

CHRISTIAN STUDIES

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With this issue of *Christian Studies*, I begin the duty and privilege of serving the faculty as editor. Since its inaugural issue in 1980, this journal, known at that time simply as the “Faculty Bulletin,” has been in the capable hands of its founding editor, Michael Weed. It is with gratitude for Dr. Weed’s visionary labor and with humility for the work at hand that I assume the role of editor, with the indispensable aid of the managing editor, Todd Hall.

From its inception, this publication has sought to provide responsible and biblical theological reflection that is beneficial and accessible to the scholar as well as to the interested “layperson.” This aim is summed up well in the journal’s motto: Scholarship for the Church. I want to assure our readers, old and new alike, that we press on toward the future mindful of what has come before. As in the past, so in the future, the goal of this journal will be not merely to publish the “results of scholarly research,” but to address real issues in the faith and practice of the church and of individual believers. As in the past, it will continue to be a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology, but also with contributions from other scholars. Within these parameters, the intent is to provide readers with the best theological writing in Churches of Christ, but also with a reach that extends beyond our walls.

All issues of *Christian Studies*, including this one, are available online, via the Austin Grad website, at <http://austingrad.edu/resources/christian-studies-publication>. If you find the content beneficial, please share this journal, in its print and online forms, with others.

In that first issue of the “Faculty Bulletin” that appeared thirty-five years ago was a contribution by Paul Watson. Watson is an Old Testament scholar who taught at the Institute for Christian Studies (now Austin Grad) from 1979-1983. He had a lasting impact on his colleagues and students during his years as a professor here. He left the Institute to work in full-time congregational ministry, where he has continued to influence countless souls for God’s kingdom. This issue of *Christian Studies*, whose theme is “The Old Testament and the Life of the Church,” is dedicated to Paul Watson and to the legacy of scholarship and ministry that he has passed on—and continues

to pass on—to the church. The contributors bring this gift to him, and to us all, in the hope that it will bring honor to whom honor is due.

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Reflections on the Value of Isaiah for the Life of the Modern Church¹

J. J. M. Roberts

For the writers of the New Testament, including the Apostle Paul, Scripture meant the Old Testament. In 1 Cor 10:1-11 Paul uses the OT accounts of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings as a warning to Christians. In vv. 6 and 11 he says, “Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did...These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” Indeed, the classic proof text for biblical inspiration in 2 Tim 3:16—“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work”

¹ I have known Paul Watson since our freshman year at Abilene Christian College. We were both Greek majors, so we had lots of classes together, and the last year or so of our time there, Paul and his first wife Ann and I and my first wife Genie shared the two halves of a duplex house. We became good family friends, and we kept up with one another through our divinity school experience and graduate school, though I went to Harvard in Cambridge, MA, while Paul went to Yale in New Haven, CT. The friendly Harvard-Yale rivalry was symptomatic of other differences between us. We have remained good friends over the years as both of us lost our first wives to sickness or accident and both of us remarried, and as our academic and church careers have taken us in different directions, but, apart from our common Christian commitment and a common interest in good scholarship, I am not sure that we have ever agreed on many of the important issues of the day, whether of scholarship or politics. In a period of deeply divisive and partisan social and political conflict, it is perhaps a helpful reminder that friendship does not require anywhere near total unanimity in opinion.

(NRSV)—clearly refers to the Old Testament. In the preceding verse the author characterizes Timothy as a person who “from childhood” had “known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). In 2 Tim 1:5, the author speaks of Timothy’s “sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” Since, according to Acts 16:1-5, Paul chose the young man Timothy to accompany him early in his second missionary journey, well before any of the New Testament documents or letters had actually been composed, it should be clear that the reference in 2 Timothy was to the Old Testament scriptures, not to the New Testament, none of which existed when Timothy was a child.

Of course, the New Testament is included in Scripture for later generations of Christians who had access to these writings. The author of Colossians urges that his letter to the Colossians be also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that the Colossians read his letter to the Laodiceans (Col 4:16). Moreover, the author of 2 Peter refers to the two letters he had written to his Christian communities as a reminder of the words of “the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles” (2 Pet 3:1-2), and he goes on to mention the letters of “our beloved brother Paul,” in which “there are some things hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (my emphasis, 2 Pet 3:15-16). The emerging collection of New Testament writings was clearly being read in the Christian communities that had access to them as authoritative writings, as Scripture, alongside the more ancient Scripture of the Old Testament.

In the mid-second century, however, under the influence of the heretic Marcion, “who rejected the Jewish roots of the church and postulated two gods, the just Creator of the world” versus “the merciful Father of Jesus Christ,” the Old Testament was rejected as the work of this alien God of wrath, and even New Testament Scripture was limited to a revised version of Luke and ten edited letters of Paul.² The view that two different gods are responsible for the Old and New Testament may strike modern church people as odd, but unfortunately an only slightly variant form of Marcionism is still

² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd. ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 612-13.

alive and well in segments of the Church of Christ and in the larger Christian church. Dispensational theology, which tries to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15) between Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations, can lead very easily to the disparagement of the Old Testament as no longer relevant to Christians, since we live under the Christian dispensation, and the old Law is no longer binding, having been nailed to the cross (Col 2:14).

Growing up in the Church of Christ in West Texas I heard the complaint more than once, rooted in a poor understanding of this theology, that preachers should not preach on the Old Testament, since it was no longer in force and basically irrelevant for our lives today. In more recent years I naively assumed that our tradition had progressed beyond that misunderstanding until an incident in a church in New Hampshire reminded me that old heresies never die; they just reappear in new forms. A “progressive” teacher was teaching on Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, when he encountered something in the text that he regarded as not “spiritual” enough and “too Jewish” to come from Jesus. To my astonishment he claimed that the portrait of Jesus in the Gospel had been “contaminated” by the “Jewishness” of the Old Testament. I immediately reacted by explaining that this point of view was nothing more than the ancient Marcionite heresy barely disguised in new clothes. I am not sure, however, how much the audience really cared one way or another. The temptation to remake Jesus in our own image or to “spiritualize” away sayings or demands that we do not like is ever with us, and it is amazing how much the “historical Jesus” winds up looking like our ideal portrait of ourselves, uncontaminated by the actual words of the ancient texts.

One of the fundamental problems of any Marcionite or pseudo-Marcionite limitation of the canon, even allowing the whole corpus of the New Testament, is that the New Testament was composed in a very brief period in which the social and political situations of the Christian communities were relatively homogeneous. During the compositional period of the New Testament, the Christian community was very much a minority religious movement within the Roman imperial system. The Christian community had no political power, and it was subject to severe persecution, both from older, larger, and more powerful religious and societal groups, as well as

from the imperial authorities. In such a climate, it was helpful to hunker down, not to draw unnecessary attention to oneself. The world in which modern Christians live, particularly in the democratic societies of Western Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, is quite different. Christians are no longer an obscure religious minority. They actively participate in government, sometimes as heads of state, and they must decide what kind of public policies are compatible with their Christian faith, while recognizing at the same time that the state they lead is not “Christian,” that the population they serve is both religiously and irreligiously quite diverse. In this regard, the Old Testament texts may prove more helpful to modern Christians looking for political guidance than the more homogeneous texts of the New Testament. The Old Testament was composed over a much longer period of time, parts of it when Israel under David and Solomon was a major imperial power, parts of it when Israel and Judah were major regional powers, parts of it when they were vassal states subject to far more powerful imperial states, and parts of it when the Jewish community was very much a minority community under the domination of successive empires. Within this much broader historical framework of the Old Testament, one may perhaps expect to find more relevant advice for the modern political concerns of Christian citizens, politicians, and government officials, than in the more narrow social and historical framework of the New Testament.

To focus on Isaiah of Jerusalem, his ministry spanned the years from ca. 738 BC to perhaps as late as 686 BC, early in the reign of Manasseh (687/6–642 BC). Isaiah’s ministry began in the last year of Uzziah/Azariah (Isa 6:1), when Jotham was already a co-regent (2 Kgs 15:5), and Judah was a significant independent regional power. With the fall of north Syrian Kullani (biblical Calno [Isa 10:9] or Calneh [Amos 6:2]) in 738 BC and the death of Uzziah/Azariah the same year, followed by the growing hostility of Rezin of Damascus and his Israelite and Philistine allies, Judah’s political position deteriorated quickly under Jotham (2 Kgs 15:37) and his successor Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:5-6; Isa 9:10-11) who, to save himself from these regional enemies, accepted vassalhood under the Assyrians (2 Kgs 16:7-18). Isaiah had opposed this move (Isa 7:1-9), and had very little, if anything, positive to say about Ahaz and his court. His disparaging comments in Isa 3:4, 12, and 7:13 are aimed at Ahaz and his court. Isaiah was initially more positively inclined

toward Hezekiah (Isa 8:23b–9:6; 14:28–32), but when Hezekiah attempted to throw off the Assyrian yoke by linking his fate through diplomatic agreements to the eastern coalition of the Aramaeans of Babylon (Isa 39:1–8) and their Elamite allies and the southern power of the Nubian rulers of Egypt (Isa 30:1–7; 31:1–9), Isaiah severely criticized the policies of Hezekiah’s court. Following this failed revolt against Assyria, Hezekiah and his successor Manasseh remained Assyrian vassals with little freedom of action, though how many, if any, of Isaiah’s oracles actually date to the years following Sennacherib’s campaign against Judah in 701 BC remains disputed and uncertain.

Before applying Isaiah’s insights to any modern situation, however, it is also important to take seriously the huge religious and political gap between his world and the world of the modern Christian of the democratic West. Isaiah lived in a hereditary monarchy with religious undergirding, and even in his visions of the ideal future he never articulates any hope or desire for a different political structure. Moreover, the dominant theological strand which influenced his thinking, a construct which I have characterized as the “Zion Tradition,” is quite different from the theological beliefs of modern Christians, though the Zion Tradition was instrumental in the development of messianic hopes that ultimately led to Christian beliefs in Jesus as the Messiah, son of God, and ruler of the kingdom of God until the final judgment.³ The Zion Tradition consisted of three main points: 1) Yahweh/God was the supreme deity, creator, and ruler of the whole universe; 2) Yahweh/God had appointed David and his continuing dynasty as God’s human regents to exercise God’s imperial rule according to God’s justice; and 3) Yahweh/God had chosen Zion/Jerusalem as God’s imperial capital from where God’s rule would be exercised. Of these three main points, only the first remains basically unaltered in modern Christian belief. Far from a belief in the continuation of the earthly political rule of David’s descendants, Christians see Jesus as the heir of David, but Jesus’ kingdom is not a kingdom of this world (John 18:36), a very important shift that caused the earliest disciples of Jesus difficulty (Matt 16:21–23; Acts 1:6). Moreover, in Christian thought the political

³ See my “Solomon’s Jerusalem and the Zion Tradition,” in A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew (eds.), *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, SBLSS 18 (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 163–70, and the literature cited there.

importance of the earthly Jerusalem has also experienced a major spiritualizing shift, so that the new Jerusalem of Christian hope is no longer the earthly, physical Jerusalem of Palestine, but the heavenly Jerusalem where faithful Christians hope to spend eternity in the presence of God and the Lamb (Gal 4:25-26; Rev 21-22).

Isaiah lived in the late eighth and early seventh centuries BC, long before either of these spiritualizing transitions in thought had occurred. His visions, even of the ideal future, remained far more earthbound and worldly than modern Christian beliefs, and one needs to remember that in applying his insights to modern situations. Isaiah's criticisms of Ahaz's diplomatic submission to the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-pileser III and Hezekiah's opposing policy of trying to throw off the Assyrian yoke through diplomatic dealings with Nubian Egypt, the Philistines, and eventually Babylon, for instance, are rooted in Isaiah's firm belief in God's commitment to the Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem. If Ahaz and Hezekiah really believed in the promises of God emphasized in their own royal theology, Isaiah claimed that these faithless leaders then would not go running off in fear to seek salvation from human political powers. No such divine promises extend to the President of the United States or Washington, D.C., however, and it is not at all clear that Isaiah's opposition to defensive alliances, rooted as it was in particular divine promises, has any relevance for modern geo-political crises faced by contemporary believers in positions of political responsibility.

On the other hand, Isaiah's oracles against governmental corruption involving judicial bribery (Isa 1:23; 5:23; cf. Micah 3:9-11) and unjust laws (Isa 10:1-2) allowing the rich and powerful to confiscate the private property of the innocent poor remain relevant, whatever the differences in political systems between his time and ours. In Isaiah's troubled time, with the vast influx of landless refugees from the north following Assyria's conquest of Israel, the surplus of cheap labor made the acquisition of more farmland economically attractive, and, to judge from the oracles of Isaiah and his contemporary Micah of Moresheth (Micah 2:1-2, 8-9), many of Judah's wealthy and elite families did whatever was required to radically increase their landholdings, including bribing government officials and getting laws passed that made their acquisitions quicker and easier at the expense of their poorer, less influential neighbors (Isa 5:8). For these families, men and women alike

(note Isaiah's two oracles explicitly targeting the women of leisure [Isa 3:16–4:1; 32:9–14]), at least according to Isaiah,⁴ it was a time of excess, of flagrant display of wealth (large and beautiful houses [5:9; 32:13–13]; elaborate clothing [3:18–23]; excessive drinking and partying [5:11–12, 22; 28:7–8; cf. Micah 2:11]), with little regard for the cohesiveness of the larger community or of their responsibility toward God and their fellow citizens.

Despite his criticism of the leisured class, however, Isaiah himself appears to have come from this same class, with whom he appears to have shared the same educational background in the wisdom tradition and the same religious background in the royal Zion Tradition. Moreover, despite his criticism of his patrician social class, he never opted for a populist point of view or desired a radical social rearrangement of the patriarchal and monarchical system of which he was a part. For Isaiah, the traditionalist, it was not a blessing, but divine judgment, when he threatens Judah with a breakdown in society that results in their being ruled by women and children (3:4, 12), when youth will be insolent to the elder, and the base to the honorable (3:5), when the only criterion for being a leader is whether one has food or a cloak (3:6–7). In contrast, in Isaiah's ideal future, after the refining judgment (1:24–28), the Davidic king and his royal officials will rule justly (32:1), and the larger ruling class, of which Isaiah was a part, will once again be noble in fact, not just pronounced such by fawning seekers of favors (32:5–8).

Of course, Isaiah, like the Old Testament in general, was concerned with the welfare of the poor and powerless, the proverbial stranger, orphan, and widow—those who did not have the social safety net of extended family connections to protect them from avaricious predators. In his view, however, the just and compassionate treatment of the poor was also the best way for the wealthy and powerful to maintain their own security. Isaiah quotes Yahweh as saying to these leaders, “This is rest, give rest to the weary/ This is repose, give repose to the needy,” but Isaiah continues with the negative judgment, “but they refused to hear”(Isa 28:12).⁵ The leaders' selfish refusal

⁴ It should be remembered that Isaiah's oracles are polemical in nature, and polemical literature by its very nature seldom portrays the opponents in a completely objective fashion. There was another side to this debate to which we no longer have access, but of which Isaiah's contemporaries would have been aware.

⁵ Reading *wz 't hmnwłh hnyłw l'yp wz 't hmrg 'h hrgy 'w l'bywn wl' 'bw šmw'* (see my “A Note on Isaiah 28:12,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 48–51).

to consider the wellbeing of the whole community, including the weak and powerless, would ultimately lead, according to Isaiah, to the leaders themselves losing their own security, eventually undermining any status they had as “leaders” (Isa 3:6-7).

In citing Isaiah’s and the Old Testament’s concern for the poor, however, the modern interpreter addressing contemporary social and political issues needs to exercise discernment. Despite widely-accepted claims for the Old Testament’s “preferential treatment” of the poor, the legal material in the Old Testament is quite explicit in rejecting any partiality in the exercise of justice—“You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit” (Exod 23:2-3). One is not to distort justice or show partiality, whether for the rich or the poor; “justice, and only justice, you shall pursue” (Deut 16:18-20). When “justice” is qualified by such popular modifiers as “social justice,” one needs to look closely to see whether genuine “justice” has simply been replaced by a “crowd-pleasing injustice.” Moreover, just because a modern political or social program is supposed to help the poor is no guarantee that it actually will. Past welfare programs genuinely intended to help the poor in our country have in some cases had the opposite effect.

A case in point is the economic incentive such programs have had in removing the husband from welfare families. This incentive has contributed to the breakdown of family structure and has done much to create a continuing dependency on the state by significant segments of poor urban populations in this country. One may have a genuine concern for the poor and still be very skeptical of, and even opposed to, particular programs that are supposed to help them. Reasonable people may reach far different conclusions on the likelihood of success of a particular proposal for helping the poor, and the reasoned refusal to back such a proposal is hardly a sign that the nay-sayer is against the poor or that the proposal’s backers are more compassionate or religious.

In the contemporary political debate in this country, much has been made of “the politics of fear,” whatever that may mean to the various parties in the debate. On this point Isaiah has much to say. Based on the Zion Tradition’s promises to the Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem, Isaiah urged first Ahaz (Isa

7-8) and then Hezekiah (Isa 14:28-32; 18; 20; 28) to calmly trust God, not to fear the enemies' vain threats, and certainly not to rush into vassal treaties with human suzerains that compromised the dynasty's fundamental religious beliefs and switched reliance on God to reliance on "violent oppression and deceit" (Isa 30:12).⁶ When Ahaz refused Isaiah's repeated promises of divine support and instead, in sheer terror, turned to Tiglath-pileser III as his savior, Isaiah received another revelation from God in Isa 8:11-15. God warned Isaiah and his supporters not to call everything treason which this people called treason, nor to fear (*tir'ēû*) what they feared, nor to be terrified (*ta'ārîṣû*) by what terrified them. Rather they were to sanctify (*taqdîṣû*) Yahweh of Hosts and make him their object of fear (*môra'ākem*) and their object of terror (*mă'ārîṣkem*). If one acted out of a fear and terror of Yahweh, that is, out of genuine piety, then Yahweh would be a *miqdāš*, a place of sanctuary or refuge. If not, however, Yahweh would be a stone (*'eben*) and a rock (*šûr*). Both these words could be used to refer to God's protection. Samuel set up an *'eben* which he named Ebenezer to commemorate Yahweh's help in battle against the Philistines, and Isaiah speaks of the large stones that Yahweh uses as the foundation for his unshakable sanctuary in Zion (Isa 28:16), while *šûr* is widely used as an epithet for Yahweh as a place of refuge (Pss 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14; 27:5; 28:1; *passim*). Isaiah uses it that way in Isa 17:10 and 30:29.

In Isa 8:14, however, both terms are given an opposite meaning by their modifiers. For those who act out of fear—not of Yahweh but of some human object of terror—Yahweh will become to them not a stone of help or a rock of refuge but a stone of toe stumping and a rock of stumbling, a snare and a trap; they will stumble and fall and be broken, and they will be snared and caught. Because Ahaz would not listen to Isaiah, Isaiah withdrew with his disciples and the children God had given him as signs and portents to wait and see what Yahweh of Hosts who lived on Mount Zion would do (Isa 8:16-18).

⁶ See my extended discussion in "Security and Justice in Isaiah," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13/1 (2010): 71-79, from which some of the following comments are taken. Note also the detailed discussion of this passage in my "Isaiah, National Security, and the Politics of Fear," in R. Jewett, W. L. Alloway, Jr., and J. G. Lacey (eds.), *The Bible and the American Future* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 72-91.

Perhaps one should comment further on this idea of making God one's object of fear. Even many Christians seem uncomfortable with the idea of "fearing" God, as though somehow "fearing" God is in conflict with "loving" God, and only "loving" God is compatible with the superior ethic of Jesus. Such Marcionite ideas have little to do with Jesus or the New Testament. 1 Pet 3:14-15 actually quotes Isa 8:12-15 in preparing Christians to stand up to persecution:

But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Against his disciples' fear of persecution, Jesus himself said, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!" (Lk 12:4-5; see Matt 10:28).

When I was a young child growing up on a farm in west Texas, we had a windmill about 50 yards from our back door. One of my chores was to shut down the windmill in the early evening before supper, so that if a windstorm came up during the night, the windmill would not be damaged. Being a child, I occasionally forgot to do it. Then at supper, hearing the creaking of the windmill still running, my father would tell me to get up and go turn the windmill off. By that time it was dark outside, country dark, with none of the ambient light familiar in our modern cities. I was afraid of the dark and whatever unknown I might encounter in the dark. For a young child, 50 yards was a long way to go in the dark. Because of this fear of the unknown, I did not want to obey my father. On the other hand, I feared my father, who was not a permissive, modern dad. If I did not obey, the punishment would be certain, swift, and painful, and I would still have to go into the dark after the punishment. My fear of my father put my fear of the dark in perspective. In the same way, the fear of God puts all lesser fears into perspective and gives one the freedom to be obedient in scary and dangerous times.

To return to the contemporary issue of “the politics of fear” and Isaiah’s potential contribution to this discussion, there are a number of points to be made. Issues of economic or foreign policy are complex, requiring expertise, careful analysis, good intelligence, flexibility, and a healthy dose of sheer luck, and, given such complexity, it is not surprising that reasonable people often hold diametrically opposing points of view. Most of our day to day decisions in life, however, are not that ambiguous or that needful of prolonged, careful analysis. We know right from wrong—lying, cheating, stealing, adultery, murder, the contemptuous mistreatment of others, and the like, is wrong, and we know they are wrong. It is just a question of whether we choose to do what we know is right. Various vices may get in the way of our doing the right—laziness, pride, or selfish desire for example—but we are generally aware of the conflict between what we should do and what we may choose to do instead. In times of overpowering fear, however, such fear may convince us, at least subliminally, that we live in special circumstances and that under these circumstances the old rules no longer apply.

Political debate is important enough in a democratic society that one might expect serious statesmen and honorable politicians to represent fairly the opinions of their opponents, that is, to tell the truth, not to attack straw men; but such expectations are widely disappointed today. For example, when a right-wing blogger edits a video recording of an Obama speech given in Brussels to make Obama say negative things about the US constitution that he did not say, that is an abominable lie that undermines constructive debate. On the other hand, when the administration insists for weeks against the evidence on the ground that the attack on the consulate in Benghazi was a spontaneous demonstration provoked by an anti-Muslim video, that is also an intentional lie. One hardly needs to mention, “If you like your doctor, you can keep him, period” or “If you like your insurance, you can keep it,” or Jonathan Gruber’s revelations about the helpful lack of transparency in the administration’s passing of the unread Obama Care law. Normal, orderly, truthful, perhaps even lawful, process is often the first casualty of fear, or in highly partisan times, perhaps even of mere irritation. In contemporary politics we see it in the suspension of long-established bipartisan senate rules for debate and amendment, in presidential arrogation of the duty of congress to make the law, and in various government bureaucracies’ partisan abuse of

the law. Of course, it is always someone else's fault when we suspend the rules and refuse to follow due process.

One might hope, in such circumstances, that the press, the fourth estate, would shine the light of truth, of factuality, on contemporary political debate, but that is a forlorn hope today. The press is just as partisan as the rest of society, more concerned about the "correct message" than about what might be "inconvenient truth." In this world the Christian believer must maintain his or her independence of judgment, question the popular narrative of either the right or the left, and attempt to do so with civility, patience, and grace. Such a stance will probably make the modern believer about as popular as Isaiah was in his day, but the circle of Isaiah and his disciples, though small, is not a bad company in which to stand.

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