

# A Study of Christian Involvement in Politics in Modern Secular World: From an early Christian Understanding of Salvation

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## Abstract

This research paper examines whether biblical values should be applied in political arena of the modern secular world. It addresses some of the reasons for the current skepticisms toward Christian involvement in politics. In response to this, this paper re-examines how the early Christian community understood the concept of salvation as well as the redemptive function of their Messiah. This poses questions such as; was salvation something that only pertained to 'life-after-death' or did it also have wider socio-political implication in the world? This is a topic that is often neglected by the conservative evangelical Christians of Korea as religion and politics have their own separate domains in which any hope of interaction is becoming increasingly discouraged. This may be partly attributed to the concern of Christians in seeking to prevent the Gospel and the Church from the powers of secularization but it is, perhaps inadvertently, creating a sense of negligence to the issues and demands of the modern world. This is not necessarily the case only in Korea but is a dilemma that perhaps evangelicals in other parts of the world also struggle with.

This paper starts by briefly examining some of the challenges which the Church is currently facing and seeks to respond to them in the light of the early Christian understanding of messianic salvation that is established by Christ Jesus. The discussion highlights the importance of the Davidic lineage and an appreciation of the overarching theme of redemption in the history of Israel, which brings us to re-consider the significance of the exodus event in particular. The study seeks to demonstrate that a genuine transformation of an individual consequently leads to a renewed awareness of the surrounding community which includes social / political issues.

**Key Words:** Christianity and politics, Christian salvation, secularism, Dualism.

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## **I . Challenges of Modern Secular World**

This paper deals with the question whether it is biblically justified for Christians to be actively involved in social arena such as politics. The topic is not only relevant for Korean Churches in which the author of this paper is located but also evangelical Christians elsewhere. This may be attributed, in part, to dualistic tendencies of our contemporary world where there is a clear delineation between the realms of politics and religion but the question whether it is indeed what the Bible teaches is seldom addressed in Korean evangelicalism.

This paper is primarily rooted in biblical theological perspective from which the question of political engagement of Christians is addressed. The discussion of the messianic identity of Jesus, for instance, necessarily encapsulates the exploration of Israel's understanding of the Messiah in their unique context of historical reality. In other words, it is essential to bring to focus the Redemptive History of Israel in its entirety in order to understand the messianic identity of Jesus and what he was expected to accomplish. In closely examining Israel's messianic expectation especially in the context of the exile, there seemed to be a fundamental tension in the relationship between the Old and New Testaments' portrayal of the Messiah and consequently the belief of salvation. This conflict is perhaps what lies at the foundation of the question whether Christians are to understand salvation only in terms of 'other-worldly' dimension and view the reality of human society as intrinsically evil and therefore incompatible with Christian ethos.

Is salvation which is made possible through messianic agent something that only pertains to the life after death or is it something that has practical bearing in the concrete reality of our modern secular world? Is the biblical teaching of messianic salvation only intelligible in spiritual realm? It is this aspect of biblical theology that needs to be re-addressed first before engaging in a debate as to whether it is 'biblically justified' for Christian faith values to be engaged in political affairs in order to promote ethical and spiritual ideals of Christianity in our modern

contemporary world.

In conjunction with this, dualistic approach towards Christian engagement in politics has historical as well as theological grounding. According to W. Grudem, the exclusion of religion from political arena may be attributed to certain historical incidents where religious dispute later developed into geopolitical violence such as the 30 years' War (1618-48) which began as a conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics, escalated into military violence over the control of territories, especially in Germany (Grudem, 2010: 23). He also notes that in the 16th century, the Reformed and Lutheran Protestants persecuted and killed thousands from the Anabaptist groups in Switzerland and Germany who sought to have Churches for 'believers only.' It may well be that such historical incidents of religious conflicts that have generated violence have reinforced the idea that religion should not be involved in political affairs.

From a biblical perspective, Jesus' own statement before Pilate; "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place (Jn. 18:36)" seems to indicate that he is not seeking to establish a political kingdom like the Roman Empire.

For such historical as well as theological reasons, Christianity in particular, is being excluded to a personal devotion and commitment rather than an active moral / spiritual agent in public domain. However, the question also arises whether such view is what the original writers of the Biblical texts actually intended. Such tension has recently given some rise and accumulation of scholarly discussions which address the very issue of whether such delineation between politics and Christian religion is in fact supported by biblical texts (김성건, 2013: 95-117; Skillen, 2014).

Certainly in Republic of Korea, the academic enterprises such as economic, development and political sociology including social science of cultural anthropology have largely neglected a close examination of the relationship between the

participation of religious values in public arena. It may be that the general public in Korea does not associate their fundamental identity with the government other than its functional capacity to provide jobs, social welfare, military defence and law enforcement; the areas which religion or its institution is perceived to have little, if any, direct control. Such recent perception has been addressed by S. Lim who argues that although Christianity has made a significant contribution until the late 20th century, Korean Church is quickly losing its credentials from the general public with the dawn of the 21st century (임성빈, 2012). According to the Korean Christian Ethics and Practice Movement in 2008, the statistics show that only 18.5% of the general Korean population expressed positive views toward the Protestant Christianity whereas 48.3% expressed negative views. Negativity of such perception was more prevalent amongst young people in their twenties (15.5%) and thirties (17.7%).<sup>1)</sup> Such negative view toward Protestant Christianity was attributed largely to the quality of Church leaders and the members of congregation as well as their intolerance towards other religions (임성빈, 2012: 78).

By contrast, perhaps that the government has lost its credentials and is generally viewed by the public as a domain where corruption and violence prevail and is thus inherently incompatible with the values of Christianity. This is not only true in Korea as J. Skillen has similarly pointed out that government is not generally perceived as an expression of human nature. As a result, many Christians treat the institutions of government with considerable suspicion.<sup>2)</sup>

Or, perhaps Christians generally believe that the salvation which is represented

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1) 임성빈 (2012). 76. On the other hand, Catholicism had must more positive perception by the general public as 41% of the population in their forties expressed positive view. This is mainly due to the Catholic engagement in social / political movements which produced a positive impact in Korea (기독교윤리실천운동).

2) He notes that: "From at least the time of Augustine to the present day, there has been a tendency to disconnect Christ's kingship and the city of God from the responsibility of human government on earth." "And Calvin, who stressed the sovereignty of God over all things, sometimes distinguished sharply between the Kingdom of Christ and earthly government to the point of dissociating them."

by Christ is spiritual and not of this world which leaves an insurmountable gap between the realms of political reality and Christian vision. Such dualistic notion of politics and religion in broader sense makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for any creative discussion to take place.<sup>3)</sup>

Recently, however, S. Kim notes that a fairly new intellectual movement known as the "culture and development school" has stated that certain culture promotes progressiveness and development whereas certain others hinder such positive advancement. He notes that there is recently a visible social / political development in fast developing countries such as Latin America, China and South-East Asia where religious values play a crucial role in their respective cultures (김성건, 2013: 109-110).

Such an issue has also been addressed by W. Grudem in his comprehensive, yet deeply searching work, entitled *Politics according to the Bible* where he deals with the subject of Christian engagement in politics through biblical perspectives. Despite the current dualistic tendency, which seems to be a global phenomenon as far as the issue of religion and politics is concerned, biblical principles have had and continues to have a crucial role in modern contemporary society. In fact, he argues that to remove religion altogether from the political realm is to ignore the foundational role religion has played in history and is thus to forfeit any sense of justice in our world. He states:

Since all absolute moral standards are in some way based on religious convictions and a sense of moral accountability to God, 'exclude religion' view would tend to remove from the entire nation any sense of absolute moral standards or any sense that there is any clear way of knowing right from wrong. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this viewpoint is not only the destruction of all belief in God, but also the complete moral disintegration of society (Grudem, 2010: 36).<sup>4)</sup>

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3) "Kaplan, a highly acclaimed journalist and public-affairs scholar, contends that politics and government in the real world demand the use of force, which requires a 'pagan ethos' because it cannot be sustained by a Christian ethos."

4) He adds that "governments do make a difference to the work of God's Kingdom. For instance,

In other words, Jesus' messianic kingship and the salvation which he brings to the world are not only confined within the Church and one's private spiritual life but they should necessarily flow out as they overcome and transform the world (1 Jn. 3:8; 5:4-5). In his earthly ministry, Jesus did not only forgive sins in a spiritual sense but such forgiveness of sin resulted in physical restoration (Choi, 2011).<sup>5)</sup> His healing ministry presented in the Synoptic Gospels clearly shows that he was concerned not only about people's spiritual welfare but also their physical life in this world. This shows that for early Christians, at least, the dualistic approach to physical and spiritual realms of life were not as apparent as modern people may think (Minnery, 2001).

Such tendency to separate religion from politics may be attributed to secularism, which demands some level of neutrality in the context of pluralistic society (Taylor, 2012: 11-21; Repko et al., 2014: 3-7). However, C. Taylor aptly points out that the fundamental philosophy behind secularism is not to intentionally subvert religion in society but in the process of responding to diversity, which the modern world naturally brings, a democratic state inevitably creates a certain degree of distance from being attached to one particular set of thought or belief (Taylor, 2012: 12). If a democratic nation chooses to lean towards the idea of civil religion, however beneficial it may be, or anti-religion, it would be contradicting its own principles. Therefore, secularism is not originally designed to suppress religion in society but rather in its attempt to promote liberty, equality and fraternity as its basic goals, it has to distance itself from the notion of civil religion or possessing any kind of religious allegiance in its political system in order to preserve its democratic ethos (Taylor, 2012: 19). This has also been highlighted by P. L. Berger who says that modernization has not necessarily led to a decline of religion as many have suspected. Even though that certain religions may have lost their

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governments can allow churches to meet freely and evangelize or they can prevent these things by force of law as is the case in North Korea." 46.

5) See especially chapter 6 "Analysis of christological titles"; Son of David.

appeal and influence in various societies, many religious beliefs have continued to thrive in the lives of both individuals as well as in institutional communities (Berger, 1999: 1-18). The challenge, according to Berger, is not so much how to preserve religious faith in the context of secularism; but how to adapt and respond appropriately to the ever-changing demands of the secularized world (Berger, 1999: 23).

This necessarily directs our attention to an interdisciplinary approach insofar as theological endeavor is concerned. Such methodological approach has been comprehensively outlined by Repko et al.:

(Interdisciplinary approach) is a cognitive process by which individuals or groups draw on disciplinary perspectives and integrate their insights and modes of thinking to advance their understanding of a complex problem with the goal of applying the understanding to a real-world problem (Repko et al., 2014: 32).

The starting point of such discussion in this paper starts from an overall understanding of the early Christians interpretation of Israel's Messiah and the salvation he establishes. This consequently reshapes our understanding towards the complex issues of Christian engagement in politics of modern secular world.

## **II. The early Christian understanding of Salvation**

It is important to remind ourselves that every single texts of the Bible is a carefully designed response to specific social, political, economic, cultural and religious contexts in which authors and recipients of texts lived. In order to properly understand the concept of salvation in the Bible, which has a far-reaching significance in terms of how we are to view Christian engagement in political affairs, we need to understand the redemptive function of the Messiah. In other words, the biblical understanding of salvation will be largely determined by understanding who Messiah is and what he is expected to accomplish for his

people. Even though there is an ongoing debate as to precisely when the messianic fervor originates in the Old Testament period, it seems fair to say that it reaches its peak in Israel's exilic plight as she eagerly awaited messianic salvation from foreign oppressors (cf. Ezek. 20:33-38; 34:23f; 37:15-28; Isa. 51:17-52:12). Throughout the Old Testament, it is evident that the God of Israel Himself is the prominent figure for the salvation of Israel. However, Israel's understanding of salvation is primarily a political liberation and the restoration of national stability, which is brought about by God's direct intervention in history (Choi, 2011). What is interesting and unique about Israel's religion and her understanding of salvation is that her political welfare was directly linked with the righteousness of the people before God. We may observe that "all the political atrocities and oppression from foreign nations are in fact portrayed as punishment of Israel's sin" (Choi, 2011: 59). In other words, the king's spiritual uprightness and his relationship with God are what determined the success of his political leadership. The sons of David perform their duties as kings according to the standard of the decrees prescribed by the Lord upon which the success of their political leadership is measured (cf. Ps. 89:30-34). Their failure to live up to the decrees of the Lord resulted in political atrocities. For instance, during the Assyrian invasion before the Babylonian captivity the national theology of Israel which was anchored in the affirmation of God's choice of Zion and his covenant for the Davidic dynasty was thrown into crisis. We need to bear in mind that the prophetic message was a direct response to these real historical circumstances. Ezekiel spoke of the greater New Exodus (20:33-38) as he eagerly awaited the restoration of Davidic kingship (34:23f; 37:15-28). In Deutero-Isaiah, the prophetic corpus is largely dominated by consolation that Israel's true King (i. e. Yahweh) will not abandon Israel despite her sin (51:17-52:12). The prophets Haggai and Zechariah give reassurance that God will not abandon Zion and affirmed the fulfillment of His promise in the national theology of Israel and the Davidic dynasty. With this prophetic message the Temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 515 BCE (Ezra 1-6), which marks the

beginning of the Second Temple Judaism (Choi, 2011: 110). What is interesting is that despite countless disappointments and failures, Jewish eschatology never gave up on the messianic hope that was firmly rooted in the historical reality of Israel. It may be surmised then that the king of Israel is not only political but also carried deeply sacred role which had a direct influence upon the welfare of the nation. A. R. Johnson also writes:

The king is not only found leading his people in worship with the offering of sacrifice and prayer on important occasions in the national life, but throughout the four hundreds years of the Davidic Dynasty, from the time of David's active concern for the Ark to that of Josiah's thoroughgoing reform, himself superintends the organization of the cultus in all its aspects (Johnson, 1967: 13-14).

Consequently, for Israel, the realm of politics was inextricably intertwined with the spiritual dimension of Israel. Since the definition of the Messiah in the Old Testament is related to the Israelite king in the line of David (Jer. 23: 5-6; 33:14-18), the author of Matthew's Gospel, who is thoroughly embedded in the Jewish mind-set, is eager to designate Jesus as the Son of David in order to emphasize his identity as the Messiah which Israel had been waiting for (Mt. 1:1) (Barton, 1998). Bearing in mind the importance of such Davidic lineage for the early Jewish-Christians, many interpreters struggle with the way that such messianic expectation was believed to have been fulfilled through the person of Jesus Christ since he is often perceived to be 'apolitical' from a modern contemporary point of view. There is an 'uneasy consciousness' as the messianic salvation which Jesus represents is far from exclusive nationalism which Davidic covenant inherently entailed, as it deals with much more fundamental issues of salvation. Jesus established spiritual regeneration by defeating the power of sin (Mt. 12:31; 13:41; Jn. 1:29; 5:14; 8:34; 9:41; 15:22; 16:8, 9). Is then the Old Testament's understanding of salvation, which certainly has heavier political connotation, fundamentally inconsistent and incompatible with that of the New? Bearing this intrinsic tension

in mind, evangelical Christians who tend to place priority on the New Testament and pay closer allegiance to the New Testament's message of Christ, have developed a tendency to lean more towards the depiction of salvation which seemingly places more emphasis on the spiritual regeneration of individuals by professing Jesus Christ as their Savior. While this is the most fundamental aspect of understanding the nature of Christian salvation; if that is the only way of understanding salvation (that it only pertains to the life after death), then it has fallen victim to a partial understanding of what the Bible is trying to convey about the meaning of salvation. Such partial view of salvation may very well be the reason why some Christians are skeptical about the idea of a direct involvement in political and social affairs as the world is regarded inherently evil and, above all domains, political arena is often perceived to be filled with sinful corruption and conspiracy (Boyd, 2005). Christians must therefore detach themselves in order to preserve spiritual purity and holiness of the Church. Such interpretation of salvation coupled with the current trend of modern pluralism and relativism would have very little difficulty in effacing Christianity and its values from the public domain into an isolation of personal devotional commitment (Wright, 1990: 11-17).<sup>6)</sup>

However, such view would struggle to intelligibly answer questions as to why the evangelists of the Gospels bothered to describe Jesus as the Son of David (Matt. 1:1), which is primarily a political title ascribed to the royal successors of David, and goes at great length to regurgitate the historical lineage of Israel in asserting Jesus' historical origin and national identity. Or, if Jesus and his followers regarded Israel's understanding of salvation to have been inherently erroneous in their hope of national political liberation; why the evangelist would take a great trouble in emphasizing the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies

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6) One of the major reasons for such isolation also finds its root since the destruction of Jerusalem Temple approximately in AD70, as the focus of Jewish identity moved away from the Holy Land and more towards the Holy Book, which naturally encourages the idea of ghetto: a safe place where one could worship Israel's God in private rather than in public while the world went on its own way.

that runs throughout the New Testament (e. g. Mt. 1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10)? In response to these questions N. T. Wright argues that;

When Jesus called some followers and arranged them into a group of 12, the analogues pointed, not to a primitive ordination ceremony for a church with minimal ties to socio-political reality, but to the groups of desperate men who went off into the wilderness to prepare for God's action in restoring Israel (Wright, 1990: 13).<sup>7)</sup>

However, there still seems to be a delineation between the Kingdom of God which Jesus depicts and that of the world under human leadership when he said "my kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36). In response to this, Wright proposes that the sentence should not be interpreted as referring only to an other-worldly, platonic, non-physical kingdom. Rather, the ways with which Jesus seeks to establish the order of God's Kingdom are different in terms of its values and method from worldly ways. In conjunction with this, H. C. Waetjen who employs a post-modern reading of Paul's Letter to the Romans in an attempt to evaluate the concept of salvation comes up with an interpretation that the word 'justice' according to Paul transcends the personal religious connotation of the word 'righteousness' to promote and embrace the transformation of the world by the actualization of God's justice (Waetjen, 2012: 197-212). In other words, Jesus Christ not only has the very authority of God to break down the chains of sin for spiritual regeneration but he is also by origin a political descendant of David who fulfills Israel's messianic expectation.

Such dualistic approach to political theology thus finds no real support in the overarching theme of the Bible and in the way the early Christians viewed the messianic kingship of Jesus. Rather, the early Christian concern is that the

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7) "For the 1st cent. Jews, the Temple was the equivalent, for 20th cent. Britain, of the Houses of Parliament and it was against this central and vital institution that Jesus spoke against and acted."

disciples of Jesus should not live according to the flesh alone, which is at odds with living according to the spirit (Rm. 8:4, 9; Gal. 1:16, 2: 14, 15; Eph. 6:12; 1 Cor. 15:50) (Van Peursen, 1988: 108-110). In other words, being a spiritual existence does not necessarily mean that a person should pursue immaterial values that are detached from reality. Rather, the purpose and attitude towards life are renewed and ordained by God's sovereignty.<sup>8)</sup> In fact, this is consistently employed both in the Old and the New Testaments' portrayal of messianic salvation as what affects the spiritual realm leads to a direct impact on the physical (thereby political) dimension of life (Is. 26:19; 66:22, 23; Dan. 12:2).

Furthermore, from an early Christian perspective, salvation of God is for the community of His chosen people rather than being based on individual merit of righteousness or moral excellence. For the early Christians, salvation is by nature communal. In other words, they have never regarded their faith to be exclusively confined within the personal commitment to faith as it had much wider social / political dimension which also entailed responsibilities of promoting the justice of God for the communities of which they were part. This corporate view of salvation has been appreciated by scholars such as T. Holland who has persuasively presented a case on the basis of the Letter to the Romans. According to Holland, salvation for Israelite religion fundamentally depended on the 'membership to the community of God' rather than individual righteousness (Holland, 2004; 2012). He argues that for Israel the Exodus event in particular played a crucial role in shaping her experiential understanding of salvation. In this redemptive event the death of the firstborn, otherwise known as the Passover, was God's wrath and judgment upon the system of sin which Egypt represented.<sup>9)</sup> In this event, it was

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8) This is further reinforced by Descartes who regards such dichotomy between body and soul only constitutes one way of analyzing human nature but fails to do justice to the entirety of 'substantie' in which soul is the essence of the body.

9) Although Holland doesn't quite lay it out in his work, it follows from his reasoning that the Passover was a punishment not on Egyptians *per se* but upon the system of evil such as slavery, murder, arrogance (since the Pharaoh was addressed as god) which Egypt nevertheless

made clear that regardless of how morally blameless one may have been, the individual righteousness did not necessarily earn him / her salvation from the judgment of God. Rather, it was the membership in the community of God symbolized by the blood of the lamb (thereby replacing the death of the firstborn son) that provided a way of vindication in the context of God's judgment.<sup>10)</sup>

However, the prototype Exodus event was primarily a political liberation (namely, delivering Israel from the bondage of slavery) which did not permanently solve the fundamental problems of sin. This is why the prophets of Israel warn the Israelites of the impending judgment which is manifested through political oppression by the surrounding powers if they do not come to repentance and surrender to God. With genuine repentance, there will be a New Exodus, the one that solves the fundamental roots of sin, which consequently brings about perfect justice to the nation of Israel. The New Exodus thus has far greater significance than the prototype Exodus. This time, it will be marked by the Davidic Messiah, who would be anointed with the Spirit to establish the New Covenant (cf. Hos. 12:9; Isa. 11:1-13; 19:19-25; 40:5; 44:3, 23; 48:20; 52:1-12; 58:8; 61:1-3; 66:18; Ezek. 36:24-28; 37:1-4; 44-45; Mic. 7:15; Joel 2:28; Jer. 33:19-22; Mal. 3:1) (Choi, 2011: 112).

The New Testament is the fulfillment of such messianic hope as the writers are eager to convey that the prophecy has indeed come to life through the person of Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul uses this Exodus theme in further explicating that the true salvation is established by the Son of David, which once and for all, solves the fundamental problem of sin that was always at the heart of Israel's political atrocities throughout her history (Luke 22:20; 2Cor. 3:6; 5:17; 6:16-18; Heb. 8:8-13) (Goldingay, 1990).

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represented and was guilty of. The descendants of Abraham were clearly victims of such evil order. However, it is important to recognize that the God of Israel is neither promoting nor conducting genocide simply because he favors Israel.

10) This further indicates that God was not conducting some kind of genocide against the Egyptians. Rather, his judgment was upon the 'sinful system' in a corporate perspective which Egypt represented, such as slavery, oppression, and so forth.

This has a far reaching significance and implication for modern day Christians in their understanding of salvation. The separation of Church and state on the assumption that religion is purely a private matter could not be further from the biblical truth. This is not to say that Bible regards any individual attempt of moral excellence to be futile. That would be absurd since any given community has individuals as components of a community and a genuine internal transformation by the Word of God is indeed the first requirement for a proper external transformation to follow. However, salvation or judgment according to the Bible was never based on individual merit of righteousness or, lack thereof, but how the community as a whole performed which was measured by the decrees of the Law prescribed by God (cf. Mk. 1:15; Mt. 9:2; Lk. 9:23-27). A genuine spiritual regeneration and the acceptance of Jesus as the Savior would naturally compel one's attention to the surrounding community and to promote justice for the wider world. Such a holistic notion of salvation reflects the early Christian understanding of the messianic salvation as well as their Jewish predecessors. This guarded Israel's religion against mythical understanding of God. We may conclude, then, that the Bible and its teaching of salvation are thoroughly historical which is rooted in the concrete reality of Israel's redemptive history.

### **III. Christian involvement in politics**

As we have discussed above, the secular world with its pluralistic world-views, necessarily creates a distance from any one particular set of beliefs and values. Even if we grant that Christian ethics and world-views do have some positive impact on our society, any claim that the Kingdom principles should form the basis of the modern day public policies and civil law of a state would be met with immediate confrontations (Klein et al., 2004; 전명수, 2014: 31-56).<sup>11)</sup>

Perhaps the most classic historical example that certainly deserves a mention

(and more in-depth research which, unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this paper) is Abraham Kuyper, who as a Calvinist and a Christian democrat grappled with the interdisciplinary issues of Christian involvement in political affairs of the Netherlands. He, too, understood that authentic Christianity is deeply historical which encourages public engagement. He taught that religious pluralism had to be respected but he was against the idea of the 'privitization of faith'. Each confessional community must be granted its legitimate proportion of access to and participation in all sectors of public life without subordinating other religious faiths (Bratt, 2013: 217). For Kuyper, all knowledge was founded on some type of faith and the most fundamental ideal of democracy to which he was politically committed is to welcome pluralistic world-view.<sup>12)</sup> This does not mean, however, that he was willing to compromise his Christian belief as his goal was precisely to advance the Christian truth in the Netherlands in a democratic and in a civilized manner. Kuyper was convinced that the restoration of the Netherlands into a Christian state would bring about the highest ideals of aspiration upon which the morality of citizens and the transparency of democratic political system could be built.

Such a stance of Christianity towards secularism seems somewhat paradoxical in explicating how the truth of the Gospel, which is inherently absolute, also embraces other forms of belief. In response to this, John Locke proposes a nuanced approach towards other beliefs, which has a value for modern day evangelicals in their inter-religious dialogue. He criticizes both the Catholics who supposedly require submission to authority as well as the Puritan enthusiasts who claim to

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11) 전명수 (2014). 031-056 According to the survey conducted in Republic of Korea in 2013, 74.6% responded that they were very much against the idea of religious involvement in politics whereas only 23.1% supported the idea of religious involvement in politics.

12) Brat, 2013: 217 "Kuyper helped arrange a meeting between Calvinist and Catholic leaders that forged a plan of comity whereby each side would support the other's candidate in the run-off phase of the general elections." His intention was not to subordinate other religious beliefs under Calvinism but to accomplish a wider objective; namely, restoring a Christian Netherlands.

possess 'a light from heaven' which is superior to natural reason (Jolley, 1999: 169). Such attitude would render very difficult, if not impossible, to engage in any form of inter-religious dialogue in a civilized manner which is what the modern day secularism demands. However, this is precisely what the Church is called to do in our modern day if it is to exercise its influence in a democratic world and thereby maintain its relevance. This is not to say that a sense of the truth is somehow diluted but it relies on the fact that a genuine belief cannot be coerced. The history of Israel in its entirety clearly shows that while government regulations and even persecutions may have resulted in external change of Israel's life, it did not change their internal belief (Jolley, 1999: 192). It is this same principle that needs to be borne in mind by the evangelical Christians as they seek to reach out to the world and engage in political affairs. The values of the Bible should not be forced at the expense of undermining or persecuting other beliefs. According to Locke, this can never bring about a genuine transformation (Jolley, 1999: 195).<sup>13)</sup>

This further indicates that a law issued by a government, which has sanctions annexed to it, cannot bring about a genuine transformation of society and the establishment of justice.

It seems that Locke is not necessarily against the idea of absolutism which may act as the center of collective moral guidance but there must be a voluntary willingness in the way the truth is pursued and implemented in society, which is what Locke's argument is primarily concerned about.<sup>14)</sup> This then shifts our discussion from whether Christians should or shouldn't be involved in politics to

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13) "From a modern standpoint, far and away the most important champion of absolutism in the 17th century was Thomas Hobbes. In his immortal masterpiece 'Leviathan' Hobbes famously argued that in the interest of peace and security people must submit to a sovereign state whose authority over its citizens is absolute in the sense that it is unlimited by any constitutional restrictions whatever."

14) Jolley (1999). 217. "But the experience of modern western democracies tends to suggest that Hobbes' arguments must be unsound; on this issue it is Locke, not Hobbes, who has been vindicated by history."

how believers should exercise their rights with a sense of responsibility and a sound political theology in a democratic world. While some Christians may be called to directly serve the government as the official representatives of people, it seems that a genuine transformation of society, as we have seen above, comes about only when there is a voluntary experience of religious faith. This has been documented by R. Woodbury who persuasively argues on the basis of statistical evidence that conversionary Protestants in their missionary endeavor, acted as crucial catalysts in spreading and developing public education, mass printing, freedom of media, voluntary organizations and human rights movement for the indigenous in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Woodbury, 2012). In fact, he argues that the very root of modern democracy comes from missionary activists who fought against dictatorial leadership, elite domination and social injustice. He further states that;

Most Enlightenment democratic theorists came from Calvinist families or had a Calvinist education, even if they were either not theologically orthodox or perhaps religious (e. g. John Locke, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton), and they secularized ideas previously articulated by Calvinist theologians and jurists (Woodbury, 2012: 248).

He explains that the reason for the lack of Christian engagement or relevance today may be attributed to the fact that once the conversionary Protestant missionaries have catalyzed transformations such as expanding religious liberty, public education and democratic ideals, others copied them and modified them as their own in their unique contexts, thereby diminishing the role the Protestant Christians in society. This may well be one of the chief reasons why Christian influence in society is generally declining in certain places as it has undergone inevitable changes with the fast changing demands of the modern world. However, as Woodbury reminds us, modernity is not a direct result of economic development, urbanization, secularization or the Enlightenment as generally assumed by many. At the core of modern development lay the spirit of Christian missionary and their evangelism that brought about a genuine transformation of the lives of people

(Woodbury, 2012: 270).

## VI. Final Remarks

On the basis of the early Christian interpretation of the Scripture, the case of biblical understanding of salvation was presented which includes not only individual spiritual regeneration by confessing Jesus Christ as the Savior but also a transformation of wider world, which should be a natural consequence of a genuine spiritual regeneration. While some Christians are called to engage in political arena and implement the values of the Gospel in positively influencing governments, we cannot undermine the value evangelism of the Protestant missionaries that have proven to be crucial in the establishment of modern development of politics, education, economy and culture. Many evangelical Christians have inadvertently resorted to a partial understanding of biblical salvation in shying away from an active public engagement, which may be partly attributed to an absence of sound political theology in the Church. This has deeply penetrated into the realms of biblical hermeneutics which has produced 'ghetto churches' that rely on evangelism alone whilst neglecting the importance of active social / political engagement. This, as we have seen above, may well be the reason why Christianity is not only losing its relevance in modern world which has given rise to the dualistic approach. This doesn't mean however, that the Church should assume the role of socio-political movement as its primary function to solve world problems. It is difficult to imagine that any serious Christian leaders would consider this a viable option. Rather, this paper is a self-critical re-evaluation of Christian mission in this modern world in its attempt to hold the responsibility as a believer as well as a citizen of the world in a creative tension in order that the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ may be fulfilled.<sup>15)</sup>

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15) 'This article has not been published or applied to publish in other academic journals.'

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## 현대세속사회에서 기독교인들의 정치참여에 관한 연구-초대기독교인들의 구원의 대한 이해

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### 국문초록

이 논문에서는 성경적인 가치를 세속화된 현대 세계의 정치적인 영역에 적용할 수 있는지에 대한 여부를 논하고자 한다. 또한 기독교인들의 정치 참여에 대한 현대의 회의적인 시각을 살펴보고 그 이유들을 짚어보고자 한다. 이러한 시각에서 초대 교회 기독교인들이 메시아의 구속사적 기능과 구원의 개념을 어떻게 이해했었는지도 살펴보고자 한다. 이는 다음과 같은 질문으로 전개된다; 당시에는 구원이 오직 죽음 이후의 개념으로만 여겨졌던가? 아니면 정치 사회적인 폭넓은 의미로도 이해되어졌나?

이 문제는 한국의 다소 보수적인 복음주의 기독교인들 사이에서 간과되어 왔던 부분이다. 그동안 종교와 정치가 완전히 분리된 영역으로서 양 측의 상호 작용은 장려되지 못해왔다. 이는 아마도 복음 자체와 교회가 세속화되는 것을 기독교인들이 우려한 탓일 수도 있다. 그렇지만, 동시에 이러한 현상은 현대 세계의 요구와 문제에 오히려 무지함을 초래할 뿐이다. 이는 한국에서만 국한된 문제는 아니며, 세계의 다른 나라에서 사는 복음주의자들이 당면하는 딜레마이기도 하다.

이 논문은 교회가 현재 직면한 도전들을 소개함으로써 시작하며, 그리스도 예수, 메시아의 구원에 대한 초대 교회 기독교인들의 관점에 비추어 현대의 도전들을 풀어나가고자 한다. 논의하는 가운데, 저자는 다윗의 자손의 중요성과 이스라엘의 역사 가운데 구속이라는 주제의 중요성을 동시에 강조하고 있다. 특히 구속의 주제는 출애굽의 의미를 재고하도록 돕는다. 무엇보다 이 논문을 통해 한 개인의 진정한 회심은 결과적으로 정치와 사회적 영역을 포함한 조직 및 사회 전체에 대한 새로운 인식으로 이어진다는 점을 증명하고자 한다.

주제어: 기독교와 정치, 기독교적 구원, 세속주의, 이원론

