

Statism and Catholicity: Something to Think About

By Rich Lusk

Many Presbyterians who are anti-statist (e.g., opposed to what they perceive as tyranny by the civil government) also happen to be highly sectarian in their ecclesiology. They do not realize that their limited government views and their low ecclesiology are at odds with one another. The state can only be kept in check by a strong, unified church. A divided church means people will seek unity elsewhere, namely, in a powerful and centralized civil government. Only a truly *catholic* church can preserve civil liberties. Only when citizenship in God's kingdom trumps citizenship in an earthly nation-state can God's people stand against tyranny. Only a fully functioning church, a church that provides her own moral discipline, her own charities, even her own educational structures, can hold in check the growth of Caesar. Only a united church can effectively voice Christ's claims on the magistrate. In short, only Mother Church can protect us from the nanny state.

Historically, the rise of denominationalism and the decline of freedom have coincided. American Christians have tended to see denominationalism as *proof* of our religious freedoms, but in reality the denominational system *threatens* our liberty in the long run because it leaves us with no ability to speak to the state with a unified voice or stand against the tyranny of the state as one man. It is far easier for the state to manipulate, control, and bully isolated individuals than a strong institutional church. In fact, Presbyterians should consider the fact that the Roman Catholic church is probably doing more to protect us against encroaching, state-enforced political correctness at the present time, precisely because the Roman church can act in a coordinated fashion to buffer and counteract the state's secularizing agenda.

In truth, a unified and faithful church is the best antidote to statism in every age. Jean Jacques Rousseau rightly viewed intercommunion among Christian churches as the gravest threat to the unity and power of the modern state since it offered Christian citizens membership in a trans-national kingdom and relativized their earthly political loyalties. Their feasting together at the Lord's Table was itself a political, counter-statist act. The communion meal enacted an alternative politics, and indeed, manifested Christ's body as the only

source of true community in the world. As Augustine saw long ago, the Eucharistic sacrifice is the only proper basis for organizing a just society.

Presbyterians today would do well to learn the lesson of Rousseau. John Nevin certainly knew the way things worked. He wrote, "A church without unity can neither conquer the world nor sustain itself." Instead it becomes the pawn of the nation-state. Divided we fall into tyranny; united we stand to oppose it. It's that simple.