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Nation should be fighting to restore the kingdom of the heart

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The captains of the culture wars tell us that we're slouching toward Gomorrah. They say that America's moral condition is worsening and that sin is somehow worse now than "before."

Unless the "before" was the Garden of Eden, their idea of a "trend-line-down" needs an adjustment.

It's been said that all of human history can be summed in this: God created us good; we fell; he redeemed; he will restore. That's no "trend-line-down," no worsening in the pervasiveness of human sin and misery. It's a flat line of sin since the fall, coupled with a promise of divine grace. Sure, each generation struggles as it must with particular manifestations of the problem, but the "problem" has been through all and in all since the Garden.

Perhaps the culture war captains' "sky is falling" rhetoric is harmless error, mere puffery of the alarmist sort. On the other hand, maybe it's doing serious damage in the kingdoms of the heart.

Advertisement First of all, shouldn't we be more thankful to live in these "best of days"? Who among the trend-line-downers would choose to live in any other time period in human history? Want to go back to the 1950s in America? Heaven help you if you got cancer or if you were black.

Want to go back to some Scottish castle in the 1600s? You'd have to give up running water, flush toilets, central heating and air conditioning, and climate-controlled cars. Want to go back to Roman times? They threw live babies on the trash heaps around their cities, and they threw the Prince of Peace up on a cross.

At a very practical level, these "best of days" in which we are blessed to live are better than any "good old days" that never existed.

Next, shouldn't we expect leaders to be optimistic? If their pessimism is as deep as their fund-raising pieces, aren't the culture war captains disqualifying themselves from leadership? When leaders are optimistic, they're saying they believe in the people they represent. More deeply, they're saying that they believe that the One who orders the universe is good, just, merciful and sovereign.

Truth is, we've got every reason to be optimistic. We're blessed to live in a constitutional republic which guarantees our right to express our most heartfelt beliefs and which protects us from the horrors of a theocracy. The First Amendment gives us the right (which we must protect with eternal vigilance) to persuade the faithful and the faithless that the Sovereign King's principles are useful to the ordering of society. We should make that case with optimism and hope, remembering that it is the love of the heart and not the compulsion of the law that is the highest aim of our faith.

A theocracy is not our goal; it's poison to the church and poison to the state. That means that our neighbors have the right to live in opposition to our most heartfelt beliefs and that we should ask that the civil law restrict only those personal choices that affect the life or liberty of another.

The captains of the culture wars often quote John Adams as saying, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." Do they hear what he's

saying? He's expressing the limits of government and the limitless potential of genuine faith among a nation's citizens. Since it's faith (not law) that's the surest deliverer of the brokenhearted, shouldn't we focus most of our hopes for personal and cultural redemption on the kingdoms of the heart? Unless one doubts that the heart's song of redemption is really that good, why choose the lifeless civil law as anything but a minor means of redemption?

Finally, is it right to always blame someone else for our moral decline? The captains tell us that it's the homosexuals, the Hollywood stars, the "activist judges" who are debauching our culture. They never turn the business end of that accusing finger on themselves. But it's me -- my sin -- that's debasing my family, my community, my country, my culture. It's my callous disregard for social justice, for example, that needs redemption as much as whatever fault that lies in my neighbor's life. If I admit this, I can find grace, I can offer grace and I can be an empowered agent of reconciliation.

Jesus loved, touched and ate with sinners. He had no patience with those who set themselves up as paragons of virtue. He gave great attention to the hearts of his hearers, did battle with the forces of evil that oppressed them and cared for their practical needs. He never left sinners where they were, but he mounted no effort to change their ways through civil laws. Captains, it sounds like he was fighting a wholly different war.
