

Editorial: Christians, must we keep America first in our hearts?

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Christians, we must keep Christ first in our hearts.

Let me state that right out of the chute so there is no mystery about where I stand on a Christian's first allegiance.

I am keying off of one of the last things President Trump said in his [State of the Union address](#) delivered Feb. 5: "We must keep America first in our hearts."

To Trump's credit, he can't very well say, "We must keep Christ first in our hearts." To do so would raise concerns—among other things—about First Amendment religious protections that Baptists have long championed.

Beyond what can and cannot be said from the dais by the President of the United States is the fact that saying "We must keep Christ first in our hearts" would be in stark contrast to—and even conflict with—the rest of the address, which emphasized economic growth and national security.

During such speeches, Christians need to stay awake to the differences between political rhetoric—with which we may or may not agree—and the commands of Christ to which we are duty-bound.

The challenge of first allegiances

Admittedly, it seems easier to make the claim that Christ is our first allegiance than it is to live the claim. Christians are confronted every day

with the choice between faithfulness to Christ or acquiescence to temptation.

The State of the Union address spoke to two overarching concerns, each of which is loaded with a myriad of greater and lesser temptations for all of us—Christian or not.

When it comes to the economy, how worked up have Christians been about fiscal policy? In our celebration of a booming economy and our angst over volatile markets, do we forget one of our favorite teachings of Christ: Store up treasures in heaven; don't worry about the bare necessities; seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6)?

While others celebrate and lament each rise and fall of the economy, Christ stands outside economic policy and theory, calling us to another way of living.

Christians with ears to hear and with Christ as their first allegiance are less likely to be manipulated by money worries.

When it comes to national security, how worried have Christians been about foreign threats? In our debates about foreign policy and border security, are we mindful of another security spoken of by Christ, that those who belong to him will never perish nor be snatched from his hand (John 10:24-29)?

Every nation on earth wants security and prosperity. Into the competition for them, Christ interposes the claim—chilling to some—that this world will pass away, but his words never will pass away (Matthew 24:35).

Christians with ears to hear and with Christ as their first allegiance are less likely to be manipulated with fear and better able to hold a steady course.

These are just two areas in which making anything in this world our heart's

first allegiance—no matter how good or great it may be—puts Christians at odds with Christ and diminishes our role in this world.

First allegiances & conflicts of interest

Holding America first in our hearts sounds good politically but ought to sound alarming spiritually.

Inasmuch as we understand “America” as a shorthand for a set of values and principles, we place those secular values and principles above all else by holding America first in our hearts.

Inasmuch as we understand “America” as “we the people,” we place ourselves at the center by holding America first in our hearts.

Both are in conflict with Christ being our center and the Author of our faith.

Notice that every time I refer to the second person of the Trinity, I use the name Christ rather than Jesus. Christ is the transliteration of *Christos*, which was the ancient word for “king,” a word similar to the Hebrew *Messiah*, as in the question Jesus fielded frequently: “Are you the Messiah?”

Christ is a Christian’s first allegiance because Christ is King. There is no Christian without Christ.

First things first & then what

Does keeping Christ first in our hearts mean we can forget about America?

No.

Keeping Christ first in our hearts allows us to play a vital role in our

country because we can engage issues free from greed, fear and worry.

Rather than diminishing our contribution to our country, Christ as our first allegiance enlivens us to take more seriously the dignity of all people and the stewardship of creation, two values under which roam questions of national security and economic and foreign policy.

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