

Madness

I don't understand what is going on. But, as a pastor, I feel some responsibility to say something. For me, patriotism is a value which is secondary to faith: I don't believe that there will be a special heaven for Americans; There will be no such distinctions there, where God is "all in all."

Nevertheless, I am grateful to God for being born in this country. I do think that the founders, who were experienced with endless conflicts and tyrannical forms of government in Europe, were inspired to form this nation in a better way and, especially, in terms of the spreading out of power. It seems that this was one of their primary concerns: Power had to be spread out among the branches of government and to the people themselves, with a system of "checks and balances."

What has undermined these principles in our day? I am no sociologist; just an observer like the rest of you. For sure, the rhetoric is fueling the fires. Freedom of speech, like any freedom, comes with responsibility. Whipping people into a lather with misinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda is, it seems to me, a gross misuse of speech. Demonizing the citizens on the other side of the argument is just not honest, nor is it Christian. Do people really understand the meaning of the words they are using? Words like "socialism" and "fascism" do have dictionary definitions and I think that they are being misapplied in some cases and, in other cases, they are an exaggeration. Both of them are the consolidation of power, economic or political:

Socialism: (leftist) *a political and economic theory of social organization which advocates that the means of production, distribution, and exchange should be owned or regulated by the community as a whole.*

On paper, this sounds good. It sounds like equality. In reality it has led to the concentration of power in an oligarchy which ends up becoming Communism

Fascism: (right wing) *is a form of far-right authoritarian, ultranationalism characterized by dictatorial power, forcible suppression of opposition and strong regimentation of society.*

Nothing about Fascism sounds good on paper. Nevertheless, the Church has made the mistake of allying itself with Fascist regimes in Italy (Mussolini), Spain (Franco), and Portugal (Salazar). Why would the Church ally itself with such governments? Because they incorporated conservative Christian principles into their platforms to entice and seduce Church leaders. This provided them cover to consolidate power in ways inimical to American Democracy and inimical to Church Social Teaching as well!

I may not have all of the details down with precision. But I submit that these rough characterizations are pretty close. Reckless use of these words is fanning the flames of division and being used to demonize those with opposing views.

What happened at the Nation's Capital last Wednesday is, for all of us, extremely troubling. It seems for many that the outcome of the election is not merely a disappointment but an actual disaster. What is different now than what came before? Have not the winners of the Executive Branch alternated, back and forth, between both parties since the beginning of the republic? The answer is probably radicalization and extremism in the case of both parties or, as I heard one commentator remark, the "ideological purification" on the left and the right. The problem with this is that it seems to be leading us down the path of violent conflict.



I have tried to be careful and objective in the composition of this column. My only purpose is to encourage discernment and prayer. But, certainly, these words will be read through glasses tinted red or blue. There's nothing I can do about that. Surely, we agree that more violence would be bad. And, yes, the violence of abortion continues. It is violence cloaked in medical garb and rooted in an ideology of false freedom and fear. We can and we must continue to open the eyes of those who are blind to the rights of the unborn. Politics is only one aspect of that complicated problem.