

A black metal safe with a silver handle and a white envelope sticking out of the top. The safe is rectangular and appears to be made of heavy metal. The envelope is white and has a pointed top, sticking out from the top of the safe. The background is a light blue gradient.

MANKIND WILL BE GOD-GOVERNED
IN PROPORTION AS GOD'S
GOVERNMENT BECOMES APPARENT,
THE GOLDEN RULE UTILIZED, AND
THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND THE LIBERTY
OF CONSCIENCE HELD SACRED.

—MARY BAKER EDDY, *THE FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST, AND MISCELLANY*, P. 222



PRAYER AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

BY RON BALLARD

ELECTIONS around the world call for politicians to leave office, parties to rotate in and out of power, and policies to change along with them. In fact, the desire for change is a common refrain heard this election season. And it's not just with the American public. Citizens around the world in such places as the Czech Republic, South Korea, Taiwan, and Zimbabwe are hoping for shifts in their governments after the votes have been counted.

But dig deeper to find the impetus behind this general global desire for change, and there's an underlying demand for more effective politics, rather than just "politics as usual." For example, recent polling in the United States suggests that while citizens have high expectations for their leaders, those expectations are tempered by "optimism with a cynical streak" (see poll by Knowledge Networks, January 18–28 conducted for AP-Yahoo News Survey).

Is there a way to get around that cynical streak and make real progress? Gaining a clearer understanding of God, or divine Principle, as the one true source of power and government is a good place to start. It's easy to get caught up in the politics of personality and pin hopes on certain candidates. But in order to have dependable government, creative government, compassionate government, it's essential to look to this unifying Principle, rather than to people, for answers.

A Bible promise from Isaiah points out that "the government shall be upon his shoulder" (9:6). This passage prophesies the coming of the Messiah, or Christ, who came to share the powerful message of God's love in people's lives that brings peace and order to everyday experience. In one conversation, Jesus was asked to whom one should pay allegiance. Jesus held up a coin and asked whose image appeared on it. The answer was "Caesar's." Jesus explained, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21). In modern terms, this could mean to honor the practical purposes behind government. Fair enough. But what are the things that belong to God? How about our happiness, security, welfare, freedom, and self-government, which all originate with Him.

It can be easy to assume that one's well-being will be affected by whatever political party holds the power, but it's freeing to realize that what really governs is not the human type of government, but the divine. Mary Baker Eddy, the discoverer of Christian Science, emphasized in her writings that ultimate freedom comes from understanding the spiritual laws that govern the universe. She once defined *Christian Science* as "the law of God, the law of good, interpreting and demonstrating the divine Principle and rule of universal harmony" (*Rudimental Divine Science*, p. 1). Her discovery opened the door of healing to many who were



THE LEADERSHIP OF DIVINE LOVE BLESSES EVERYONE. THERE ARE NO LOSERS UNDER LOVE'S MANAGEMENT— NO ONE IS LEFT OUT OR EXCLUDED.

suffering from all kinds of maladies and mental impositions that compromised their rights to self-rule. Mrs. Eddy was also often sought out as a commentator on world events around the turn of the 20th century. In her acceptance of her election to the Association of International Conciliation, an organization dedicated to the resolution of conflict by peaceful means, she remarked: "Human law is right only as it patterns the divine. Consolation and peace are based on the enlightened sense of God's government" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 283).

An enlightened sense of God's government would naturally include the totality of His nature. The Bible refers to God's nature with such terms as *Love*, *Truth*, and *Mind*. As explained in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, these essential synonyms give us glimpses into the infinite variety of how God governs His universe.

LOVE IS UNIVERSAL AND UNCONDITIONAL

The leadership of divine Love blesses everyone. There are no losers under Love's management—no one is left out or excluded. In fact, the law of Love works in everyone's best interest. In a political environment where one viewpoint is often pitted against another, it's easy to accept that unless a particular candidate wins, hopes are going to be dashed, unfulfilled, or at least compromised. But even if the political process goes against our desires, it isn't immune to prayer. The divine government always gives what best promotes true welfare, and our conviction that this is what truly governs will help uplift the human scene. It

then becomes important to look to divine Love to meet both our needs and the needs of our country's citizenry, no matter which candidate ends up in office. There can never be a scenario or circumstance where God's love will not already be there meeting our needs.

TRUTH IS ABSOLUTE, CONSISTENT, AND UNCOMPROMISING

Government by divine Truth expresses wisdom and empathy, and is based on firm spiritual standards managing our lives. The good news is that universal truth has less to do with a set of controversial human opinions and more to do with the ways people naturally relate to one another and to God. In a time when debate is frequently fueled by opinion and predisposition—often about morally charged issues—people yearn to find some spiritual touchstones that they can rally behind and rely on.

Take the Golden Rule from the Bible—doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (see Matt. 7:12). The Golden Rule appears in some form in all of the world's wisdom and faith traditions. The same could be said about the Decalogue or Ten Commandments upon which much of common law is based. Why? Is it because these truths were commonly agreed upon or because they reside intuitively within each person's heart? If the latter, how did they get there? God, divine Truth, guides the principles and standards that intuitively make up our lives, and we can appeal to Him for guidance. As we make decisions about parties and candidates, we can turn to the recognition that those spiritual standards are within each of us. That recognition assures us that government is, in fact, always "upon his shoulder."

MIND INSTILLS INTEGRITY, HONESTY, AND RELIABILITY

Divine intelligence lifts us to a higher level of thought, reason, and interpretation. Government by Mind instills integrity, and values honesty and reliability.

On the campaign trail these days, “truth squads” are common, often taking the form of websites that track the claims made by candidates during stump speeches and debates. These squads try to square up with actual facts comments and assertions that are made. Oftentimes, remarks candidates make out of context will be given a particular slant. Points of reference will be left out, and important aspects of key issues will be ignored. This tack is taken to mold or manipulate public thought to one’s advantage. And unfortunately, in the process, integrity is often tossed out the window.

But acknowledging government by divine Mind allows individuals to perceive ideas clearly, understand the complexity of concepts and their implications, and appreciate the wholeness of an issue, seeing it from all sides. There is nothing hidden, withheld, confused, or manipulated by this divine intelligence. To make choices based on the insight of this Mind is to go beyond just landing on a particular candidate or issue and to find the wisdom that lets our decisions “pattern the divine.”

Praying in the realm of political change also brings out the question “What are our motives?” Are we praying that one person or party wins over another or that one ballot issue gains the upper hand? It may be challenging to let go of preconceived outcomes and actually seek a higher solution, but I’ve found that it’s necessary. It’s interesting to note that, around the turn of the 20th century, Mary Baker Eddy asked her church to pray for resolution of the Russo-Japanese war. Initially she requested that members “pray that God bless that great nation and those islands of the sea with peace and prosperity” (*Miscellany*, p. 279). But as time went on, and before the conflict ended, she asked that specific prayer cease. When questioned about this, she explained, “I cited, as our present need, faith in God’s disposal of events” (p. 281). Perhaps she was pointing to a need for people to seek an even higher goal than “peace and prosperity,” as desirable as those ends were. That higher goal may have been to understand that the guiding factor in world peace resides in trust and faith in a God who is able to maintain His creation in an orderly fashion—even if His “disposal of events” doesn’t necessarily match up with human expectations and well-planned timetables.

After an election day, when the votes have been cast and the outcome has been determined, should our prayers end, and is our involvement done? In many ways the real campaign has just begun. Selecting candidates does not complete anyone’s involvement in the realm of politics. Assuring that right spiritual motives and decisions are continually considered becomes the real campaign—a commitment to prayerfully supporting government that permeates each day of our lives.

In addressing another conflict facing her country (the war between the United States and Spain for the liberty of Cuba),

Mary Baker Eddy offered this encouragement on the subject of involvement: “Pray that the divine presence may still guide and bless our chief magistrate, those associated with his executive trust, and our national judiciary; give to our congress wisdom, and uphold our nation with the right arm of His righteousness” (*Christian Science versus Pantheism*, p. 14).

How can one guard against negativity if the outcome of an election seems less than ideal to him or her? Regardless of which “side” wins an election, attitudes about outcomes have historically been divisive. In recent decades, and on a global scale, parties who have lost elections have spent much time and energy challenging, and in some instances criticizing, those in power. While constructive criticism can be a catalyst for better government, destructive criticism, especially the kind that hopes for the failure of those in power, can be harmful to an entire nation. Those who understand the need for government “upon his shoulder” will aid the process of that government, turn away from the temptation to react to personalities, and seek the common good.

One of the great leaders of the Western world, Abraham Lincoln, came to the presidency ill prepared to face the challenge of his country’s civil war. But he ultimately attributed the tremendous character growth and moral development he experienced while in office to the prayers of his fellow countrymen.

As citizens around the world gather to cast their ballots this year, hoping for transformative change, we can take heart knowing that prayer for an effective political process does make a difference. No matter who or what issues win, nothing can override the spiritual fact that God governs. Trusting His disposal of events expands prayer beyond our home borders, and makes all good not only possible, but universal. **ICSS**

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FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC

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