

Bishop's Retreat with Rostered Leaders of the Upper Susquehanna Synod

"DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AND A NEW WAY OF TALKING"

April 25-27, 2016
State College, Pennsylvania

"We live in interesting times!"



A Chinese Proverb

诅咒

A Chinese Curse:
"May you **always** live in interesting times"

A “critical point at time”

3

“We are at a critical point in time
when we must “reaffirm our enduring spirit”
and “choose our better history;”
when we should not return
to our darker history of exploitation,
irresponsibility,
and global imperialism,
but to our better history of equality,
responsibility,
and mutual respect.

Barrack Obama
First Inaugural Address
January 20, 2009

4

Are we?

Are we listening to our "better angels?"



5

A Contentious Time



6

Is this a time the church must speak?



7

Accused!



8

don't speak

9



The Church always lives in interesting times.

The Church lives at a critical point in time.

10

Bishop Helmut Frenz, The Lutheran Church in Chile



Augusto Pinochet

11

- 28,000 tortured
- 2,279 executed
- 1,248 missing
- 200,000 exiled
- countless detained

According to
the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation
and the National Commission on Political Imprisonment
and Torture

12

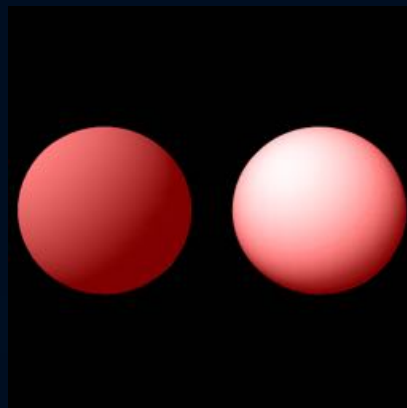
Powerful laity appealed to...

Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession
in support of the 2 kingdoms doctrine,
which they alleged called pastors to preach the gospel
and leave politics to the government.

13

In the 19th century,
there developed a Lutheran understanding
of a rigid dualism of two separate spheres

- This earthly life,
everything pertaining
to politics and daily
vocations
- Eternal life,
everything pertaining
to salvation



14

Christian Luthardt

- “The Gospel has absolutely nothing to do with outward existence but only eternal life.... It is not the vocation of Jesus Christ or of the Gospel to change the orders of secular life and establish them anew....”
- “Christianity wants to change man’s [sic] heart, not his [sic] external condition.”

15

Rudolf Sohm

Issues of public life
“should remain untouched
by the proclamation of the Gospel,
completely untouched.”

16

These views were enormously influential upon Lutheran immigrants.



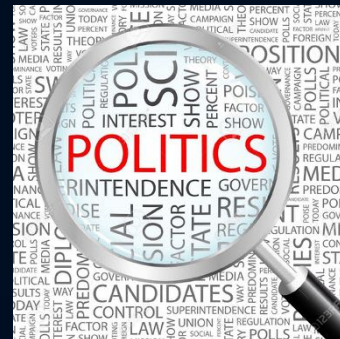
Upper Susquehanna Synod

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Two completely separate realms...



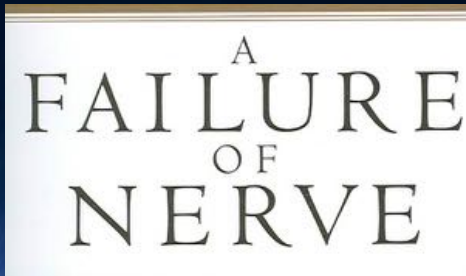
Word and sacraments



Public life and human rights

18

Led to fateful consequences
in the 20th century



19

No contradiction between...



20

Anyone who speaks
of two unconditional allegiances
places himself outside
the Evangelical Church

KARL BARTH

21

This was not a uniquely German issue

VIETNAM WAR



APARTHEID



22

The view of many...

THE CHURCH IS TO:

- preach the gospel,
- administer the sacraments,
- and care for souls in anguish

THE GOVERNMENT IS IN CHARGE OF:

- the nation's life,
- foreign policy,
- and civil rights.

23

An American Lutheran Theologian

1945

- "Every[one] is a member of a secular realm and of a spiritual realm.
It is important to realize the difference between these two realms and to keep them separate.
Luther claimed that Jesus had emphasized the separation of the two realms when he said: 'Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.'
Luther himself pointed frequently to the difference between the two and reiterated the need for clear separation."

24

The Lutheran understanding
of the Law
challenges these views
of **absolute** separation.

A Lutheran understanding:

- God's law is known by human beings apart from the gospel.
- Indeed, atheists and agnostics know the law of God without faith in the God of law.



It is written upon the heart.



God carries out God's political purposes:



- ... through political leaders and institutions whether they know it or not.

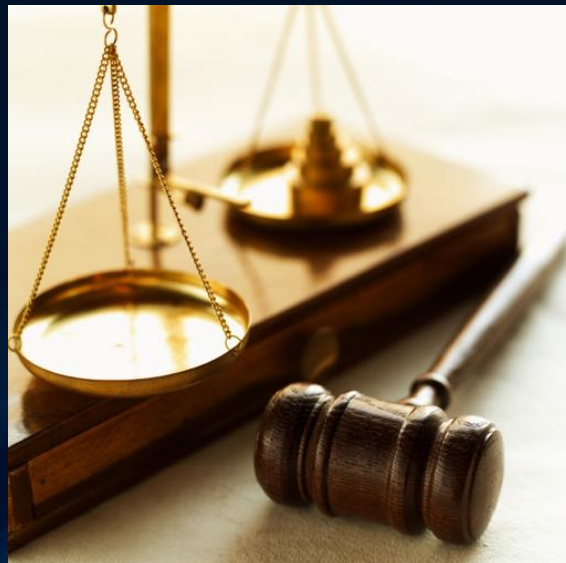
The second table of the law...

- is built into human existence
- is universally valid in human life
- can be known apart from biblical history and revelation



29

This the driving force
behind the call
of human beings
as they seek justice
from one another.



30

The question
always arises:

What is just
in this situation
and at this time?

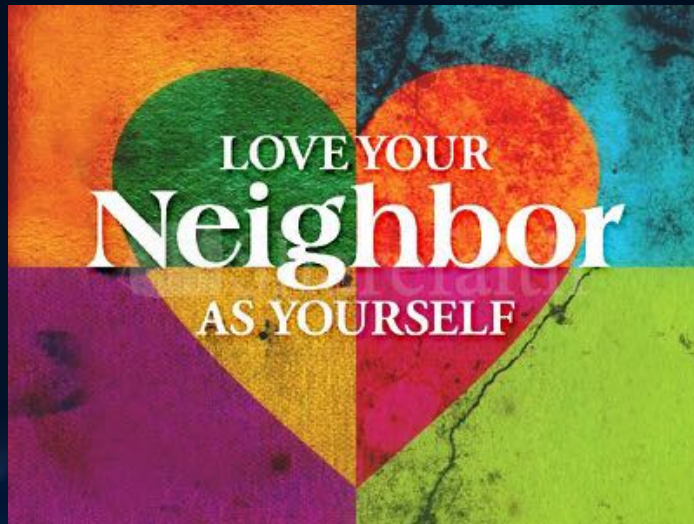
31

The core of justice is care for the neighbor



32

The sum of the law is:



33

In Lutheran language,

- the political or civil use of the law places demands on me to serve my neighbor in need, whether I feel like it or not.



34

Love should be enough...

But love
is not the universal motive
behind the demand
to grant others their due.

The force of law and the threat
of punishment is.



35

A Church that fails to preach the law...

- and preaches only the Gospel, may become quietistic,
- and may withdraw from the problems of the world.

quietistic

36

If the Church fails to preach the Gospel...

...it is not the Church.



37

The Church recognizes the distinction...

.. between law and Gospel.

The Law does not save.

- The Church is not the bearer of one more moral program, yet another human plan for improvement, as good as such plans may be.



38

The State (Government) has been instituted by God.

- It protects, not the soul,
but the body
and goods , property,
from the power of others.



39

This doesn't mean every
temporal government
or authority is good,
nor does it justify
every government action.

40

Non-Christian governments
and officials
can carry out this function
just as well or even better than
governments or officials
who identify themselves
as Christians.

4.1

- Order should not exist without justice, and justice cannot exist without order.
- The state is to uphold the law.
- No room exists for a state to consider itself to be above the law or an end unto itself.



4.2

Government
is one of the masks of God.
It is one of the ways
God rules the world.

43

Theologically
Lutherans can distinguish between church and state
but cannot separate church and state.



44

Church and State

- The state—perhaps unintentionally—provides a safe order for the free flow of the gospel.
- The church reminds the state of its *God-given* responsibilities and encourages all citizens to be involved with the state.
- The preaching of the law provides a constant standard by which a society and its government are judged.
- The church may admonish, proscribe and criticize.

45

Misunderstandings about the Legal Concept of the Separation of Church and State

- This phrase is not in the constitution.
- It is a phrase used by Thomas Jefferson to interpret what the constitution does say.
- The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

46

No Politics in Church?



47

The basic political question :

"WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY
SHALL WE BE?"



The process by which we answer this question
is politics.

48

Communities do not
always know what is right.

America did not
with regard to slavery.



FREEDOM OCCURRED
PRECISELY WHEN, AS A NATION,
WE CONCLUDED
WE NEEDED TO DISCERN
WHAT WAS RIGHT
WITH REGARD TO SLAVERY.

49

In this sinful world,
the call for discernment...

...can be costly,
in society
as well as within
the church.

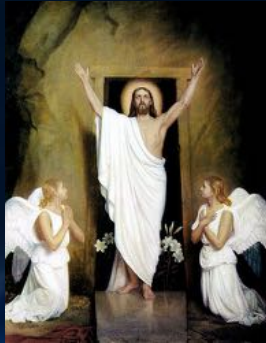


50

The church has a word of hope to speak.

THERE IS A FUTURE.

Thanks to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.



THERE IS A FUTURE...

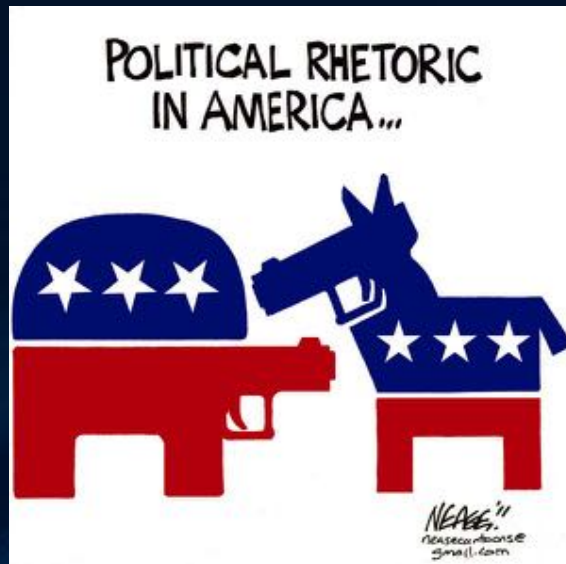
...into which we are being called
and which makes discourse
in the present worth it.

51

The purpose of arguments
over the separation of church and state,
and the reason for the claim
They have largely succeeded.
"You're preaching politics"
is to shut down discourse.

52

The current political climate leads to vitriol and not discourse.



53

- It's not that the church or that Christians have greater insight into what we must do,
- but the church lives by hope.
- If Jesus is risen, we are being called into a future he will bring.

54

I believe we are to be a community...
that welcomes refugees and is hospitable to the stranger.



55

After all,
we know we are strangers
and aliens in this world.

1 Peter 2:11



"When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall do them no wrong, the strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as natives among you, and you love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." —Leviticus 19:33-34

56

It is the claim of the gospel
that signs of the messianic kingdom
will erupt among...

the disenfranchised,
the poor,
the stranger,
the outsider.



57

I believe,
that in this world of sin...

If we were to open
our doors widely to all
without conditions,
some would enter
who have hate
for their neighbor
and would seek their death.



58

I believe
government
has the God-given responsibility,
out of love for the neighbor,
to protect its citizens.



59

I believe God wills a creation
that is whole and well.

- But is fracking, for example,
so detrimental to the creation
that I must urge it be banned?

Perhaps!



60

OR...

- Should we tax the pollution fracking creates, and it's potential harm to humans, plants and animals, to rivers and water tables?



Perhaps!

61

We will disagree with each other...

...both Christians and non-Christians alike, some of whom see a god and others who don't see any god in the question at all.

- Some Christians will argue that in this fallen world,
 - the need to put food on tables,
 - the employment that fracking can provide,
- is also a serious consideration,
- because tables that are full so that no one is hungry is God's will.

62

What shall we do?

- *What kind of community will we be?*
- The answer is complex.
- It necessitates public discourse.



63

Can the church encourage such discourse?

CAN THE CHURCH BE A SAFE SPACE FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?



“Don’t vote for JFK”



65

I suspect my pastor was greatly concerned
about our future as a nation;
but what he did, *I am not urging you to do.*

- It could jeopardize your congregation's 501C3 status
 - I don't believe my pastor—sinner that he was--
had more insight into whether or not JFK should be president
than anyone else, including me, sinner that I am.

66

He and I did not see eye-to-eye
or ear-to ear!



67

- Christians like all other citizens, including non-believers, will not have the same answer to the question.
- The answer Christians provide is not necessarily any more insightful than anyone else's.



68

But we should be able to assert...

...there is reason to wrestle with the questions faced by our communities, because we believe, even if others don't, that God is calling us into a particular future, some of which seems clear, but much of which requires discernment.



69

How can we have these difficult, yet important conversations about the communit(ies) we shall be?

And yet, it is God who will bring about the future that has been revealed through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus—not me, flawed that I am—and not our discourse, flawed that it will be.



70

