

Politics and the Vocation of the American Christian

Session 2. Challenges of America's Democratic Culture to the Church in America

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I. Framing the Discussion: Three Lessons from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*

1. American Democratic Culture Promotes Intellectual Conformity

- + This (seemed) to work in the Church's favor in times past.
- + Now may work against the Church given change in public opinion.

2. Only alternative is “thickening” Church Community. Living the “transfigured life” and not being “conformed” to the world.

3. Challenges to that:

A. Democratic Christianity in America obscured, and obscures, the Gospel.

B. Democratic Christianity Naturally Thinks of the Church, and the Kingdom of God, as a “Voluntary Institution”

II. Two Rival Notion of Freedom

1. Long-time compatibility between two different ideas of freedom. Now unhinged.

“Whig” (or “liberal”) conception of freedom.
Christian conception of freedom.

Whig freedom

- + Freedom is understood as autonomy: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.” (*Planned Parenthood of SE PA v. Casey*, 1992)
- + Not religious in any traditional sense. But speaks to spiritual needs:
 - + Has an anthropology (What it means to be human). Self-deception
 - + Has an ethics. Sin is difference.
 - + Has an eschatology (the movement and goal of history)
 - + It has a Great Commission, and offers a form of redemption.

Christian Freedom

+ There is a true human nature, a human nature that was destroyed in the enslavement of humanity in the Fall to the Evil One. Liberation is recovering that nature in Jesus Christ who is the very image of God, the second Adam.

Alternative narrative: Separation of God and humanity is the human plight. Lost our freedom, our humanity. Divided from God, divided from one another. (So it intersects the Whig narrative, but it is not the same as the Whig narrative.)

The solution to humanity's plight is God incarnate, Jesus Christ, who comes to redeem the promise God made to Abraham, as the new Adam, reintegrating humanity with God, and humanity with one another.

Rival Anthropology, Redemption, Eschatology, "Ethics," Great Commission

No Choice but to Intensify Church.

+ American Culture Used to bear much of the burden of Christian socialization – Christian discipleship. (Tocqueville.)

+ But in relying on Culture instead of Church, the Message was distorted. This is a burden the American Church carries with it today.

+ There is no alternative other than living God's true narrative: We are recreated a new humanity, with a new life, new community, and new creation. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transfigured by the renewing of your mind" (Ro 12.2). This is for the Church. Do not read it pietistically.

+ Must recover and communicate the true picture of the Church: Rev 19.

III. We must Recover the Horizontal Dimension of belong to Christ, as well as the Vertical Dimension

- + The Church is God's Heavenly Community. (More in Session 3.)
- + We are One with Christ; united with Christ. We are one with one another; united with one another. (Romans. 1 Co. Sacraments and union)

This is not withdrawal from the World

- + Eph 3 and 6
- + Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Ephesian church (circa. 107 A.D.)

"Take heed to meet together frequently for thanksgiving [eucharis] to God and for his glory. For when you meet together frequently, the powers of Satan are cast down, and destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity your faith" (Eph 13.1).

The Church is not a “voluntary organization,” at least not as the phrase is often used.

WCF, ch 30: “The Lord Jesus, as king and head of His Church, has therein appointed a government, in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.”

Critically to understand Church government biblically: Luke 22.24-27.

+ Church must be an intense enough experience to resist culture’s Whig narrative.

Rev 19 – True nature of the Church. Not condemnation. A feast; a party.

Ro 12.1-2. Do not be shaped by the world. Be transfigured by the Spirit. Do not fear man. 1 Co 14.25 Ungifted man falls down and exclaims surely Christ is among you.

We cannot continue to fool ourselves. To the extent that people do not see the difference in the church, then there is no epiphany. We need to enter into the transfigured life that Jesus has given us.