

Editorial: January 6: Insurrection, protest or Epiphany?

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There's a reason the new year starts with January. January honors the Roman god [Janus](#), the keeper of passages and god of beginnings, the first god to be invoked during prayer. His festival took place Jan. 9. Thus, all who order their lives by the Julian and later Gregorian calendars begin their year with January.

January 6, for those unfamiliar with the liturgical church calendar, commemorates a competing passage. Jan. 6 is Epiphany, or a commemoration of Christ revealed as the Son of God.

On Epiphany, the Western church commemorates the magi's visit of the Christ child (Matthew 2:1-12). Eastern Christians use the day to commemorate Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17).

This year, Jan. 6 has a stronger association for most Americans. This Jan. 6 is remembered as the first anniversary of the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

Just as Jesus' birth and baptism marked a direct confrontation with the political rulers of his time, so Jesus continues to pose a direct confrontation with the political rulers of our time.

The confrontation centers on who will order our steps. Will Jesus Christ order our steps, or will the political powers in our time order them?

What we believe about Jan. 6 is a prime example of who is ordering our steps. Is Jan. 6 about a protest, an insurrection or Christ?

Redirecting our attention

Labeling an event like Jan. 6 is a powerful act. Labels shape our thinking and our responding, thereby ordering our steps.

On Jan. 6, 2021, the labels “protest” and “insurrection” were beginning to be applied, each term signifying a larger set of ideas, confronting us with where we stand in relation to those ideas, ordering our steps.

Within days, the [debate](#) was underway about what exactly to call what happened. Was it a protest, a mob, a riot, an insurrection? Was it innocent or malicious? Was it justified or criminal? A [select committee](#) of the U.S. House of Representatives was formed to find out.

Muddying the debate were the numerous representations of Christianity on display among the crowd at the Capitol. The direct tying of Christianity to support of Donald Trump and his claims about the election raised yet another question. Was the event purely political or also religious?

Whatever truth or falsehood may exist in any one label as applied, we are expected to believe Jan. 6 is about either an insurrection against the government of the United States or a protest of a fraudulent election. Both choices are deeply loaded by political powers who desire to order our steps in accordance with their respective purposes.

We must be vigilant

We must keep our eyes and ears open to the ways political power in our day attempts to order our thinking, our responding, our steps. One recent example jumps out.

While others already have given attention to Donald Trump Jr.’s remarks during [his appearance](#) Dec. 19 at AmericaFest 2021, my focus here is how

his characterization of Jan. 6 is part of ordering our steps.

Trump Jr. sought to distinguish between the “insurrection” label as applied to Jan. 6 and how he contended it hasn’t been applied to “burning down the federal courthouse all over the West Coast, taking them over, trapping police inside.”

“That is not an insurrection, folks, but if your grandmother was somewhere within 200 miles of Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6th, they’re being investigated by the FBI,” he asserted.

We all know he was exaggerating in the moment, but the label was skillfully applied. Presumably, one is supposed to ask: “If one event is deemed an insurrection, shouldn’t both events be, and if one is deemed legitimate protest, shouldn’t both be?”

He then wrapped his argument in the rhetoric of freedom and liberty—“We are the frontline of freedom. We are the frontline of liberty”—and a call to action—“If we band together, we can take on these institutions. ... If we get together, they cannot cancel us all.”

Trump Jr.’s next assertion should have broken whatever spell he held over listening Christians of any political persuasion.

“We have turned the other cheek, and I understand, I understand, sort of, the biblical reference. I understand the mentality, but it’s gotten us *nothing*. OK? It’s gotten us *nothing*.”

He contended conservatives need to play “hardball and cheating” like their opposition.

According to this reasoning, obeying Christ can take a back seat if it gets in the way of freedom and liberty. If it’s OK in politics, how long will it be OK elsewhere?

How subtly our thinking, our responding, our steps can be ordered, not according to Christ, but contrary to Christ.

One part of the whole

Some have [pointed out](#) Trump Jr. did not question Jesus' authority and teaching in its entirety. They seem to justify his derision of "turn the other cheek" as purely political, a call to "American conservatives ... to be more pragmatic and ruthless in pursuing their political aims," as Snopes puts it.

Be that as it may, the problem for the Christian is that such a call relies on casting aside even just one teaching of Christ. If a Christian can be convinced to make that first step, how much else can the political powers in our day—Republican, Democrat, conservative, liberal, moderate, whatever—order our thinking, our responding, our steps?

An investigation is in progress to determine who ordered an unruly assault of government last Jan. 6, if such an assault was ordered at all.

This Jan. 6—as with all days—Christians ought to order the day differently. How we do will reveal who orders our steps and our lives.

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