

Not the kingdom?

By [David Heim](#)

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At a conference on theology and politics at Wheaton College earlier this month, a speaker described a world run by economic elites who pursue their own interests. These elites dominate both political parties in the United States, he noted.

In the question-and-answer period, a student at the evangelical college asked what then should be done, given such an oppressive system. The speaker advised the student not to put much hope in electoral politics. “Don’t imagine that the kingdom of God is going to come just because Obama is elected.”

At this, a person in the row ahead of me muttered to her companion: “It’s different hearing a speaker assume that it’s Obama, not the Republicans, we might put our hopes in.”

Different indeed. I suspect that a speech puncturing liberal hopes would be rather different from one puncturing conservative ones—which suggests that electoral politics are not completely irrelevant to the conversation.

Anyway, that oft-used line about “the kingdom of God is not going to come because of X” seems to me tiresome and evasive. The kingdom of God is not going to come with any number of things. It won’t come with electoral politics, a more inclusive health care system, or a more compassionate welfare system. It will not come with the rise of local food coops. It will not come with a theologically pure liturgy. The kingdom of God comes only when Jesus brings it—and its coming is a mystery. That much we know.

In the meantime, lots of these other things—from liturgy to food coops to electoral politics—are worth a Christian’s thought and participation out of love of God and neighbor. I think that’s what Bonhoeffer meant when he said “I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the center” of life. “The church stands not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.”