

GOOD GOVERNMENT

HON. BILL SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 2, 2001

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring this great chamber's attention to another sermon I recently heard. People across the United States of America are still trying to figure out why these men carried out their terrorist attacks on September 11th. I believe this sermon may help those people deal with this tragedy. I recommend everyone to take a moment and read the sermon below.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to place a copy of this sermon into the RECORD.

"PAUL'S ADVICE"

(By Pastor Carol Custead, Zion Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg, PA)

I can't imagine a more well timed lesson for this week than this second lesson which was appointed for the 16th Sunday after Pentecost, from St. Paul's First Letter to Timothy. Here we find scriptural affirmation of what I said last Sunday was Luther's understanding of the role of government in this world—"It is the God-given vocation of good government to maintain order, peace, and safety so that civilization can function."

We also find here a scriptural calling, issued by St. Paul, to prayer for our governmental leaders—something that we have seen much of in these last twelve days. People all over our nation & all over the world, of varying religions, have been flocking into churches, synagogues and mosques to pray—and especially to pray for God to guide the leaders of the nations in wisdom and discernment in this time of crisis following the terrorist attacks on September 11.

So let's start this morning by having a look at this scriptural passage. Here in 1 Timothy, Paul commends intercessory prayers for everyone, but most especially for "kings and all who are in high positions". Why does he single them out? It is "so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity," St. Paul explains. In his context, we might expect that Paul is trying, by using these words, to assure the civil authorities that the Christian movement does not subvert or cause trouble for civic stability. Roman officials worried about that, especially since it became clear that the Christian movement was no longer a sect within Judaism, and that some Christians were refusing to sign the annual loyalty oath affirming the divinity of the Roman Emperor.

But there is more reassurance in these words of Paul—reassurance which pertains to our world situation today. As biblical commentators have frequently attested, across the centuries, the Christian movement, except in its most radical fanatic fringe branches, values a stable political order where justice is enforced, and injustice is appropriately restrained—a political order where people can expect to lead a quiet and peaceful life.

Moreover, when the stability of political order is threatened, Christians must partici-

pate in efforts to regain that stability. Otherwise we are left in a Darwinian jungle where the survival of the fittest is the rule, and that means sheer power with both the threat and practice of violence. Therefore, Paul's advice about intercessory prayer for those in authority is more than a formality. It is a persistent reminder in our liturgies and life of prayer that a just political order is a necessity if individual rights are to be secured and opportunities for fulfillment accessible to all.

In a society that has been increasingly cynical about government, about all institutions and people in authority, where professional wrestlers or entertainers are excessively admired and voted into office because they are not politicians, it is especially important for churches and individual Christians to keep up a lively intercessory prayer life for those who hold political positions of authority. It will not only keep us a bit less tainted by that cynicism; it might also lead us into greater participation in public life. It is also the case that when we pray for everyone, especially those in authority, our lives become more quiet and peaceable not just because the effect of our prayer is that the state will be governed in greater justice, but also because we will be more quiet and peaceable in spirit if we have prayed truly. As we have so greatly seen these past twelve days, intercessory prayer has that effect. It calms us down. It delivers us from the agitation of not being able to control events. It enables us to live and act with the conviction that this is God's world, to be guided according to God's purpose, not according to our own purposes. To pray with all our might, and to trust—that is the good advice we have from Paul.

We have seen all of this at work in recent days. Never before in recent history have those in high positions asked us to pray so straightforwardly. We have seen how prayer can also be a unifying force in our nation and world. It has united Christians in an unprecedented way. Last Sunday evening we hosted a community-wide Prayer Service here at Zion. Approximately 320 people were packed tightly into these pews—people from many different congregations. There were Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, United Church of Christ, Methodist, and of course, Lutherans. It was a feeling of great comfort to know that in such a time of crisis we can come together in unity of purpose in prayer, for it is the same God that we pray to.

It is also an amazing feeling to know that people all over the world are praying for America in this time of great need—to see that also Jews and Muslims are praying the same prayers we are praying. While they do not pray in Jesus' name as we do, it is still the same God to whom they pray. These three great monotheistic religions have come together in unity of purpose in an unprecedented way. The terrorist actions of a fanatic fringe group of Muslims have been the shame of so many Muslims worldwide. We should remember that we also have been shamed in the past by our own fanatic fringe groups such as the incident in Waco, Texas and mass suicide of Jim Jones and his followers. Therefore we can treat our good Muslim brothers and sisters with grace and we

can pray with them and for them. We can pray with them for deliverance from the threat of militant Muslims, that those who have used violence as a means to grasp control in places such as Afghanistan might amend their ways or be ousted from their tyranny and murderous fanaticism.

When we pray we dare not do so with an attitude that God is on our side as the fanatics have done. How presumptuous! Rather, let us pray that we may be given the wisdom and strength and insight to discern God's way in all that lies before us so that we may properly be on God's side in His ongoing war on evil.

And when we pray, "God bless America" we dare not do so with an attitude of superiority to other nations of this world. For we believe that God does bless America—indeed that is our annual theme in this Harvest Home celebration. But that does not mean that God does not bless other nations and peoples also. As we pray for God to bless America today in this crisis let us remember that good people all around the world join us in that prayer.

When we pray we dare not forget Jesus' teaching to pray for our enemies. Perhaps that is most difficult in this crisis. But this prayer is so important because it helps us to keep our focus and perspective. As President Bush said in his speech Thursday night, our enemy is not Islam. Our enemy is not the Arabs. It is not even the majority of Afghan people. But our enemy is all those, wherever and whoever they are throughout this world, who would inflict terror and violence on innocent people. To pray for these enemies means neither to cover up the conflict we have with them nor to downplay it's enormous seriousness, but rather to endure the tension of our conflict with them without succumbing to their level of hatred—indeed without succumbing to hatred at all. We do not need to hate the person but only the terrible evil acts that they commit. To pray for one's enemy in this way means that despite our conflict with them we recognize this enemy as a creature of God who has had a right to live—but not the right to commit an unjust act! So we earnestly pray for them to turn from their evil ways for the sake of the whole civilized world. Our purpose, then, for bringing them to justice, is not for the sake of vengeance, but for the sake of restoring order to our world so that people everywhere may once again expect to live in peace, quiet, safety and dignity.

Finally, when we pray for our President, our government leaders, our military personnel—and those of all the nations who join us in our cause in this time of crisis, we ask God to give them insight, wisdom, and guidance in all that lies before them—in each decision they will need to make—especially the difficult ones where the lives of poor, innocent people may be at stake. While it is inevitable that in our efforts to root out terrorism from this world some innocent people will likely be harmed, let us pray that that number be minimal and that the actions we must take will be effective in meeting the overall strategic goal. In the words of President Bush, "In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may God watch over [us]." Amen.