural, moral law. "The Ten Commandments had spread over the whole world not only before Moses but even before Abraham and all the patriarchs" (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 47, J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, eds. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999] 89). "In some way human reason naturally understands the [Ten Commandments] (for it has the same judgment divinely written in the mind)" (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, Paul McCain et al, eds. [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005] Ap IV 7).

Deuteronomy 1:13-16]: a good *and* prudent ruler. However, if both qualifications cannot be had, a prudent ruler who is not personally good is better than a good one who is not prudent, because a good one rules nothing but *is* only ruled – and only by the worst of people. Even though a prudent but personally bad ruler may harm the good people, he nevertheless rules the evil ones at the same time; and this is more necessary and proper for the world, since the world is nothing but a mass of evil people.<sup>23</sup>

Because a politician rules in the kingdom of man, his competence to do so should be the primary criterion used in discerning his fitness for office. If he is a Christian, great! If not, it is better to have a competent ruler who is not a Christian than an incompetent ruler who is a Christian.

Finally, Christians, out of theological conviction and consecrated consciences, can and do vote for different candidates. Because we live in a sinful and fallen world and, as such, we vote for sinful and fallen candidates, Christians come to differing conclusions as to which candidate would best serve in a particular public office. Christians' consciences need not be unduly bound in such decisions. The pastors of Concordia believe that, given the choice between two candidates of equal competence, if one is a Christian and the other is not, wisdom instructs us to vote for the Christian candidate because he will not only serve his country skillfully as a politician, but faithfully as a Christian as he seeks God's guidance. This guidance will make his leadership in public office all the more effective.

Pastor Jeffress has endorsed Rick Perry for President of the United States. As a citizen, he is certainly free to make this endorsement. As a pastor, however, he must be careful speaking on behalf of a political candidate in a public forum such as the Values Voter Summit. For his primary vocation as a

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, Ewald Plass, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959) 582.

pastor is the faithful stewardship of the gospel. Anything that jeopardizes this stewardship is to be rejected. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod explains: “The church is a precious institution for us, which dare not be jeopardized by immersion in secular politics.”<sup>24</sup> We, as Christian citizens of this country, are also free to endorse and vote for our preferred candidates. However, our preferred candidates need not be the same as Pastor Jeffress’. Each Christian can come to his own conclusions concerning for whom he will vote.

As citizens of this country, we are free to vote for whomever we want. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we are free to vote in accordance with our consecrated consciences. Thank God for both freedoms.

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<sup>24</sup> *Render Unto Caesar...A Lutheran View of Church and State*, 91.





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