



Trinity's Desert Voice

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus."

(Romans 15:5)

Church and State

People often ask me, "Is the United States a Christian nation?" I appreciate the distinction that Martin Luther (the 16th century reformer) made. Based on Jesus' statement, "Render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar and that which belongs to God unto God" (Matthew 22:21), he delineated between the "kingdom of the left" (State) and the "kingdom of the right" (Church). The State, Luther taught, bears the sword of protection and the scales of justice for its citizens while the Church proclaims the Biblical Gospel of Jesus Christ to bring eternal salvation to all who believe. Luther was particularly interested in clearing the confusion inherent in the Papacy's insistence that it held supremacy over both the State and the Church.

Based on these distinctions, the United States is not the Church nor is the Church comprised of the United States. While there are many Christians in the United States, this does not make it a Christian nation any more than the presence of other religious groups can define it according to their natures.

But what about the Christian disposition of the founding documents? Indeed, in human affairs, morality and order may be framed and founded in the beliefs of the majority or of those who otherwise hold power. However, the moral compass the state

employs should not confuse it with the function and nature of the church. History is replete with examples of what happens when church and state are confused (such as crusades and inquisitions to convert others by force).

We rejoice in and pray for God's provision through the state for protection and justice in this world. However, the Church of Jesus Christ and the Good News it proclaims must not be altered by or confused with the State or its function.

Jesus Christ taught that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). It is not defined by this world or bound by it. This means that no matter what happens in the "kingdom of the left," the "kingdom of the right" must keep its focus on the peace of God which is intended to bring joy and release for souls captivated by sin and eternal death.

May our Lord bless us and clarify our participation in the God-ordained functions of church and state.

Pastor Smith