

Hartford Bible Students Newsletter

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CHUCH AND STATE

The founders of the United States of America believed in God and wished to have Biblical principles as a foundation for governance, but they 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.

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?

THE RISE OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

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." Thereafter 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

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.

CHURCHES IN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

History has 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.

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

Hartford Bible Students * P.O. Box 493 * Manchester, CT 06045