

Is It Sinful for American Christians to Be Patriotic?

These days, it seems that more than a few church folk are lining up to ring a bell, the Liberty Bell.

Yep, I've been hearing some unusual calls from godly people to stand against basic American patriotism. I've heard the podcasts and read the writings. It seems the hair-trigger, "I'm Offended" parade from the outside has now found itself meandering down the aisles.

It's time to preach about awful America! That terribly flawed, hateful place. The land that has made so many mistakes and has been so mean.

You'll get a lot of hand-clapping for this new move, and you might even get crowned as profound. The troubling sound of reckless preachers who, for shock value, brag about their lack of concern for America, unwittingly screams, "I don't read history!"

Seriously, we've been given so much, and this flawed country has given unprecedented help and benevolence to the world, with medicines, inventions, education and the gospel. No other land has done this, ever. And find another place that has rebuilt the cities of their own war enemies!

In fact, America is so bad, everybody wants to come here. This poor, awful place.

Ironically, America's greatest gift seems to have been given to the church. We gather when we want, sing how we want, pray like we want, we can even "run the aisles" if we want. We can gather without fear; no secret police are recording the license plates of the cars in the parking lots. Freedom to Worship! Here in flawed America!

Recently, a well-known evangelical writer and teacher made some interesting statements about the place of Christians in the political landscape of America. Although delivered in the customary fatherly, ecclesiastical tones of concern, some statements were troubling.

His upfront disclaimer, when questioned about a specific candidate's passionate espousal of socialism, was he was not qualified to judge the pronouncement without spending "a ton of time learning about ... the socialistic experiment in Venezuela or Sweden, and the historical examples of its failures or successes..."

I'm thinking, 'Hey man, how much time do you need to figure this out?'

You're a real smart guy, and, after the pathetic carnage of death, poverty and corruption left strewn on the road of history as the result of socialist and communist hijinks, you're not equipped to speak about it?

Pardon the pun, but this raises some red flags with me.

In a few other concerning musings, my brother stated:

[He is] "one hundred times more passionate about creating Christians and churches that will be faithful, biblical ... than I am in preventing a Muslim America or a Communist America."

[He insisted] "his main calling is not to help America be anything, but to help the church be the church."

[In the past, he] "argued that Christians are not obligated to vote in political elections ... Before the general election in 2016, [he said] followers of Jesus need to show their allegiance to another world".

"[God's] children are free! Free from human institutions. As citizens of heaven, we are not bound in every situation to participate in the processes of human government."

Sounds good, huh? Bonhoeffer, Line 1!

I bet the Christians in Iran, Iraq, Syria and other persecuted places might take issue with a few of his points. But as you know, we live here, we can pontificate all we want.

Perhaps the reporter misquoted the gifted wordsmith, but just in case, let's peer through the piety just a bit.

I understand the clear words of Jesus, "My kingdom is not of this world." I have a decent grasp on the "Render unto Caesar" thing. But mixed with the "Occupy until I come" final order, clear concepts of stewardship and faithfulness pull at my heart.

In one of Jesus' landmark messages, He spoke of men who had been given land and wealth. Those who were passionate and diligent were deemed faithful and were blessed even more. Those who, out of laziness or passivity, remained unengaged or indifferent, lost what they had. That wouldn't fly in Venezuela.

Using the pastoral voice to tell people it is not important to get involved, or to even vote, by citing a tepid "whatever is gonna happen, is gonna happen" mantra is a disappointing misuse of the podium. After all, aren't we encouraged to be good citizens? Fatalism is not found in the gospel of the kingdom.

I believe Solomon's insight, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people mourn" (Prov. 29:2).

Many of the profound things that sound so wise and astute today, under closer examination, might deserve a time-out whistle. If emulated, such profundity will bring much groaning to his flock. Yet, we fall for the smooth sound of "reason."

Many years ago, Doris Day's smooth, velvet alto voice was

everywhere. Her famous hit was mesmerizing, and we all hummed along. But did we really listen to the hopeless message mingled in the melody?

When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother, what will I be./

*Will I be pretty, will I be rich? Here's what she said to me/
Que Sera, Sera! Whatever will be, will be/ The future's not
ours to see/ Que Sera, Sera! What will be, will be.*

(Well, maybe the love of my life has a more hopeful word for our life together?)

*When I was young, I fell in love/ I asked my sweetheart what
lies ahead./ Will we have rainbows, day after day? Here's
what my sweetheart said/ Que Sera, Sera! Whatever will be,
will be/ The future's not ours to see/ Que Sera, Sera! What
will be, will be.*

Now, that is just plain sad when your Momma and your sweetheart aren't much help; it's all downhill from there!

I'm not ready to throw in the passivity towel. I live here, thank God! I'm convinced, it is the praying people who have kept this country afloat. No, I am not flailing in a robotic blind allegiance. I will stand when the anthem is played.

But down the road, if the America my brother is preaching for tells me I can't speak the "name above all names," it will be time to fight.

Before I mess up the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner table discussions, as a born-again, Spirit-filled Christian, I know how this ends. As Grandma used to say, "I know what side my bread is buttered on!" I am a church guy, and my final allegiance is to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Yes, our God is sovereign, and He will do what He wants to do.

But as good stewards of what has been entrusted to us, and especially in this difficult time, we don't need passive piety. We need prophetic "watchmen on the wall" voices who can say to all sides, "Wake up! You're fixin' to mess up!"

Somebody is going to influence the culture. Capable people who really know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have proven to be a good fit. (See Ezekiel, Daniel and company).

So, no choruses of "Que Sera, Sera" on the song list this Sunday.

Watch! Pray! Vote! Get out there, and get that "salt and light" thing cranking!

But know this: I am a citizen of a higher heavenly country. My citizenship is there. I'm just here on a temporary visa. {eoa}

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