

CHURCH AND STATE LESSONS FROM HISTORY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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 had 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 a letter of clarification as to his views: “I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their 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.”

Today, this *wall of separation* is in danger of being dismantled. The followers of Christ should ask themselves: could the factors that led to the oppressive church-state system of the past happen in our day? Are we educated in Bible principles to know why our government is founded upon the separation of church and state? What lessons of history can we learn to prevent the rise again of an oppressive church-influenced government?

ANCIENT BABYLON: A PROPHETIC PICTURE

Babylon is first noted in Old Testament scripture 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 idolatry, God allowed Israel to be taken captive by this great city Babylon. Babylon appears again in the Book of Revelation—this time it is symbolic—an oppressive force which would quickly arise and persecute the disciples of Christ. (Revelation 17:2-6) But why is this ancient city used as a symbol?



As Israel of old is a picture of *spiritual* Israel during the Gospel era, so ancient Babylon is a picture of a powerful city which would take Christians captive. Just as many *natural* 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, and the **treasures** of the king... all these he [Nebuchadnezzar] brought to Babylon.” (2 Chronicles 36:18) The *treasures* of the Lord were those sacred items used in the Temple—the meeting place between God and man. (Exodus 25:22) Similarly, the beautiful truths and characteristics—*treasures*—entrusted to the early followers of Christ would soon become adulterated with the practices and governments of this world.

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. “...that day [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?

RISE OF THE *HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE*

The answer is yes. The great alliance of church and state is an indisputable fact of history. How could this have happened? Roman persecution of the early church over the first two centuries weakened the resolve of many Christians, and when Constantine converted to Christianity in A.D. 312, ambitious church leaders saw this as an opportunity to gain a partnership with their former persecutors.

Yes, after heavy persecutions upon Christians in the first few centuries, 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, 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 and the 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 Christ the King was represented by her popes, who reigned over the kings of the earth as his 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 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 recognition of and 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; See also *End Times*, Winter 2002 Issue



Pope Stephen II Crowning King Pepin A.D. 754

RESTRAINT OF LIBERTY A WARNING SIGN

Today, the fear of financial disaster, 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 stay the rising tide of Islam and brace 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. Concerning the Military Tribunal Act of 2008, Michael Tigar, an American University law professor, wrote, "*Never in American history has such a sweeping suspension of civil rights been attempted.*" 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,*" Lurie said.

It seems to many 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 loyal 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 AND 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 far should Christians go to assume what we want is what God wants? How often have well-meaning Christians misinterpreted God's will and stained the pages of history with innocent blood.

It wasn't that long ago, at the height of World War I, that Pastor Zoebel, speaking in the great Lutheran church in Leipsic, 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. We must fight the wicked with every means in our power. 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 the envious, to chastise the wicked, 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 current vice presidential candidate who told ministry students that the United States sent troops to fight in the Iraqi war on a "*task that is from God.*" In addition, the popular evangelical TV preacher, John Hagee, based upon his religious conviction, 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. James Kennedy, a prominent advocate of the theocracy/dominionism doctrine, stated in 2005, "*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."

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.

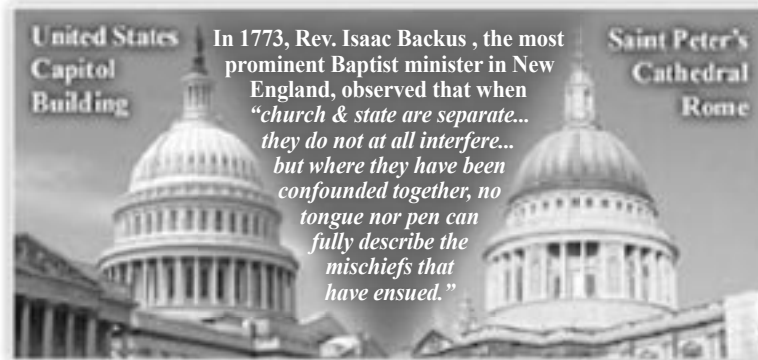
CITIZENSHIP IN HEAVEN

Jesus did not say that his Kingdom should be set up before he returns. 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) Meanwhile, the Apostle Paul says that the Christian is to be subject to, but not involved in, government. "*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. He said, "*My Kingdom is not of this world.*" (John 18:36) 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) Yes, 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 could never be reformed, but must be swept away to make room for the new government under Christ.

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*, from which Christ and the true Church will reign, and a *new earth* prepared for the billions of resurrected mankind. Then will come the proclamation, "*the spirit [Christ] and the bride say, Come... and let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" True 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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