



One Page Sermon

By Rev. Robb McCoy

July 21, 2024

Doom to you...

Recap of sermon from July 21, 2024

Scripture: Romans 13:1-10

In 2019 a Pew Research poll about religion and politics found that 63% of US adults felt that churches and other houses of worship should “keep out of political matters.” Additionally, an even more robust 76% felt that churches should not come out in favor of one candidate over another.

The Church has always been involved in politics. Many, including me, argue that the phrase “Kingdom of God,” is a deeply political phrase. It is found in the New Testament 67 times (and Matthew’s preferred “Kingdom of Heaven” is used 31 times in that gospel). It refers to an Empire that is an alternate to the Empire of Rome. Saying “Jesus Christ is Lord,” is a political statement that “Caesar is not.”

Politics, at its heart, is the way groups of people make decisions about how to live together. It is impossible for churches to not be political. Jesus message of the Kingdom of God is about how we live together. It is about turning the cheek, loving the neighbor, proclaiming release to the prisoner, giving sight to the blind, freeing the oppressed. These are deeply political ideas.

Why then, do people think churches should not be political? Because they either, 1, have a mistaken concept of salvation that is purely personal; or 2, conflate the concept of political with “partisan.” As Christians, we are not called to follow a certain American political party. When politics become more about winning and losing and gaining power, the Church gets into murky territory.

The idea of how a Church or a person of faith should be engaged in society was an important concept that great thinkers tackled in the 40s and 50s. After World War II, there was a large question about how fascist state capable of such evil as Naziism was able to rise out of a Christian nation. While much of Europe shifted to a more secular society as a response to perceived failings of the Church, America arguably became more religious in the postwar aftermath.

Theologian H. Richard Niebuhr’s seminal work on this concept was called *Christ and Culture*. In it, he describes five ways to understand how the church should act in the political world.

1. Christ against culture.
2. Christ of culture
3. Christ above culture
4. Christ and culture in paradox
5. Christ, the transformer of culture.

My explanations of these five concepts and how the Church then acts in society.

1. **Church as hermit, at best an EMT.** The Church can do nothing to stop the slow decay of society. The only thing we can do is withdraw and watch it burn. The best we can hope for is to save a few folks along the way. Examples: Extreme fundamentalist communities, a lot of “Left Behind” theology, “off the grid” communities.

2. **Church “riding shot gun.”** The culture is guided by the benevolence of humanity and the best we can do is ride along, embracing the changes. This was the hope of the the early 20th century Protestant liberalism, but the hopes for this kind of future were dashed by the horrors of two global wars.

3. **Church as navigator or caddy.** The arc of the moral universe is bending toward justice, and it’s our job to help it along. People of faith should provide guidance, remind society of the way we should be going.

4. **Church translator or as the guy who follows the horse cart and cleans up the messes.** The church and culture will never truly get along. We need to clean up the messes that the world makes. The best the church can hope for is to hold dual citizenship, and translate the good news to a mostly lost world.

5. **Church leading a donkey, pulling, struggling, cajoling it to go where we need to go.** The church must be active in the world trying to bend its will to God’s. Civil disobedience and advocacy are important tenants of a person of faith who wants to see change.

I think at various times, all of these options work and none of them are the absolute solution. This framework however, might help us understand how and when we are active in the world.

Next Week: Three-Church event at Schwiebert Park