



# CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICAL AUTHORITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE AND BENEFITS OF CHRISTIAN INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS WITH EMPEROR CONSTANTINE AS A CASE STUDY

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The intersection between Christian values and political governance reveals both challenges and benefits in shaping just societies. Christianity's relationship with political authority has long been contested, shaped by theological perspectives, historical experiences, and practical concerns. This paper examines the role and benefits of Christian involvement in politics, using Constantine the Great as a central case study. Findings show that the Constantine shift marked a transformative era in which Christianity moved from a marginalised, persecuted faith to a religion of imperial favour and influence. Through this development, Christians began to participate actively in governance, legislation, and public life. Critics argue that Constantine's adoption of Christianity introduced compromises that diluted the Church's spiritual purity, while supporters contend that his reign demonstrated the potential benefits of Christian engagement with political authority, including religious tolerance, social cohesion, and moral influence on statecraft. The study adopts critical analysis as methodology which will be used to analyse the historical, theological, and political dimensions of Constantine's involvement in governance of his day. This will highlight the complex but fruitful relationship between Christianity and political power. Thus the stand of this research is that responsible Christian involvement in politics can contribute positively to societal order, ethical governance, and social justice when aligned with core biblical values. Drawing from Constantine's example, the study provides insights into the enduring question of how Christians should engage political authority in diverse socio-political contexts.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Political Authority, Constantine, Governance, Theology

## Introduction

The relationship between religion and politics is one of the most debated subjects in human history. Historically, Christianity emerged as a small, persecuted sect within the Roman Empire. The problem this study seeks to address is "how believers should relate to political authority". In many societies today, Christians wrestle with questions about political engagement: Should the church take a prophetic stance, challenging unjust structures, or should it seek integration within political systems to influence them from within? This problem has been within different historical periods in the rise of Christianity up till this contemporary era.

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Historically, the Church has suffered several persecutions from secular authorities, suggesting that political authority and religious authority are parallel. Academics, Scholars, theologians, religious scholars and Christian Apologists have tried to write on how Christians should relate to political authority but have not given an enduring solution to this. This is evident in how this problems comes up in our everyday experiences especially in contexts like Nigeria's 2023 general election, where religious identity and divine conceptions deeply influenced political behaviour (Salahu, 2023). Throughout history, Christians have taken different approaches to political authority. In the early centuries, many believers adopted a stance of separation, often avoiding political engagement due to persecution or fear of compromise.

Thus the relationship between Christianity and political authority has always been complex, oscillating between cooperation and confrontation, integration and independence, empowerment and compromise. However, with the conversion of Constantine the Great in the early fourth century, Christianity experienced a dramatic transformation in its relationship with political power (Drake, 2007). The case of Constantine provides an indispensable lens for understanding both the opportunities and the risks inherent in Christian involvement in politics. His reign marks a decisive turning point in church history, transitioning Christianity from a persecuted minority faith to a religion with significant political influence. While his policies and decisions were historically contingent, they continue to raise enduring questions for contemporary Christians seeking to engage faithfully in public life. (Drake, 2007). Constantine's reign initiated what scholars call the "Constantinian shift," where Christianity moved from the margins of religious society into the centre of imperial politics. (Drake, 2007; Yoder, 1994; Clapp, 1996). This shift not only ended centuries of persecution but also opened opportunities for Christians to shape governance, law, and society in ways that continue to influence the modern world.

The New Testament itself reflects this tension. On the one hand, Jesus proclaims, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), seemingly distinguishing Spiritual authority from political power. On the other, Paul exhorts Christians in Rome to "be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1), affirming the legitimacy of political structures as divinely ordained. These biblical foundations illustrate the dual reality that Christians must navigate: faithfulness to the transcendent kingdom of God while also participating responsibly in earthly governance - politics.

The central aim of this paper is to examine the roles and benefits of Christian involvement in politics through the case study of Constantine. The focus on Constantine is significant because his reign marked the first major instance in which Christian principles began to inform statecraft, legal reforms, and public policy at the highest levels of governance. His policies such as the Edict of Milan (313 CE), which granted religious tolerance, and his convening of the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), which sought doctrinal unity and demonstrate the practical implications of Christian political engagement.

However, Constantine's legacy is not without controversy. Some historians argue that his patronage of Christianity compromised the faith, aligning it too closely with imperial power



and diluting its prophetic voice (Burckhardt, as cited in Ancient War History, 2025; Yoder, 1994). Others contend that Constantine's example reveals the potential benefits of Christian involvement in politics, such as fostering religious freedom, promoting social order, and embedding moral principles into governance (Opoku, 2014; Ancient War History, 2025; EBSCO, n.d.). This dual legacy reflects the enduring debate within Christian thought: Should believers seek to influence political authority, or should they remain apart from it to preserve their spiritual distinctiveness?

This study approaches the question by examining three interrelated dimensions: (i) the theological foundations for Christian engagement with political authority, (ii) the historical example of Constantine's reign, and (iii) the broader benefits and challenges of Christian political involvement. Drawing upon biblical texts, theological interpretations, and historical analysis, this paper argued that responsible Christian engagement in politics can contribute positively to governance when it is rooted in biblical values and oriented toward justice, peace, and the common good. The significance of this study lies in its contemporary relevance. The case of Constantine provides an early, formative example of these dynamics and offers insights for modern Christians navigating the complex terrain of politics.

This paper structured into six sections with reference. The first section reviews existing literature on Christianity and political authority. It traced key debates from theology and history on Christian political participation. The second explored the theological foundations of Christian political engagement, considering biblical and doctrinal perspectives. The third provides an in-depth case study of Constantine, analysing his policies, reforms, and impact on Christianity's relationship with political authority. The fourth section discusses the benefits of Christian involvement in politics, highlighting examples from Constantine's reign and broader Christian history. The fifth examines the critiques and challenges associated with Christians and political participation. It also addresses the risks of compromise and abuse of power. The final section reflects on the contemporary relevance of these debates and concludes with interconnection of the findings. Situating Constantine within the broader conversation about Christianity and political authority, this study seeks to illuminate both the opportunities and the challenges of Christian political involvement. Ultimately, the paper argued that Christians can play a constructive role in politics, provided they remain faithful to their theological convictions and committed to the common good.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is built on the intersection of political theology and social contract theory. It provides the intellectual lens through which Christian involvement in politics, and Constantine's role in particular, can be understood. Political theology serves as a foundation. It argues that religious ideas inevitably shape political order and authority (Schmitt, 1985; Yoder, 1972). In the Christian tradition, this means that governance cannot be separated from moral responsibility and divine accountability as well as the citizens who are both Christians and the governed. The teachings of Scripture, such as Romans 13, emphasise both obedience to governing authorities and the expectation that rulers act justly under God's authority. This dual obligation creates a theological rationale for Christian participation in



political structures.

Furthermore, the social contract theory provides a secular framework that complements Christian ideas of governance. Thinkers like Augustine, Thomas Hobbes, J.J. Rousseau and later John Locke argued that political authority exists for the welfare of the community, not merely for rulers' interests Atkins & Dodaro, 2001; Duke, 2014; Arneson, 2025; Hoff, 2015). Constantine's adoption of Christianity illustrates how the alignment of spiritual authority with political power can contribute to social order and legitimacy. This harmonises human relationship by offering tolerance and support to Christians, Constantine reinforced a political contract rooted in mutual benefit peace, stability, and shared identity.

These theories "political theology and social contract theory" demonstrated how Christian ethics influenced imperial policies like the *Edict of Milan* recognises that Christianity's engagement with politics is not merely historical but deeply theoretical on theology, philosophy, and ethics to explain why Christian participation can shape governance positively when grounded in authentic faith and moral responsibility(Britannica, 2025).

### **Literature Review**

The relationship between Christianity and political authority has been one of the most enduring subjects of scholarly inquiry. Scholars from theology, history, political science, and philosophy have explored the complex ways in which Christian faith intersects with political structures. In reviewing the literature, three major strands emerge: (i) biblical and theological perspectives on political authority, (ii) historical interpretations of Christian political engagement, and (iii) critical assessments of Constantine's role in shaping the trajectory of Christian state relations. *Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Political Authority:* The biblical foundations of Christian political thought form the starting point for scholarly discussions. Key texts such as Romans 13:1–7, 1 Peter 2:13–17, and John 18:36 provide insights into the early Christian understanding of political authority. Scholars such as Yoder (1972) and Hauerwas (1981) argue that the teachings of Jesus emphasise nonviolence, service, and a radical separation from coercive power. From this perspective, political authority belongs to the fallen order of the world, and the church's task is to embody an alternative relationship rooted in the kingdom of God.

According to Augustine of Hippo, writing in *The City of God* (426 CE), developed a more nuanced view that recognised the necessity of political authority in restraining evil and maintaining order in a fallen world. For Augustine, political institutions are not the ultimate source of justice but can serve as instruments of God's providence (Markus, 1988). This Augustinian tradition has profoundly shaped Christian political thought by affirming that Christians may engage in politics while maintaining a distinction between the earthly city and the heavenly city. Later theologians such as Thomas Aquinas advanced this integrationist perspective, arguing that reason and faith can jointly inform political life. Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 58) viewed political authority as natural and divinely sanctioned, providing a framework for laws to align with divine justice. Contemporary scholars like Oliver O'Donovan (1996) also defend a positive role for Christian political engagement, suggesting



that Christ's resurrection reconfigures authority and legitimises Christian participation in governance.

*Historical Interpretations of Christian Political Engagement:* Historians have noted that Christianity's political role has evolved through various epochs. The Constantinian era, however, transformed Christianity's posture toward politics. Scholars debate whether this transition was a betrayal of Christian purity or a providential development. Harnack (1908) famously critiqued the Constantinian shift as the moment Christianity lost its radical character, becoming intertwined with imperial structures. In contrast, Eusebius (*Life of Constantine*, c. 337 CE) celebrated Constantine as God's chosen instrument for advancing the Christian cause. In the medieval era, the church became a central political authority itself, often overshadowing secular rulers. The rise of Christendom, marked by papal influence and the *Constantine's Role in Scholarship:* Constantine the Great has remained a focal point in scholarship on Christianity and political authority. His conversion to Christianity and subsequent policies, such as the *Edict of Milan* (313 CE), profoundly altered the trajectory of both the church and the Roman Empire. Yet scholars remain divided in interpreting his legacy. Eusebius portrays Constantine as a divinely appointed ruler who advanced the Christian faith through wise governance (Cameron & Hall, 1999). This hagiographic view sees Constantine's reign as a model of Christian political authority that brought peace, unity, and protection for the church.

*Contemporary Scholarly Debates:* The legacy of Constantine continues to inform contemporary debates about Christianity and political authority. Some scholars see in Constantine's reign a cautionary tale about the dangers of political compromise. For example, Milbank (1990) warns that when the church becomes too closely aligned with political power, it risks losing its distinctive witness. Others, however, argue that Christian political engagement is not only permissible but necessary for the pursuit of justice and peace in society (Elshtain, 2008). Furthermore, in pluralistic democracies, questions arise about how Christians should engage politically without imposing sectarian values. Scholars such as Rawls (1993) argue for a public reason framework, while others, like Wolterstorff (2012), defend the legitimacy of religious reasoning in the public square. This ongoing debate reflects the enduring tension between faith and politics, highlighting the importance of examining historical examples such as Constantine to draw insights for the present.

### **Theological Foundations of Christian Political Involvement**

The question of whether Christians should participate in political authority cannot be addressed adequately without a theological framework. Christianity is, at its core, both a spiritual and a practical faith that engages all dimensions of human existence, including governance, justice, and community life. Scripture, tradition, and Christian theology collectively provide the foundation for understanding how believers might faithfully engage in political authority. This section explores four major theological bases for Christian political involvement, they are biblical teachings on governance, the doctrine of God's sovereignty and providence, the incarnational character of the Christian faith, and the ethical imperatives of justice, peace, and human dignity.



The Biblical teachings on governance presents a complex yet coherent framework for understanding political authority. Several key passages have been central to Christian reflection. Romans 13:1–7 is perhaps the most frequently cited. Paul instructs believers: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” This passage affirms that political authority is not arbitrary but derives from God’s sovereignty. Governments, even when imperfect, serve the purpose of maintaining order, promoting justice, and restraining evil. Consequently, Christians are called to obey lawful authority, pay taxes, and honour rulers. Yet this passage must be read alongside Acts 5:29, where Peter declares, “We must obey God rather than men.” This establishes a limit to political obedience: Christians are not to submit when state commands contradict divine law. The tension between obedience and resistance underscores the dual responsibility of Christians to respect legitimate authority while maintaining loyalty to God above all.

The ‘Old Testament’ provides additional insights. The prophets consistently held kings accountable to God’s standards of justice and righteousness (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8). Israel’s monarchy, though divinely permitted, was judged when it deviated from God’s covenantal expectations. This prophetic tradition underscores the principle that political authority is legitimate only insofar as it serves justice and the common good. Jesus’ own teachings also inform Christian attitudes toward politics. His statement, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Mark 12:17), acknowledges the reality of political authority while simultaneously affirming the higher claim of divine authority. Likewise, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) articulate ethical values such as peace-making, humility, and justice that provide guiding principles for Christian engagement in politics. Taken together, these biblical passages affirm both the legitimacy of political authority and the responsibility of Christians to engage critically and faithfully within political systems.

A second theological foundation for Christian political involvement lies in the doctrines of God’s divine sovereignty and providence. Scripture affirms that God reigns over all creation, including nations and rulers. Daniel 2:21 declares that God “changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others.” Similarly, Proverbs 21:1 states, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”

This understanding implies that political authority, while exercised by humans, is ultimately under divine governance. Augustine, in his *City of God* (426 CE), distinguishes between the earthly city, characterised by self-love, and the heavenly city, characterised by the love of God. Yet even the earthly city is sustained by God’s providence, and rulers serve a role in maintaining temporal peace. Augustine’s theology legitimises Christian engagement in politics as participation in God’s ordering of history, even if political authority remains imperfect.

A third theological foundation arises from the incarnational character and/or nature of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the incarnation affirms that in Jesus Christ, God entered fully into human history, assuming flesh and participating in the realities of earthly life (John 1:14). This central truth of Christianity implies that the faith is not detached from worldly affairs but



deeply engaged with them. The incarnation suggests that Christians cannot retreat into purely spiritual or private domains, ignoring the political and social dimensions of life. Just as Christ engaged with the marginalised, confronted unjust structures, and proclaimed good news to the oppressed, so too are Christians called to embody God's kingdom in tangible ways, including political engagement. By extension, Christian involvement in politics is not a departure from spirituality but an expression of incarnational discipleship. To ignore politics would be to neglect the arenas in which human dignity, justice, and peace are contested and shaped.

There is also the ethical imperatives: on justice, peace, and human dignity. Christian political engagement is grounded in ethical imperatives central to the faith. Scripture consistently emphasises justice as a core value. The prophet Micah encapsulates this in his famous exhortation: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Justice in the biblical sense involves fairness, equity, and care for the vulnerable, particularly the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:18–19; Isaiah 1:17). The New Testament reinforces these imperatives. Jesus' ministry prioritised the marginalised, embodying a kingdom ethic that challenged unjust hierarchies. The early church shared resources in common, ensuring that "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34). These examples underscore the responsibility of Christians to pursue justice not only in private charity but also in public policy and governance which can be achieved through our involvement in politics. Finally, the Christian doctrine of humanity affirms that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This doctrine provides a theological basis for human dignity, equality, and rights. Political engagement thus becomes a means of safeguarding the dignity of all people, particularly the marginalised. Contemporary Christian thinkers, such as John Paul II (1991), have emphasised the defense of human dignity as the cornerstone of Christian political ethics.

### **Benefits of Christian Involvement in Politics**

Christian involvement in politics has long been debated within theological, historical, and ethical discourse. While critics emphasise the risks of compromise, corruption, or loss of prophetic witness, it is equally important to acknowledge the potential benefits of Christian engagement with political authority. Constantine the Great provides a compelling historical case study that illustrates how Christian influence in governance can yield positive outcomes. The benefits of Christian political involvement under two major categories: The first is the promotion of religious freedom and tolerance. This is one of the most immediate and enduring benefits of Constantine's political involvement with Christianity. The Edict of Milan (313 CE), jointly issued by Constantine and Licinius, not only legalised Christianity but extended freedom of worship to all religions within the Roman Empire. This development marked a radical departure from the centuries of persecution that had characterised earlier imperial policies. Christians were no longer marginalised but granted equal legal standing, enabling them to practice their faith openly and organise their communities. Beyond Christianity, the Edict also affirmed the principle of religious pluralism, recognizing the right of all citizens to worship according to their conscience. From a Christian perspective, this represented a remarkable alignment of political authority with biblical principles of freedom and human dignity. Theologically, it echoes the conviction that authentic faith cannot be coerced but must



be freely embraced. By institutionalizing religious tolerance, Constantine's policies created space for Christianity to flourish without persecution while also protecting the rights of others. This benefit extends beyond Constantine's context. In modern societies, Christian involvement in politics has often been a catalyst for the defense of religious liberty.

The second benefit of Christian political involvement lies in the integration of moral and ethical principles into governance. Constantine's reign exemplifies this through a range of legal reforms influenced by Christian values. In this instance, Constantine introduced laws that reflected Critiques, Tensions, and Challenges of Christian Involvement in Politics. While the benefits of Christian involvement in politics are substantial, as demonstrated in Constantine's reign, history also reveals significant challenges and tensions that arise when faith and political authority intersect. These challenges highlight the need for careful reflection on the appropriate role of Christianity within political life. Broadly, the critiques can be grouped into five categories:

Thus, one of the primary critiques of Christian involvement in politics is the risk of compromising the spiritual integrity of the faith. Christianity, at its core, is a spiritual movement centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Its mission is fundamentally one of proclaiming the gospel, nurturing discipleship, and embodying the kingdom of God in everyday life. Christianity, when becomes deeply enmeshed in political authority, there is the danger that its spiritual mission will be diluted or subordinated to political concerns. This was evident in Constantine's reign. While his support for Christianity enabled the faith to flourish legally and institutionally, it also created new entanglements. Bishops and church leaders gained political influence and material privileges, which in some cases diverted their focus from spiritual ministry to political manoeuvring. For critics, this represents a fundamental compromise. The church, they argue, risks losing its prophetic independence when it becomes too closely aligned with the society. Instead of speaking truth to power, the church may become beholden to power, unable or unwilling to critique unjust policies.

Another critique concerns the temptation of political power itself. Political authority is inherently bound up with questions of control, coercion, and influence. When Christians enter the political sphere, they face the temptation to prioritise the pursuit of power over the pursuit of justice and righteousness. Constantine's reign again provides a cautionary example. His embrace of Christianity coincided with his efforts to consolidate imperial power. While he promoted religious tolerance, he also used Christianity to legitimise his authority, presenting himself as God's chosen ruler. This fusion of religious and political authority bolstered his legitimacy but raised questions about whether the faith was being instrumentalised for political ends. Later history offers further warnings. The medieval papacy, for instance, wielded immense political power, often blurring the line between spiritual leadership and secular rule. This led to corruption, abuses of power, and conflicts such as the Investiture Controversy. The pursuit of political power by Christian institutions sometimes undermined their spiritual credibility and led to widespread disillusionment. For critics, this demonstrates the inherent danger of Christians seeking political authority: the seduction of power can corrupt even well-intentioned leaders. Augustine of Hippo warned of this in *The City of God*, distinguishing the



earthly city, driven by the love of power, from the heavenly city, oriented toward the love of God. Christian political involvement always runs the risk of succumbing to society. Another significant challenge of Christian political involvement is the tendency toward coercion and enforced religious uniformity. When political authority aligns itself with a particular religion, it often seeks to impose that religion on its subjects, either overtly or subtly. Although Constantine initially promoted religious tolerance, later emperors such as Theodosius I, moved toward establishing Christianity as the official state religion, outlawing pagan practices and persecuting dissenters. This shift marked the beginning of Christendom, in which Christianity and political authority were deeply fused. While this provided stability and unity, it also eroded the principle of religious freedom. Theologically, this represents a tension with the nature of Christian faith, which emphasises voluntary belief. Coercion contradicts the biblical vision of faith as a free response to God's grace. Tertullian, an early Christian writer, argued that "religion cannot be forced; it must be embraced willingly" (*Ad Scapulam*, Chapter 2). Yet when Christianity is tied to political power, coercion often becomes a tool of governance (Tertullian, ca. 212/213).

A fourth critique is that political involvement can distort the witness of Christianity. The gospel's central message is one of sacrificial love, humility, and service, embodied in the life of Christ. Political authority, by contrast, often operates through force, hierarchy, and domination. When the church aligns too closely with political systems, there is the risk that the values of politics will overshadow the values of the gospel. Constantine's reign illustrates this tension. While he promoted Christian values, he also continued practices that were inconsistent with the gospel, such as waging wars to secure his rule and using violence against rivals. By portraying himself as a Christian emperor, Constantine blurred the line between the gospel of peace and the realities of imperial power (Drake, 2007; MacCulloch, 2010). This raises the question: does political involvement compromise Christianity's ability to embody the countercultural witness of Jesus? Critics argue that when the church takes on the trappings of political power, it risks losing its distinctiveness and credibility. Instead of being a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6), the church may be seen as just another political faction. In modern contexts, this concern is evident when Christian groups align uncritically with particular political parties or ideologies. Such alliances can reduce the faith to a tool of partisan politics, distorting its universal message and alienating those who do not share the same political views. A final critique reflects a deeper theological tension: the distinction between the kingdom of God and earthly political systems. Jesus proclaimed a kingdom "not of this world" (John 18:36), characterised by humility, justice, and peace. Earthly politics, by contrast, is often marked by ambition, conflict, and compromise. Christian political involvement inevitably raises the question of how these two realms relate. Augustine's *City of God* provides a classic framework: the earthly city, governed by self-interest and power, and the heavenly city (Augustine, ca. 426/2001), governed by love of God, coexist but remain distinct. Christians live in both, but their ultimate allegiance is to the heavenly city. The danger arises when Christians conflate the two, treating political authority as equivalent to God's kingdom. Constantine's reign illustrates this risk: by portraying himself as God's chosen ruler, he blurred the boundaries between divine and earthly authority. Later manifestations of Christendom reinforced this conflation, leading to centuries of church-state entanglement. For critics, this



tension highlights the need for humility and discernment. While Christians may participate in politics, they must avoid equating political achievements with the realization of God's kingdom. The church's ultimate mission is eschatological, pointing toward the fulfilment of God's reign beyond history. Political involvement can serve this mission but must not replace it.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Constantine's legacy for Christian Political Engagement**

The reign of Constantine, though distant in history, continues to provide a rich framework for contemporary reflection on the relationship between Christianity and political authority. The questions raised by his policies, decisions, and theological posturing remain relevant in today's political and religious landscapes. Modern Christians live in a variety of contexts: secular democracies, authoritarian regimes, pluralistic societies, and regions where Christianity is either dominant or marginalised. In each of these contexts, the lessons of Constantine's legacy can serve as both inspiration and caution.

One of Constantine's most enduring contributions was the legalization of Christianity through the Edict of Milan (313 CE), which advanced the principle of religious tolerance. In an era where Christians had faced brutal persecution, this shift was transformative. Although later emperors moved toward enforcing religious uniformity, Constantine's initial emphasis on freedom of belief offers a valuable precedent for contemporary societies. In modern democracies, the principle of religious freedom is a cornerstone of constitutional governance. Christians today can draw on Constantine's early policies to affirm the importance of safeguarding religious liberty not only for themselves but also for adherents of other faiths. This aligns with biblical principles of love, justice, and respect for human dignity (Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16)

The link between faith and political influence can be harnessed to promote justice, integrity, and compassion in governance (Luka, 2025; Driskell et al., 2005; Omelicheva, 2017). Constantine exemplifies how political leaders can draw on Christian values to shape governance. His support for ecclesiastical councils, his promotion of church unity, and his commitment to certain moral reforms reveal the potential for faith to inform public life. In today's context, this principle remains highly relevant. Christian values such as justice, compassion, stewardship, and care for the marginalised can enrich political discourse and policymaking. For example, movements for social justice, the abolition of slavery, civil rights, and humanitarian aid have often been inspired by Christian convictions. When Christians engage in politics with integrity, they help foster more just and compassionate societies. However, Constantine's example also underscores the need for discernment. His use of Christianity to legitimise imperial power illustrates how faith can be instrumentalised for political gain. In modern politics, Christians must remain vigilant against partisan co-option of their faith. The prophetic witness of the church requires independence from political agendas, even while influencing them.

There is also the need to provide balance between Prophetic Witness and Political Participation. A central tension in Constantine's legacy is the balance between prophetic witness and political



participation. As emperor, Constantine granted privileges to the church, but this close alliance risked muting the church's capacity to critique imperial policies. The same risk persists today. In contemporary democracies, Christians are called both to participate constructively in political life and to retain their prophetic voice. This dual role requires humility and discernment. For instance, Christians may advocate for policies that promote economic justice, environmental stewardship, or protection of the vulnerable. At the same time, they must remain willing to critique political leaders those they support when policies diverge from biblical principles. The church must resist the temptation to identify itself wholly with a single party or ideology. Constantine's legacy shows how such entanglements can erode credibility. Instead, Christians should adopt a posture of critical engagement, rooted in the transcendent values of the kingdom of God.

There is also blurred boundaries within Power, Corruption, and Integrity, which need clarification. Constantine's reign highlights both the potential and the peril of Christian engagement with political power. His patronage elevated Christianity, but it also entangled the church with imperial interests. In later centuries, this entanglement sometimes produced corruption and abuses of power. In modern contexts, the temptation of power remains acute. Political office provides opportunities for service but also opens the door to self-interest, compromise, and corruption. Christian political actors today must cultivate spiritual disciplines that guard against these dangers. Prayer, accountability, transparency, and humility are essential safeguards for maintaining integrity. Christian must support leaders who embody Christ like virtues rather than merely seeking political advantage. This requires evaluating candidates not only by their rhetoric but also by their character, values, and commitment to justice. In this sense, Constantine's legacy serves as a cautionary tale: the church must avoid uncritical endorsement of leaders simply because they profess Christian identity.

Church-State Relations in a Secular Age is still debated. Constantine's alliance with the church inaugurated a model of Christendom, in which church and state were deeply intertwined. In today's secular and pluralistic age, that model is increasingly untenable. Yet the questions it raised remain pressing: how should the church relate to political authority? In liberal democracies, the separation of church and state is often upheld as a safeguard against coercion. Christians can affirm this principle while still advocating for a constructive public role for faith. Rather than seeking dominance, the church can serve as a moral compass, offering wisdom, critique, and advocacy rooted in the gospel. In societies where Christianity is marginalised, Constantine's legacy offers encouragement that political engagement can transform contexts of persecution into opportunities for flourishing. His example demonstrates that political change can open new spaces for religious communities, though it must be pursued carefully to avoid coercion or overreach.

### **Lessons for Christian Political Leadership**

Finally, Constantine's legacy offers practical lessons for Christian political leadership today. Among them: Promote unity without Coercion: Constantine's support for the Council of Nicaea reveals the value of fostering unity, but later coercive policies undermine this lesson. Christian leaders today should encourage dialogue and reconciliation rather than imposing



conformity. **Model Servant Leadership:** Unlike Constantine, who often wielded power in imperial fashion, Christian leaders should emulate Christ's model of servant leadership (Mark 10:42–45). Political authority should be exercised as stewardship, not domination.

**Maintain Independence of the Church:** The church must retain its prophetic independence even when engaging political leaders. The danger of becoming a mere instrument of political agendas remains real. **Integrate Faith with Justice:** Christian engagement in politics should prioritise justice for the poor, marginalised, and oppressed, reflecting the biblical vision of God's kingdom.

**Embrace Humility and Eschatological Perspective:** Constantine's tendency to conflate his rule with divine purposes serves as a caution. Christians must recognise that no political system can fully realise the kingdom of God. Political efforts must be undertaken with humility and hope in God's ultimate reign.

### **Constantine as Mirror and Guide for Contemporary Christian that which to Engage in Politics**

Constantine's legacy provides both positive models and cautionary lessons for Christians today. His legalization of Christianity highlights the importance of religious freedom. His integration of faith into public life demonstrates the potential for Christian values to enrich governance. Yet his entanglement of church and state, his use of religion to legitimise power, and the coercive policies of his successors caution against uncritical alliances. For contemporary Christians, the task is to learn from Constantine without repeating his mistakes. Faithful political engagement requires balancing prophetic independence with constructive participation, safeguarding integrity, and pursuing justice in ways consistent with the gospel. Ultimately, Constantine's story reminds us that Christian political involvement is both necessary and fraught with tension. It can open doors for transformation but also risks compromise. By reflecting critically on his legacy, Christians can navigate these complexities with greater wisdom and faithfulness in today's diverse political landscapes.

### **Conclusion**

Constantine's contributions cannot be underestimated. His legalization of Christianity through the Edict of Milan provided religious freedom that enabled the church to grow, organise, and influence broader society. His support for the Council of Nicaea demonstrated the value of using political resources to resolve ecclesiastical disputes and promote unity. Moreover, his moral reforms and patronage of church institutions reveal the potential of Christian convictions to enrich governance and public order. These elements highlight the benefits of Christian political involvement, particularly in ensuring justice, fostering unity, and safeguarding the rights of believers. At the same time, Constantine's legacy is not without its shadows. His increasing intertwining of church and state laid the groundwork for later coercion, corruption, and the over-identification of Christianity with political power. The church's prophetic independence was compromised as it became reliant on imperial patronage. His successors' use of Christianity as an instrument of control reminds us that when faith becomes too closely aligned with state power, it risks losing its spiritual vitality and moral credibility. These cautionary elements underscore the dangers of political entanglement and remind modern



Christians of the necessity of critical engagement, rather than blind endorsement, of political authority.

Theologically, Constantine's reign challenges the church to reflect on the meaning of political authority in the light of Christian teaching. The Apostle Paul's affirmation that rulers are ordained by God (Romans 13) must be held in tension with the prophetic tradition that critiques unjust power (Amos 5; Micah 6:8). Constantine's reign illustrates how political authority can be a vehicle for advancing the common good but also a tool of domination when divorced from humility and accountability. For Christians today, this means adopting a posture of both cooperation and critique, recognizing that while politics can be a sphere for serving God's purposes, it can never fully embody the kingdom of God. In contemporary contexts whether democratic, authoritarian, or pluralistic the lessons of Constantine remain salient. Christians are called to advocate for religious freedom, defend justice for the marginalised, and contribute to policies that reflect compassion, stewardship, and peace. Yet they must also guard against the misuse of faith for partisan advantage and maintain the church's prophetic witness. Servant leadership, integrity, and humility are crucial virtues for Christians in political life, ensuring that their engagement remains consistent with the gospel.

The relevance of Constantine's legacy lies in its dual nature: it inspires Christians to recognise the transformative potential of political engagement, while also warning them of the dangers of compromise and corruption. To ignore the positive elements is to undervalue the contribution of Christian faith to public life; to overlook the dangers is to risk repeating historical mistakes. The challenge for today's church is to embrace the former while resisting the latter.

In conclusion, the role and benefits of Christian involvement in politics are best understood as a dynamic tension between faith and power. Constantine's example, both as benefactor and as caution, teaches that Christian engagement in politics must be rooted in justice, humility, and service rather than domination or self-interest. Political authority, when guided by Christian principles, can indeed promote the flourishing of society. Yet the church must never lose sight of its ultimate allegiance to the kingdom of God, which transcends all earthly systems. By learning from Constantine affirming his achievements while acknowledging his failures contemporary Christians can navigate the complex terrain of political engagement with wisdom, courage, and fidelity. This approach ensures that Christian involvement in politics remains a channel for justice and peace while safeguarding the prophetic independence of the church. The legacy of Constantine, therefore, continues to echo across the centuries, challenging each generation of believers to discern a new how to live faithfully at the intersection of faith and political authority.

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