

ASSOCIATED BIBLE STUDENTS

"WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMETH IN THE MORNING." PSALMS 30:5

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SCRIPTURES ADMONISH SEPARATION OF CHURCH & GOVERNMENT

The fact that Pope Francis, as head of state, addressed a joint session of Congress on September 24, 2015, is an unprecedented event in U.S. history. Time Magazine, July 24, 2015 stated: "With a Catholic vice president, six Catholic Supreme Court justices, a Catholic Speaker of the House, and a large number of Catholics in Congress, the golden age of Catholicism in American politics has arrived. This [address to congress] would have been unimaginable just a few decades ago." And, indeed, it is unimaginable considering this country was founded upon the principle that church should remain separate from government.

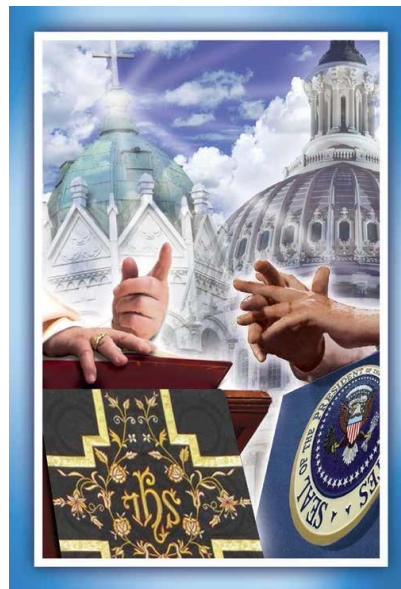
Jesus stated emphatically to his disciples that his Kingdom was not of this world. (John 18:36) Since that time, Jesus' faithful followers have been waiting patiently for this Kingdom and its rightful head - remaining separate from the politics of the world.

This important teaching, however, seems to have been forgotten. The Speaker of the House, a devout Catholic, stated in an interview on CBS Face the Nation that he has been trying to get "a papal visit to Congress for two decades." The House Minority Leader, who is also Catholic, stated that she was "overjoyed" that Francis will "address joint sessions of Congress." The Senate Majority Leader stated that "Pope Francis is moving the hearts of millions and inspiring a new generation with an engaging and compelling style." This current Pope certainly is endearing, charitable and charismatic - perhaps the most popular man of our time. However, although we do not question his motives, there is a very important reason why the Scriptures admonish Christians to be subject to government, but not in complicity with it. And history bears this out. Proverbs 16:2; Matthew 22:21; 1 Peter 2:13; Titus 3:1; Romans 13:1; 1 Timothy 2:2

Founding Fathers Escaped from Religious Tyranny

Fresh from the tyranny of kings who ruled as "divinely appointed" heads of the church, the founding fathers of the United States insisted on separation of church and state. In 1803, James Madison summarized the reason in his words: "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." In 1960, then President Elect John F. Kennedy, a devout Catholic, stated: "I believe in an America where the separation of

church and state is absolute - where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote... where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source..."



The founders of the United States of America were Christian men and women who wished to have Christian principles apply, but knew well, from the lessons of the past, the abuse that comes with an alliance of church and government. History has repeatedly illustrated the problems that arise when religion and politics mix, as shown by the oppressive power of the Holy Roman Empire when the popes crowned the kings of Europe.

In 1787, with these fresh lessons of history in mind, Thomas Jefferson wrote in his Notes on the State of Virginia: "Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burned, tortured, fined and imprisoned. What has been the effect of this coercion? To make half the world fools and half hypocrites; to support roguery and error all over the world..." Again, in 1802, Jefferson wrote: "...legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church & state."

The Pope's address to Congress indicates that this wall of separation is in danger of being dismantled. Could the factors that led to the tyrannical church-state system of the past happen in our day? What critical lessons can be learned from history?

Babylon: A Prophetic Picture

Babylon is first noted in the Old Testament as a great and powerful city in the days of the Hebrew prophets. These prophets warned God's people of the consequence of living carelessly and forgetting their covenant to serve God alone. Because they did not heed these prophets and fell into the ways of the world, God allowed Israel to be taken captive by ancient Babylon.

Babylon appears again in the Book of Revelation, this time in symbol as an oppressive force which would quickly arise upon the early church and persecute the disciples of Christ. (Revelation 17:2-6) As Israel of old is a symbolic picture of spiritual Israel during the Gospel era, so ancient Babylon is a picture of a powerful system which would take Christians captive. As the Israelites compromised

with their captors by mixing their true religion with pagan practices, so too, many spiritual Israelites became careless, mixing true Christianity with the false practices of Babylon the Great.

Thus, Babylon has become a symbol of confusion - a mixture of truth and error - a mixture of Christianity with the world. In the picture, the treasures, which had been given to natural Israel as a sacred trust, were taken captive to Babylon of old: "And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD... all these he [Nebuchadnezzar] brought to Babylon." (2 Chronicles 36:18) The treasures of the Lord were those sacred items used in the Temple. (Exodus 25:22) Similarly, the beautiful truths - treasures - entrusted to the early followers of Christ would soon become adulterated with the practices and governments of this world and of an assortment of pagan religions.

The Apostle Paul referred to this careless condition which would arise in the early church and would lead the disciples of Christ captive to a worldly spirit. The second coming of Christ "...shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself... so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God..." (See 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8) Has this prophecy been fulfilled? Was there a time when the church was dominated by one who exalted himself in the temple - the church? Was there ever a great falling away where the church mingled with the world and caused spiritual Israel to compromise its truth and purity? The answer is yes.

Rise of the Holy Roman Empire

The great alliance of church and state is an indisputable fact of history. Roman persecution of the early church over the first three centuries weakened the resolve of many Christians, and when Constantine converted to Christianity, ambitious church leaders saw this as an opportunity to gain favor and partnership with their former persecutors. Thus, after heavy persecutions upon Christians in the first few centuries, perceived providence seemed to open a door of relief. Constantine proclaimed the Edict of Milan (A.D. 313) and Christians were brought into favor with the Emperor. The great Roman Empire first courted an alliance with Christians to keep the Empire stable, but soon after, with the encouragement of corrupt bishops, compelled adherence to the church.

After only three centuries of waiting for the return of Christ many church leaders, eager for power, were willing to accept this union of church and state. Fisher's Universal History, page 262, describes it thus: "In theory it was the union of the world-state and the world-church - an undivided community under Emperor and Pope, its heaven-appointed secular and spiritual heads."

Thus began a marriage between church and state. By A.D. 800 the church was not only fully married to the Roman Empire, but actually lording over it. Revelation calls this Babylonish mixture harlotry. (Revelation 2:2-6; 17:5) The once pure church, betrothed to Christ, her heavenly bridegroom, began to reign without him, setting up her own kingdom and marrying the

kingdoms of this world. How quickly the admonition of James to the church was lost: "Pure religion and undefiled before God, Father is this... to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27

The Hunted Became the Hunter

Within a few hundred years after Christ's death, everything was changed. Instead of suffering, came honor; instead of humility, came pride; instead of truth, came error; and instead of being persecuted, the church became the persecutor of all who did not adhere to her dictates. Soon she began to invent new doctrines to justify her course, declaring that the promised millennial reign of Christ had come, and that he was represented by her popes, who reigned over the kings of the earth as Christ's vicegerents. Her claims were successful in deceiving the whole world. She made all nations drunk with her erroneous doctrines - teaching that eternal torment awaited all who resisted her



Pope Stephen II Crowning King Pepin A.D.

demands. Revelation 14:8; 17:2

Thus, the kingdoms of Europe claimed to be Christian kingdoms - Christendom - and announced that their kings reigned "by the grace of God" through appointment of the church. This claim has been a gross libel upon the true Kingdom of Christ, for Jesus said of his disciples they "are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." And Paul exhorted the church, saying, "Be not conformed to this world." John 17:16; Romans 12:2

Serious injury has come to the children of God as a result of the church nominal (in name only) and her illicit affair with the world. The followers of Christ have been led to an improper intimacy with earthly kingdoms, to the neglect of the Gospel concerning the true Kingdom and the hopes centered in it. Truly, the best and the worst of earth's nations are but "kingdoms of this world" whose lease of power from God has expired so that they may give place to their ordained successor - the Kingdom of Messiah - the fifth universal empire of earth. Isaiah 32:1; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 17, 27.

Restraint of Liberty a Warning Sign

Today, the fear of global financial collapse, Muslim extremism, the prospect of another cold war with Russia, and declining morals, all cause Christian denominations to clamor for solidarity together. These groups seem to be courting the politicians as never before to lock-in support for their religious agenda. Many hope that a Christian united front exerting pressure on Washington can hold back the rising tide of Islam and shore up the declining moral infrastructure of the United States. But pressure from the church upon state will come at what cost?

Our nation has reacted to terrorism by curtailing many civil liberties in order to insure our safety. Congress passed the Patriot Anti-Terrorism Act in response to the 9/11 attacks, which gave the government extraordinary authority to secretly spy on and indefinitely detain, suspected terrorists without trial or council for the accused. Following a lack of Congressional approval, parts of the

Patriot Act expired on June 1, 2015, but, with the passage of the *USA Freedom Act* on June 2, 2015 these were restored through 2019. Jonathan Lurie, a Rutgers University professor, alluded to the precedent used by the government to intern Japanese civilians and other steps unthinkable in peacetime: *“These are not normal times, and we do things that we would not ordinarily do.”*

To the fearful and scripturally uninformed it seems that drastic measures are necessary, even at the expense of personal liberties. But what if these measures become permanent fixtures in our government? How might it eventually impact even sincere Christians? Giving up personal liberties and protections could give rise to minority Christian groups being on the receiving end of the abuse if the wrong ideologies gain prominence in our government. As was illustrated in the Holy Roman Empire, too much power in the hands of the church has proven to lead to greed, abuse and corruption. This scenario is currently being played out in countries such as Russia and Pakistan where the state approved religion is the only one granted privileges of freedom to worship as they please. All others are often persecuted and forbidden many privileges which we currently take for granted in this country.

Churches in Politics & Government

History has thus shown that there is a danger when churches exert pressure upon government policy and support specific candidates. How convinced are these churches of the convictions espoused by their candidates? Are their principles and choices scriptural? On many issues, they are. Certainly the integrity of the family arrangement is scriptural. Frustration with inequalities and unrighteousness is understandable. But how often have well-meaning Christians misinterpreted God’s will and stained the pages of history with innocent blood.

It was not that long ago, at the height of World War I, that Pastor Zoebel, speaking in the great Lutheran church in Leipzig, Germany, said, *“It is this deep consciousness of our mission that permits us to rest content with a heart full of gratitude, when our guns beat down the children of Satan [referring to the English], and when our marvelous submarines-instruments to execute the Divine vengeance-send to the bottom of the sea thousands of the non-elect... There ought to be no mercy for the servants of Satan - in other words, no pity for the English, French, and Russians, nor indeed for any nation that has sold itself to the Devil. They have all been condemned to death by a Divine decree.”* Also, at this time in history, Fritz Philippi, Protestant Pastor of Berlin, said, *“German warriors do not shed blood with a light heart. They look upon it as a sacred duty imposed on them. Germany has been chosen by the Almighty as His instrument to punish... and to slay with the sword sinful nations. Satan himself, who has come into the world in the form of a great Power [England], must be crushed.”*

Statements such as these seem too extreme to be professed today, but consider the words of a popular Christian politician who recently told ministry students that the United States should send troops to fight Muslims on a *“task that is from God.”* In addition, a popular evangelical preacher has consistently reinforced the idea that

the United States preemptively strike Iran. Fear of the unknown has caused a radical mind-set among many evangelical groups wishing to pressure Washington. A prominent Christian advocate of the theocracy/dominionism doctrine recently stated, *“Our job is to reclaim America for Christ, whatever the cost. As the vice-regents of God, we are to exercise godly dominion and influence over our neighborhoods, our schools, our government – over every aspect of society.”* These aggressive expressions are certainly not consistent with Jesus’ peaceable Kingdom principles. In the 1950s the drive for church unity led to the formation of the National Council of Churches. The tendency to overstep their bounds and to dabble in secular and political affairs was soon evident as they attempted to coerce the media into only broadcasting material approved by the Council. These examples serve to demonstrate what could happen when Christians unite for the wrong reasons.

Our Citizenship in Heaven

Jesus did not say that his Kingdom should be set up before he returns. (Acts 15:14-17) The prophecies of Revelation state that when Christ would return at the end of the Age the seventh trumpet would sound, and then the kingdoms of this world would become Christ’s. (Revelation 11:15) Therefore, the Apostle Paul reminds Christians: *“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities...”* and pray for those *“that are in authority; that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life...”* Roman 13:1

NAS; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2

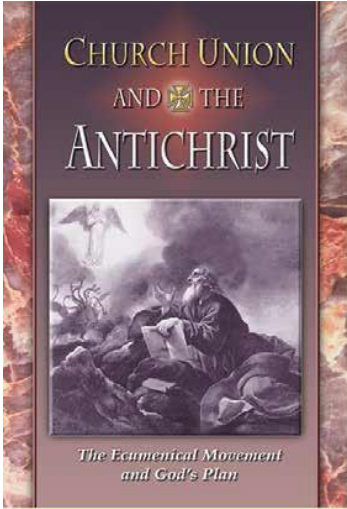
Jesus was not a political reformer. In harmony with Jesus’ statement, *“My Kingdom is not of this world,”* the Apostle Paul confirmed this, saying, *“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...”* (Philippians 3:20 NAS) Jesus taught his disciples that the new wine of God’s Kingdom could never be poured into the old wineskins of the current society and government. (Luke 5:37, 38) Those corrupted systems will never be reformed. Soon, Christ will sweep these away to make room for his righteous *“Kingdom to come”* when all the families of the earth will be blessed by his righteous rule. Genesis 22:18; Matthew 6:10

Originally, all Christians held to this view. They knew their part and lot was not to try to remake the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. They knew they were not to enter the world’s politics, nor to enter its wars. They knew their allegiance was to Christ and his coming Kingdom. They gave heed to the admonition of the Apostle Peter who encouraged them to live as aliens and strangers in this world. (1 Peter 2:10, 11) Until Jesus returned, they were to wait as espoused virgins. They believed that Jesus would return and receive his faithful followers as his beloved bride.

Although the present systems of earth will be torn down, there will be a new heavens, free from corruption, from which Christ and the true church will reign, and a new, cleansed earth prepared for the billions of resurrected mankind. Then will come the proclamation, *“the spirit [Christ] and the bride [his church] say, Come... and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”* Faithful Christians still cling to and wait for this beautiful prospect. Revelation 21:1-5; 22:17; See also Daniel 2:44



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