



One Voice for Public Policy

MINNESOTA DISTRICTS

JANUARY 2021 | A STRANGE TIME FOR AMERICA: RELIGION & POLITICS SWITCH PLACES

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:25-28, ESV

For months, even years now, it has been clear that American culture is in a state of flux. The indicators of this new state are many, including the following:

- A recent election so contentious as to call into question the peaceful transfer of political power
- Months of widespread social disorder, which at least in some quarters is now seen as acceptable
- Numerous instances in which basic constitutional rights (religious liberty, free speech and association, etc.) and bedrock legal principles (innocent until proven guilty, equal justice under the law, etc.) are being openly called into question and often ignored with impunity

Indeed, so many and so profound are these cultural distortions that many citizens, for the first time in their lives, are genuinely concerned that the foundation on which our republic rests may not have sufficient integrity and resilience to withstand whatever cultural shockwave comes next. Many wonder whether there is enough common ground among the various societal factions to allow for the kind of civil conversation required to restore harmony and stability. In particular, it's a circumstance which leaves many Christian people, including many pastors and teachers of the Church, at a loss to explain what's happening and how best to apply the counsel of God's Word in this new and disconcerting situation.

To those of you who resonate with my cultural description above, I would like to recommend Joshua Mitchell's new book, [*American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Our Time*](#). This book not only brings to bear important political and sociological understandings but also significant theological and biblical insights as it seeks to shed light on what can only be described as the strange inversion of politics and religion in the United States in recent years. In contrast to many cultural commentators who contend that our cultural fevers stem from the fact that "many Americans have lost their religion," Mitchell contends that Americans haven't so much lost their religion as "relocated [it] to the realm of politics."

It's Mitchell's observation that with respect to basic concepts like sin and forgiveness, guilt and innocence, "religion and politics have traded places." Using the religious concept of the Divine

Scapegoat as a metaphor, Mitchell brings a level of clarity that I think both clergy and laity will find helpful and reassuring. This is especially true in that he ends his analysis by encouraging Christians to be Christians. He reassures us that the best thing for us to do in these unsettling times is simply to go on being the Church, unapologetically preaching and teaching the fundamental Christian doctrines.

Of course, our primary motivation in preaching and teaching is always to advance the eternal salvation of souls. Nevertheless, it is no small thing that such faithful preaching and teaching also help to provide the “cultural ballast” necessary to keep the ship of state from foundering. Such public Christian engagement is an important way of showing that love for our neighbor to which we were called by our baptism into Christ.

***God's blessings to you as you interact with your friends and neighbors
concerning public matters on behalf of the Gospel.***



In Christ,

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