**HAPPENINGS IN THE CHURCH**

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*INDEPENDENCE DAY AND THE SUPREME COURT*

 The Fourth of July brings out the patriotic in us. For some evangelical churches it is a time to display the flag and sing *thy love divine hath led us in the past; in this free land* *by Thee our lot is cast*. Some evangelicals will refer to America as a Christian land--despite its problems--and then claim the promise of II Chronicles 7:14: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

 These evangelicals might be a bit too exuberant in their displays. It takes quite a stretch to link “my people” (God’s covenant people) with America. It is one thing to say that America has a special place in God’s plan for humankind but quite another to connect America with “God’s people.”

 Liberals, both secular and religious, on the other hand, tend not to speak at all of America as special to God, or even of “blessings” on America. *Blessings*, after all, by definition have to do with divine approval and to claim that America is divinely approved might imply that we believe others are not divinely approved and that would make us appear arrogant. Liberals are loath to speak of the “pilgrim’s feet” who beat a “thoroughfare for freedom” in America because it is offensive to Native Americans. In the politically correct UM Hymnal all references to “pilgrims” have been excised.

 Atheists and secularists are doing their best to deny any connection between God or God’s laws and America. Religious progressives, usually not too far behind the secularists, are willing to speak of God, but it must be a generic god agreeable to Muslims and New Agers as well. And, if there are references by progressives to God’s laws, it should be understood that God has intended that his (or her) laws should be ever-changing to conform to progressive thinking.

 Secularists used not to worry about these things so much since in the past it was a secular and progressive article of faith that religion, at least religion strongly believed, was on the wrong side of history. With advances in science and because of the marvels of social and economic engineering, religion would be rendered obsolete and would soon wither away.

 Surprise! Religion never withered. Indeed, it can be argued that religion is stronger than it ever has been (except in such places as Europe). The secularists have had their day with bold experiments to establish secular kingdoms: remember the Soviet Union, Red China, Cuba, and Nazi Germany. Might we all agree these have been abject failures?

 But secularists are not easily deterred. Religion, and especially Christianity, is the biggest threat to secularists’ understanding of freedom, which is doing what people want to do when they want to do it with whomever they want to do it. So we have cultural wars, or, from the Christian point of view, spiritual warfare. So secularists seek to neutralize Christian influence wherever possible, mostly by de-constructing and redefining history, tradition, morality, freedom, equality, the Constitution, the separation of church and state, and the good life. Secularism wants to operate in a world system where there is no unified system of truth and all is relative. Without any system of truth, and without objective standards of right and wrong, issues are decided by pure power.

 It is in this context that the Supreme Court ruling on homosexual marriage should be understood. Without a lengthy analysis of what the Supreme Court did or did not do with their recent decisions, let it be said that, at least for five members of the court, the de-construction of concepts derived from the Bible and our nation’s tradition continues. Homosexual “marriage” is a “right” simply because persons in power decree it so to be. These matters are by no means settled. There will be more conflict to follow. Battles will be fought in state legislatures, in the courts, in our educational institutions, and wherever moral life is considered. The meaning of marriage is only one of a number of issues that will confront us.

 These battles will also be fought in the churches and it is here that the Confessing Movement calls for faithfulness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to the authority of Scripture, and to truths and concepts deriving from this confession.

 Comments:

 1) Whether or not it is affirmed by the courts of the land, or by the entertainment world, or in the liberal media, or in academia, or by progressive mainline seminaries, God’s understanding of marriage still stands. Marriage is marriage. We will need to make a distinction between “marriage” as it may be defined legally, and marriage as understood by the Church (including our own UM *Discipline*).

 2) References to “being on the right side of history” need interpretation. These references refer to cultural trends, and cultural trends are not the same as the “right side of history.” Furthermore cultural trends are not always accurate predictors of the future. On June 24, 1926 the *Christian Century* editorialized that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was over. Fundamentalism had lost and would from “henceforth be a disappearing quality in American religious life, while (our) churches (would) go on to larger issues.” It can now be reported that the prestigious *Christian Century* claimed too much for the “right side of history.”

 3) Homosexual “marriage” may be a skirmish in ongoing spiritual warfare, but it is not the final battle. It is good to keep in mind the larger picture. The mission of the church is to “make disciples for the transformation of the world” and that must be our focus regardless of what moral and political issues push in on us. Christian evangelicals have a strong eschatology (understanding of end times) and in our understanding God wins. Therefore, we will always be confident.

 4) Evangelicals will continue to be the more enthusiastic patriots. Even when disappointed about the trends of society, we can still affirm that God has blessed, and we believe, will continue to bless America.