

Is It the Church's Business to Advocate a Position about Gun Control?

Whether citizens possess weapons or not may be an important question, but it is a purely political issue. The church should refuse to get into arguments such as about how to make this world a better place. What the church can speak about is the increase of violence in our society, and the reasons for it, like violence on television, and about the increase of violence as one of the signs of the coming end of the world. Our Lord foretold that those days would be like the ones at the time of Noah, when the earth was filled with violence. The church should not be encouraging people to sign petitions about banning the use of firearms, as member churches of QCT are now doing. People should be clear about the true task of the church, preaching salvation through Jesus Christ in the world to come, and overcoming evil by God's spiritual weapons, faith, the word, righteousness, and truth, and salvation. Other churches often get the task of the church wrong, and the present QCT advocacy is mistaken.

When the church advocates to the state a certain action it should almost invariably only be what it should not be doing. In other words, its voice is then almost always negative. By this test alone, telling the state to ban some kinds of firearms is not the church's task. It is a positive entrance into the lobbying for the government to act in a particular way, and cannot avoid the power plays that such lobbying involves.

However, when God's great Ten Commandments are being flouted or ignored, as in the case with abortion and euthanasia, the church should be saying to the state, in its prophetic role, "God has said, '*You shall not kill!*' Don't allow' abortion, because it is murder! If you go down that path, God will punish you."

We should be very clear that, when the church does speak to the state in this negative, but prophetic, role, it is not preaching the Gospel. It is not preaching the Law as a mirror to show sin. It is not even preaching the Law in its third use, to show what people should be doing in order to please God. It is preaching the Law as a curb, to restrain, to a degree, coarse outbursts of sin. The Law as a curb has the very practical function of preserving the greatest amount of freedom for the greatest number of people, and in this respect there is great wisdom in God's commandments. To repeat the crucial point, when the church speaks in this way, to the state or to the community about social issues such as allowing abortion or euthanasia its voice should almost always be in the negative.

We have to be careful in this respect. We should not fool ourselves that in doing this we are converting people for the Lord. Only the Gospel can do that. We also have to be careful that we do not give people the impression that the church is always against everything that makes this life good and pleasant. Our joy is truly joy in the Lord, and Christians should seek many things that are lovely, good, and true, besides God's commandments.

When churches assume the advocacy of specific positive policies to make this world a better place as one of their major roles, we have to question whether they have lost faith in the power of the Gospel to change people's lives, or lost sight of their real task in this world, to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name. It is sad when so-called ministers of the Gospel, Bishop Hollingworth, or Ian Paisley, or Bishop Tutu, and the rest, speak on the media, what they say is almost always something to do with advocating a social issue or supporting a political point of view. Ministers of the Gospel should present themselves chiefly as those who have a compulsion to mention the name of Jesus Christ. Our real hope cannot be for freedom from sin and violence on this present earth. Christians who want to be involved in social and political issues should do so by all means, and should use their influence in whatever political party or organisation, as they are enlightened by their Christian convictions. However, they should not speak in the name of the church. The church dare not blur its one important task, preaching Christ's death and resurrection as the spiritual weapons against Satan, and preparing lost sinners for the judgment, and for life with Jesus Christ in the kingdom to come.

Some organisations hold the view that Christians are likely to be better politicians than non-Christians are. Some people are surprised when we say that that may not necessarily be the case. If common sense and expediency, the law of what is possible, and compromise, run the state, we should not argue that Christians have any greater endowment of common sense than others have. In fact, one could well argue that a sensible non-Christian realist would be better in government than some mamby-pamby Christian who thought with his heart and was swayed by his feelings. It is simply not possible to run the state by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, simply because God requires more there than what is visible, outward and bodily. He looks at the heart, at people's feelings and desires, and their attitudes to Him. The state cannot enforce these or punish these.

The AELC has to resolve to stand on the right side of the borderline of church and state in its comments on public issues. All the church can do towards reducing violence is to preach the Law, with God's threats and

promises, and the Gospel, with God's pardon and hope for the world to come to motivate people and inspire them. The church must take care of people's souls, and leave it to people as citizens to decide who may have firearms, and what kind, and to the police and the government to control the laws.

The church, of course, is called on to help those who are injured by violence of every kind in this world. If you see a burglar crawling into someone's window, call the police, not the pastor. After they have been robbed, call a Christian, and let him be a good Samaritan to you, and serve you as if you were Jesus Christ Himself, and in His precious name. That will enable you to see what makes Christians different, as they show love without expecting anything back. You will see that they are motivated by Christ's love to them to spare no cost, as He spared none for us, and as they show love to people even when they haven't deserve it, as God in Christ has loved them.