

*“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.”
~Proverbs 14:34*

Tomorrow, we will celebrate our country’s freedom by commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In honor of this national holiday, I would like to say a few words about how we as Christians fit into this celebration. Let me start by saying that we, as the Church, have every right to celebrate this holiday. For we, more than anyone else, have had the greatest influence on the collective conscience of this great nation. The principles set forth in the founding documents of our country all give witness to the influence of Christianity. We could list many contributions we’ve made, but I only want to focus on one particular contribution. One of the hallmarks of American ideology is the conviction that every person has the right to think for him/herself and to fashion his/her own future without compulsion by any other individual or group of individuals. Although our country hasn’t always practiced what it preached, it doesn’t negate the fact that this is a thoroughly Scriptural teaching. In fact, we could go so far as to say that this teaching about the freedom of the individual was the very linchpin of the Reformation. There exists a relationship of cause and effect between the declarations of Luther and the Reformers, and those later recorded in the Constitution of the United States. Because of this, the most valuable contributing agency to our country’s welfare and stability is the Church herself. For the greatest patriots are not always the ones who are the most vocal or forceful, but rather the ones, who with quiet spirits, put into daily practice the principles of Jesus Christ and act as a preserving salt in our national life.

When our nation was brought into existence its form of government was termed experimental. It was founded on the alien concepts of individual liberty, personal autonomy, and equal rights. Having observed the many abuses of power across Europe, the founders established a clear separation between Church and State. In this, they recognized a dual threat. The evils of the Church being directed by civil authority was just as dangerous to the nation’s moral health as the State being directed by ecclesiastical authority; for the two had completely different aims, purposes, and methods in this world. This was always

Luther's thought on the matter, and to a large extent America borrowed the dual-citizenship model of Luther's *Two Kingdoms* doctrine. Luther had staked his reputation, and risked his life, to convey the different aims of earthly citizenship and heavenly citizenship. As Christians, we occupy two worlds. We straddle two Kingdoms. We are citizens of earth and citizens of heaven at the exact same time. As such, we owe allegiance to both Kingdoms, but in different ways. The separation of Church and State does not absolve the Christian from the very definite obligations towards the State. Let's quickly enumerate these obligations. As Christians, we have an obligation to observe the laws of the land, respect our leaders, and to fight for the abolition of civic evils. Thinking about it like this means we are ideal citizens. After all, who else other than Christians believes the authority of the State has been ordained by God. The call to be good citizens comes not from Government, but from God Himself. The Church, then, is the State's greatest ally. The Christian citizen forms a bulwark against every form of human tyranny and the intrusion of every evil. God Himself lays upon our consciences the need to defend and maintain righteousness and common decency. Our founding fathers knew this to be true. They knew that morality could not be preserved by legislation and the implements of the law. Morality is the result of a spiritual force. It springs forth from within a person as God moves each of us to answer a higher calling, and aspire to a better way of life for ourselves and our neighbors. The forces that threaten to break down the fabric of the nation are the forces of immorality. The greatest enemies of our national safety are not the armed forces that may threaten our borders, but those forces that undermine the moral tone of the nation from within. For where a nation rejects God, that nation will perish from the earth.

As long as the Church remains true to her Divinely ordained Commission, she will serve the world well. The State exists to preserve order, to see that right and justice prevail, to protect the weak and punish the evil-doer. The Church has a purely spiritual function of saving immortal souls by the preaching of the Gospel. She is to confine herself to this sphere alone. The Church, as the Church, has no need to meddle

in politics. For the Call of Discipleship is a call to transcend earthly parties and rabid nationalism. Quietly the Church goes her way preaching the Gospel of the crucified Savior. For the Church is first and foremost the training ground of the Spirit of God, and this Spirit works on the hearts and minds of God's people—reorienting our souls towards a world beyond this world. Here's the real point I am trying to make: *The positive effect we have on our nation is entirely incidental.* The fashioning of loyal citizens for the State is not the Church's principal objective, it's just a happy end-result. The Church is concerned above all in making citizens for Christ's Kingdom here and His eternal Kingdom beyond. Whether or not it is recognized, we render the greatest service to our country by our activity in the affairs of the Kingdom of God. Where hearts are changed into joyous service of God, there the state naturally reaps the benefits. So, our 4th of July celebration tomorrow should include not only a patriotic love for this country, but a longing for our true country, our true home, just beyond the vale. For that is the Kingdom we wait for most; and the hope of this tomorrow, makes us grateful for what we have today. Amen.

In Christ,

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