

# United Church of God *an International Association*

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## Letter From the Chairman February 13, 2004

Dear Members and Friends,

The Council of Elders is gearing up for our quarterly meeting scheduled to begin just a little over a week from now in Cincinnati, Ohio. As usual, the five committees (Doctrine; Education & Ministerial Services; Ethics, Roles & Rules; Media & Communications; and Strategic Planning & Finance) will have preliminary work February 23 and 24, followed by our plenary session February 25 to March 2. We anticipate another profitable conference but ask, as always, that you would labor with us in your prayers to seek God's guidance and wisdom.

In the August and December 2003 meetings we approved two doctrinal study papers that are somewhat related and very important to read. One is "Balloting in the Church" (posted on the UCG Web site at [www.ucg.org/papers](http://www.ucg.org/papers)) and the other is "Voting and Involvement in Politics," which is now being mailed to the elders and to be posted on the Web site in two weeks. The former focuses narrowly on whether voting is appropriate or even acceptable within the context of making collective decisions within the Church. The latter examines to what degree, if any, a member of the Church should participate in voting and the secular political systems of this society.

These papers are quite timely. Every nation goes through—either orderly or chaotically—cycles of governmental change, and here in the United States we are already deeply into the early processes that lead to the presidential elections in November. At the same time, in United we are preparing for the Annual Meeting of the General Conference of Elders in May, where we too will decide on governmental issues that range from who serves on the Council to proposed changes to the Constitution and Bylaws. These processes of church and civil government should offer a study of sharp contrasts, and they will as long as we avoid the pitfalls of politics.

"Government" and "politics" are two distinctly different things. Theoretically, positions of government leadership should be among those most valued in a society, and even the words "politics," "political," "politicize" and "politician" actually have some positive definitions in the dictionary. However, it seems that people all over the world far more commonly attach the negative connotations to those terms and the people who bear them. In May 2002, for example, a BBC survey of 12,000 people in Britain found that "Member of Parliament" was the very least respected of 92 possible occupations! Doctors ranked as the most respected profession, closely followed by nurses, teachers, firemen and paramedics. How sad and ironic that the "public servants" governing the affairs and subjects of the state are among the least esteemed.

Why is that? Perhaps what I recently saw on television serves as an anecdotal explanation. A veteran politician, commenting on a colleague's "half-truth" (which really makes it simply a lie), said, "Well, that's just politics!" Listeners knew what he meant. Politics has earned a reputation as having a very dirty side, so much so that the word itself is synonymous with some of the seamier sides of human nature. Some observations about politics, from people of extremely diverse backgrounds and ideologies, are quite revealing. Consider these statements, and their authors:

- "Politics is almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once, but in politics many times."—Sir Winston Churchill.
- "Politics is such a torment that I advise everyone I love not to mix with it."—Thomas Jefferson.
- "Politics is war without bloodshed, while war is politics with bloodshed."—Mao Tse-Tung.

- “In politics nothing is contemptible.”—Benjamin Disraeli.
- “In politics it is necessary either to betray one’s country or the electorate. I prefer to betray the electorate.”—Charles De Gaulle.
- “Politics, as the word is commonly understood, are nothing but corruptions.”—Jonathan Swift.
- “Politics is not a bad profession. If you succeed there are many rewards; if you disgrace yourself you can always write a book.”—Ronald Reagan.
- “Politics are not the task of a Christian.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- “Politics, in a sense, has always been a con game.”—Joe McGinniss.
- “Politics: a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.”—Ambrose Bierce.

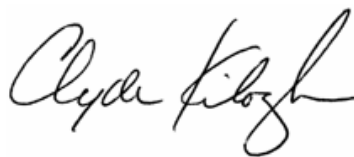
Although we are months away from the presidential election, we already see the reality of these quotes being played out once again. The political wars are getting ugly as we see members of parties fighting among themselves first for nominations, then fighting other parties to either overthrow or retain offices. The manipulation and scheming to either obtain or retain power and influence is not strictly limited to government, though. It begins early in life and is learned well on the school playgrounds, in sports, in the workplace, within families, in religion. It is truly one of the greatest evils that has plagued humanity.

Satan certainly played politics in the Garden of Eden to sway Adam and Eve to “vote” for his way. He twisted things, tried to make God look bad and told outright lies. That’s his way and so often the way of the world around us. The father of dirty politics is persuasive, sneaky, cunningly appealing to our human nature, and we must zealously guard against his influence.

Can he infuse politics into the Church? Of course! We see blatant examples in the Bible such as Simon attempting to buy the office of the ministry (Acts 8:9-24) and the mother of Zebedee’s sons trying to curry favor with Jesus so that her boys could have prominent positions in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28). But it can also occur in less blatant, more subtle ways, anytime selfish ambition, self-will, pride and ego creep in. These are among Satan’s many devices that we cannot be ignorant of, lest he take advantage of us (2 Corinthians 2:11). One doesn’t have to be involved in the world’s government to be affected by the world’s spirit. That’s why Christ warned of the end-time system, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4). The disciples had to learn to come out of it. We, too, must recognize how much the characteristics of carnal politics can influence us and distance ourselves from them.

On the other hand, we do need to practice the “politics” of God, that which we will find in His Kingdom, under His government’s administration—truth, honesty, humility, love, peace, unity, service, encouragement, sacrifice, esteeming others better than ourselves, justice, mercy, etc. When those righteous qualities define the way we individually govern our lives, we see the beauty of God’s governance in the home and in the Church. As we watch the politics of government at work in the world, let’s really take to heart the need to work hard to establish the government of God in our hearts and minds. God wants us to be “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20), representatives of a governmental system in the Church that must stand as a powerful witness in contrast to the governments in the world.

Take care, and stay strong. With warmest regards,



Clyde Kilough