

- Before we dig into the questions, I'd love for you to introduce yourself and what led you to write *The Global Politics of Jesus*
- My focus for this season has been on propaganda and how the manipulation of truth is used to gain or maintain power. Your book focuses a lot on power - specifically the power which is at the heart of politics, and how Christians have sought to obtain and maintain that power throughout history. You argue that this grasping at power is antithetical to Jesus's form of Christianity, and I want to unpack that. Now, your book was so packed with information, I really only drew up questions from a small section of the book, so our conversation will only be a snapshot of what you wrote about. Nevertheless, I think it's an important snapshot.

## **What is Christianity?**

- For the first question, I want to talk about Christendom. I've used the term Christendom a lot throughout this season. You use it as well in

your book, though you often use “Christianism.” A lot of Christians probably think that Christendom and Christianity are the same thing, yet prophetic voices from long ago, like Kierkegaard, or from today, like Cornel West, use the term pejoratively. Would you please explain the distinction you and others in the prophetic stream see between Christianity and Christianism or Christendom?

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- In the vein of thinkers like Stanley Hauerwas, you argue that the church is to be a prophetic witness and an alternative political community. Maybe we could say, a Kingdom in and for this world, but not of it. What role does a prophet play in the Bible, and how does a forthtelling of God’s will do the world any good? Legislation seems far more powerful than *mere* proclamation, doesn’t it? *Instead, prophetic witness requires principled distance from the powers of the world, while speaking truth to these very powers from the margins. In rejecting political privilege, the church retains its purity,*

*even as it demands justice for the oppressed in the same manner as the biblical prophets. It does this by existing as an alternative political community of prophetic revolutionaries in revolt against the status quo, modeling social justice and peace in its communal life. (p. 10).*

## **What is Power?**

- You discuss four ways that human kingdoms are antithetical to the Kingdom of God. First, power is the primary concern, not morality. Second, this power is necessarily backed by violence or threat. Third, kingdoms and power are inherently exclusive. And fourth, the goal of human kingdoms is survival. (p.20-21). We could do a whole episode on each of these, but I want to try to get at the core thread here. Power seeks self-preservation and in-group preservation at almost any cost. Therefore, it grasps at power and threatens violence if there is a loss of it. You only have to look at the past few years to see

the morals conservatives supposedly clung to being cast to the side because they perceived power was being lost - and then the violence being proposed by leaders like Metaxas, and the actual violence being done in the January 6th insurrection. Could you please describe power, how power corrupts, and how this power is always antithetical to true Christianity?

Morgenthau: The moral problem of politics is posed by the inescapable discrepancy between the commands of Christian teaching, of Christian ethics, and the requirements of political success. It is impossible, if I may put it in somewhat extreme and striking terms, to be a successful politician and a good Christian.

## **What Does Power Achieve?**

- You bring up Reinhold Niebuhr several times in the book, and never, as far as I remember in a good light. I have a bad taste in my mouth for him as well, because he seems to have grasped

the idealistic kingdom when he embraced positions like pacifism, but then threw those truths off for a consequentialist realism. Yet Niebuhr penned an article towards the end of his life entitled “The King’s Chapel and the King’s Court” in which he tells the soon-to-be moral majority that they were playing with politics and power in such a way that they were going to end up becoming false prophets - prophets who resided in the king’s court - rather than true prophets - those confined to proclaiming from the wilderness. I love this piece from Niebuhr, and I’d like for you to talk about how prophesying from the wilderness versus prophesying from the king’s court works. How does each environment shape the prophet and their message? [Erastianism, preferential treatment reduces religious freedom, etc]

- [Benjamin Lay and George Washington Williams being the only person to speak out about the evils in the Congo (as a black man) while the missionaries, often on the payroll of Leopold and the Catholic Church,

closed their mouths to maintain power. See  
“King Leopold’s Ghost”]

- Many Christians seem to grasp at power because they think the government - the sword - can offer some legitimacy to religion or society. The state may control morality through legislation or put up the ten commandments in courthouses. Yet you argue that rather than bolstering Christianity, this marriage to the state actually “lends spiritual legitimacy to the state.” That, in turn, means that political arrangements “can be pursued by both Christians and opportunistic secular authorities.” (p. 50). So a grasping at power does two things: It christens the state’s actions as good, because if “Christian” leaders are running a “Christian” nation, then their actions must be good. But it also dilutes Christianity with opportunists and powermongers who use Christianity as a means to power rather than seek it as the end unto life. Can you explain how power counterintuitively weakens true Christianity, props up immoral state actions, and facilitates secularism?

- JONATHAN FOX says that “supporting religion is among the most effective strategies to make religious institutions dependent on the government, and thereby more subject to its control.” (p. 50). You see that co-opting is a great way to dilute and weaken something. I did an episode this season on co-opting St. Martin - turning his day of peace, November 11, into a memorial for war. Similar things were done with St. Francis. Do you have any specific examples of how this dependency on government has influenced Christian actions and morality [perhaps the moral majority’s rise out of tax crackdowns on segregation academies?]
- Continuing with Fox, you say that “his research suggests that governments and churches enter into a kind of quid pro quo: the state depends on churches to propagate to the masses the message that resistance to the state in any form is a sin against God in exchange for the church

being granted a privileged political status with the state.” We saw Romans 13 used a lot in the last decade or two. But putting politics to the side for the moment, I was discussing fundamentalism with my friend the other day and he was telling me about Cyrus McCormick and his support of Dwight Moody who helped preach a gospel of submission to their bosses and to business leaders. This was all happening during a huge decade or two of labor unrest - including the Haymarket affair. So Moody - and subsequently conservative Christianity - has often been, at least in part, courting big money in the same way they court politics. And with lobbying and money’s connection to politics, there often isn’t much of a difference it seems. Do you think that your political observations extend into the economic sphere at all? Do you think this quid pro with corporations and the market play into conservatives’ obsession with everything they don’t like somehow being Marxist? (p. 50).



## Where Do We Go From Here?

- You argue that the church advances the kingdom in two primary ways. “By speaking truth to power and advocating for justice from a position of autonomy and (2) by representing Jesus to the world through acts of loving service.” (pp. 64-65). These two things seem impotent to most people when compared to sword and legislation. Is what you’re calling Christians to here just detachment and ineffectiveness? If not, how not?