

This is a guest article written by Rev. Scott Adle, associate pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Collinsville, IL. It was published on Brothers of John the Steadfast at <http://steadfastlutherans.org/2016/02/not-exceptional-times-two-kingdoms>

These Are Not Exceptional Times For The Two Kingdoms

Over the last few decades (at least) Christians in America have lamented that the notion of a “separation of church and state,” based in Jefferson’s understanding of the 1st Amendment, has resulted in the marginalization of anything that smacks of Christianity appearing in the public sphere – prayers at graduations abolished, schools not allowing bible studies, the 10 Commandments being removed, etc. Exactly what Jefferson meant has long been debated, but it was certainly not the case that he believed the church could or should not tell the state and politicians what to do. (They may be ignored, but that’s another thing.)

And while we lament this marginalization, there may be ways that we have encouraged it. We have arrived at a time in our history as a country and denomination where the mere talk of political things in church (beyond abortion) raises eyebrows, and gets feathers ruffled. Somehow we in the church have internalized this wall of separation idea whereby we compartmentalize our lives as Christians and citizens, as if one should not inform the other.¹

This is perfectly in line with the secular culture around us. But it’s not what we find in Scripture. It’s not what we find in Luther. In various times and circumstances, both the prophets and Luther had plenty to tell to their king/prince/emperor. (Many times they were ignored, but that’s another thing.)

Ask yourself a question: How would you react if your pastor made a “political” statement from the pulpit? Would you automatically feel uneasy, whether or not you agreed with him (the abortion issue excepted)? Why is that? Now I know that we don’t want to mix opinions and the traditions of men with the commands of God, but are all political statements opinions? No.

No, not all political statements are opinion, although I think we as modern Americans generally place them in that realm. Taxes, welfare, military action, euthanasia law, marriage law – we have debates with family and neighbors about these all the time. Everyone has an opinion. But are these all simply matters of opinion, or could one course

¹ How we got here is another discussion, but it shouldn’t surprise us that the more we let the state educate us, the more we think like the current state. One of the reasons Lutheran schools exist is because our forefathers wanted to create a certain culture – that we were in the world, but not of it. That our children poll like the general population in a number of ways may be because they are constantly surrounded and inculcated by that general population. (No, I’m not advocating becoming like the Amish.)

of action be wrong (and sinful), while the other be righteous? And if so, should a pastor and church in some way address those topics?

I'm not saying that a pastor should just get up and say every thought he has that falls in the political spectrum. But it is our responsibility as Christians to have our minds shaped by the Scriptures. And that should definitely reflect in how we live our lives in every way – spiritual, familial, political, etc.

The Scriptures point out several times when the prophets addressed kings and rulers in regard to a number of political questions: military actions, religious tolerance, calls to repentance, taking a census, care of the poor, and many other things. Luther also addressed his princes on a variety of matters not limited to personal spiritual care.

As always, the criteria should be: Do we have a word from the Lord on this? And if we do, woe to us if we hold back. The Lutheran idea of the two kingdoms recognizes that both God's left and right hands are *His* right and left hands, and that therefore both should listen to Him and do what He wills.

So, do the Scriptures say anything in regard to the role of women and men in regard to warfare? Well, if you are looking for something as specific as, "In the 21st century, women should not be drafted into the United States military for combat duty." – it is true that you won't find that verse in either the Old or New Testaments. But that is an absurd standard. Many of our applications of Scripture fall by that standard. Do the Scriptures have broad outlines as to the roles of men and women? Yes. Among the pertinent ones are Deut 22:5, the fact that men (not women) are counted as warriors for battle in ancient Israel, the image of "fighting like women" as a sneer (Jer 50:37, 51:30), and especially Ephesians 5:22ff, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her . . ."

"But, but, but!!!" I hear you panting, "What about Deborah?!" Well, exceptions to the rule are exactly that – exceptions. Even Deborah noted to Barack that he would not gain honor for forcing a woman into a man's position.² Did she do the job? Yes. And in bad circumstances women are forced at times to perform the duties of men. There are times when a mother may have to use violence to protect her family. But everyone would rightly consider the man a coward who stood by not helping his wife fend off the intruder.

Drafting women alongside men into combat positions is not an exception, it's an attempt at making the unnatural to be the rule. Even in Deborah's time, they did not draft women to fight alongside the men of the army. Should we speak out? Yes. Whether our leaders listen is another matter.

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² Besides Deborah's own objection, we see that the very method Jael used to defeat the enemy was to act like a loving and caring mother to trick Sisera into napping. Anyone who reads this story should be ill at ease about the whole thing. Roles are bent in creepy ways.