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THE UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE: Historic and Scriptural Views

**The relationship between church and state
throughout history has a
direct relevance to post-9/11 America.**

Arguments over the “union of church and state” include a connection between the two or a separation of the two, both for mutual benefit. With respect to a connection, the Judeo-Christian heritage offers an advantage to the state, compared to atheism, in upholding biblical values.

At the same time, the church is advantaged by tax exemption, protection of property, recognition of ministers and marriages, and freedom to preach religious liberty. With respect to separation, both state and

church are free from the potential temptation to repress the other, with the state as neutral (not favoring one religion over another). The state is free to legislate in civil matters, and all citizens are free to follow the dictates of their conscience.

Here are two major views on the relationship of church and state in America: (1) when religion is not al-

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Many Christians associate the union of church and state with “taking America back for God.” Some argue that America was birthed by white Christian pilgrims, where church and state were united (as in Massachusetts and Connecticut and later in other colonies), yet others argue that these pilgrims and their successors did little more than rob native Indians of their lands, broke covenants made with them, and massacred millions of them.

lowed to contribute to public debates, this is tantamount to a secular worldview defeating a religious worldview; (2) religion cannot save a country through politics, only through the gospel, and thus alignment with the kingdom is infinitely more powerful than politics, so that changed lives can impact government.

In 1947, for the first time, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it is unconstitutional for government “to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion.”¹ Law professor Philip Hamburger argues: “There are myriad connections between religion and government that do not amount to an establishment, let alone a full union of church and state.”² He argues that there are various degrees of union (from non-establishment to establishment).

Why It Is Important

Christians in America are rightly concerned about the lack of Judeo-Christian values in contemporary society, such as the absence of God, Scripture, and prayer in the upbringing of so many youth (in homes and public schools) and the bombardment of anti-Christian values that daily confront them. Many argue that if Christian legislation can prevail, things will get better.

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Some Christians argue that Amer-

ica became a Christian nation in 1776, when it gained its independence from Britain and was founded on freedom and inalienable rights. They look to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as grounds for claiming America as a Christian nation. Others ask whether America was truly a Christian nation when it shipped as many as six million Africans on atrociously cruel ships and enslaved the three million who survived the awful journeys.

The topic is too broad, requiring a book to do it justice. An examination of four examples in which a union of church and state has not benefited the church would be manageable and instructive.

The Constantinian Experiment

Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (ca. A.D. 275-337) elevated Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the year 313. His motive was political: to unite his empire of multiple religions. He must have been impressed with the growing influence of Christianity.

Evidence calls into question Constantine's conversion to Christianity. He remained a heathen while outwardly an alleged Christian. While blind to the significance of theological disputes, he worked hard to settle them in calling church councils. "He first introduced the practice of subscription to the articles of a written creed and of the infliction of civil

punishments for nonconformity."³

For the first three centuries after Christ, the Christian Church grew despite persecution. When Constantine "converted" to Christianity, the persecuted church became powerful. Clergy recognized in this new order "a reproduction of the theocratic constitution of the people of God under the ancient covenant," except dissenting sects received no benefit and were "subject to persecution from the state and from the established Catholicism."⁴ In other words, the Catholic Church fared well in the union with the state, while other churches (dubbed sects) were persecuted.

Yet the Catholic Church still suffered: "The Roman state, with its laws, institutions, and usages, was still deeply rooted in heathenism, and could not be transformed by a magical stroke. The Christianizing of the state amounted therefore in great measure to a paganizing and secularizing of the church. The world overcame the church, as much as the church overcame the world, and the temporal gain of Christianity was in many respects canceled by spiritual loss. The mass of the Roman Empire was baptized only with water, not with the Spirit and fire of the gospel, and it smuggled heathen manners and practices into the sanctuary under a new name."⁵

Baptists in Connecticut objected in 1803 to the union of church and state, referring back to what hap-

pened in the time of Constantine: “The doctrines of the gospel . . . retained much of their primitive purity, until the clergy became corrupted by a legal establishment under the Emperor Constantine, then, when church and world became united, and the clergy furnished with rich livings, and large salaries, the constant and main object of every such establishment, civil and religious oppression united their strength to the great injury of mankind.”⁶

Early champions for freedom of conscience (Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Lactantius) were ignored as the union of church and state restricted religious freedom. Heretics were not only excommunicated from church, but also considered criminals against the state. Hence, in the Middle Ages, the Roman Church persecuted, even with death, those disagreeing with her dogmas.

The Geneva Experiment

The union of church and state in Geneva made it a theocracy. It was a marriage between John Calvin’s theology and his control of the state. “Calvin extended the authority and civil government to both Tables of the Law.”⁷ The first table (commandments 1-4, Exodus 20:3-11) refers to one’s relationship to God (religious matters). The second table (commandments 5-10, Exodus 20:12-17) refers to one’s relationship to

humans (civil matters). The state usually confines its jurisdiction to the second table, but the union of state and church extended the jurisdiction of the state to all of the Ten Commandments. This meant that “offences against the Church are offences against the State, and vice versa, and deserve punishment by fines, imprisonment, exile, and, if necessary, by death.”⁸

The church in Geneva was a “state church.” This meant that it was the duty of the state to legislate beyond its civil responsibilities. It was to legislate in religious matters as well: the number of dishes at meals was regulated; attendance at public worship was compulsory; watchmen were appointed to assure church attendance; men who laughed during a sermon were imprisoned for three days; heresy, idolatry, adultery, and blasphemy brought the death penalty; a girl was beheaded for striking her parents; men and women were burned for witchcraft.

From 1542 to 1546, 58 judgments of death and 76 decrees of banishment were passed. During the years 1555 and 1559 the cases of various punishment for all sorts of offenses amounted to 414—a large proportion for a population of 20,000.⁹

Calvin’s institution of a theocracy was based on principles “exclusively taken from the Old Testament. The Calvinistic as well as the papal theocracy was legalistic rather than evan-

The number of dishes at meals was regulated; attendance at public worship was compulsory; watchmen were appointed to assure church attendance; men who laughed during a sermon were imprisoned for three days; heresy, idolatry, adultery, and blasphemy brought the death penalty; a girl was beheaded for striking her parents; men and women were burned for witchcraft.

gelical.”¹⁰ Schaff notes that “the most cruel of those laws—against witchcraft, heresy, and blasphemy—were inherited from the Catholic Middle Ages, and continued in force in all countries of Europe, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic, down to the end of the seventeenth century.”¹¹ No wonder “The union of Church and State is tacitly assumed or directly asserted in nearly all the Protestant Confessions of Faith, which make it the duty of the civil government to support religion, to protect orthodoxy, and to punish heresy.”¹² We find this spelled out in a number of creeds.

Michael Servetus (1511-1553) didn’t believe in the eternal divinity of Christ, opposed infant baptism and predestination, and held other beliefs of lesser consequence, but Calvin disliked his theology and considered him the Reformation’s greatest enemy. Since Servetus was only a transient in Geneva (en route to Naples), he was not subject to the laws of Geneva.

Legally, all Geneva could do was to banish him. But they put him on trial, denied him benefit of counsel, even though the law provided for it. All the Geneva churches consulted said Servetus should be banished, but none suggested execution. On October 27, 1553, however, he was burned at the stake.

Irwin Polishook says Calvin was “ruthless in suppressing heresy,” and with “few exceptions, the leading Protestants shared the intolerance of the medieval past.”¹³ Castellio writes, “What a tragedy that those who had so lately freed themselves from the terrible Inquisition should so soon imitate its tyranny, should so soon force men back into Cimmerian darkness after so promising a dawn!”¹⁴ In his defense, Calvin referred to the ferocious decrees in the Old Testament (Ex. 22:20; Lev. 24:16; Deut. 13:5-15; 17:2-5).

Zurich and Infant Baptism

Infant baptism was practiced by

The 16th century Reformation was mostly confined to continental Europe, although the influence of John Calvin came to Scotland. Because Pope Clement VII refused the king's request for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and became the head of the Church of England (Anglican).

all the Reformers, who considered re-baptism a heresy. Anabaptists were those who discovered that infant baptism is not taught in Scripture and argued that baptizing infants is an act without faith, for infants cannot exercise faith. The act of baptism without faith on the part of the baptized goes against salvation by faith, the message of the Reformers in opposition to works in the Catholic system. So Anabaptists rightly saw an inconsistency between the message of the Reformers and their practice of infant baptism.

Zurich was an early city where many Anabaptists lived. Although Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) worked in Zurich to forward the Reformation against the Catholic Church, he didn't go any further than the city council's approval in religious matters such as abolishing the mass and images. The Anabaptist leader Conrad Grebel (ca. 1498-1526) opposed the idea that the state should control the church.

In January 1525, the city council

decided to stand by infant baptism and ordered Grebel and the Brethren Church to discontinue their movement. The Anabaptists did not comply, so Grebel and others were arrested and condemned by the state to life imprisonment. One of them (Manz) escaped, then was recaptured and executed by drowning on January 25, 1527.

Anabaptists, in fact, met with persecution under Protestant and Roman Catholic governments. It didn't matter whether the state was united to Protestant or Catholic churches—persecution replaced proclamation as the arbiter between truth and error. The union of church and state was an affront to the *sola scriptura* principle. Often the union of church and state, rather than Scripture, handed down verdicts. The union of church and state in Protestant countries had become a new magisterium, the same kind of power opposed by Protestants in their battle with the Catholic Church.

New England Experiment and Beyond

In England, the medieval church ruled the consciences of humans, high and low, for more than a millennium. John Wycliffe (ca. 1330-1384) pointed out the errors of the Catholic Church at Oxford University and is considered the “Morning Star of the Reformation.” For that reason, a ban was placed on him and his followers (1428), and later his body was exhumed, burned, and his ashes thrown into the Swift River. In the 16th century, God brought the truth of the gospel (“the just shall live by faith,” Rom. 1:17, KJV) to Martin Luther (1483-1546), and later the gospel as union with Christ, with God’s sovereignty replacing papal sovereignty, to John Calvin (1509-1564). But the gospel penetrated only partially into the minds of Luther and Calvin, who both persecuted.

The 16th century Reformation was mostly confined to continental Europe, although the influence of John Calvin came to Scotland. Because Pope Clement VII refused the king’s request for a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, King Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church and became the head of the Church of England (Anglican). He seized Catholic monasteries and demanded total obedience to the new religion.

Queen Mary I tried to bring England back to the Roman Church, but

during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the church was not considered as Protestant as in Holland and Scotland. Some Christians thought the church should follow John Calvin. But Queen Elizabeth steered a middle course between Catholicism and Calvinism, like her father King Henry VIII. Her death brought an end to the Tudor dynasty, and the first of the Stuart line, King James I (1603-1625), ascended the throne and favored the Anglican Church. However, he persecuted certain Protestant groups such as the Puritans.

Later, King James II (1685-1688) favored Catholics. Roger Williams commented, “It hath been England’s sinful shame to fashion and change her garments and religions with wondrous ease and lightness, as a higher power, a stronger sword, hath prevailed; after the ancient pattern of Nebuchadnezzar’s bowing the whole world in one most solemn uniformity of worship to his golden image.”¹⁵

When James I ascended the throne, a thousand clergymen signed a petition opposing church practices they considered inclined to Popery. Six months later, at Hampton Court, the king rejected their petition. So 300 ministers preached against the abuses of the state church, lost their jobs, some were consigned to prison, and a silent emigration began. The swing back and forth between a papal and an Anglican state church

made no essential difference, for both were tyrannical against other religions, with limited room for religious liberty. These were troubled times in Great Britain.

For example, the punishment for non-compliance to state legislated religion was severe, as described in the story of John Lothrop, a minister in England's Newgate prison, with its filth, stench, and people of conscience locked into cells with the worst of criminals, who vented their cruelty on them. The cells were dark, damp, cold, small (nine feet by six feet), with no bathrooms, and plagued by disease and rats. In this tomb-like space, food was scarce and lacked nutrition—being only water, soup, and bread boiled in water, served once a day. Prisoners were gaunt with sallow faces, and the sane were crowded in with the insane.

The persecution carried out by Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud caused 23,000 people to leave for New England between 1629 and 1640. John Lothrop and 32 members of his congregation arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, September 18, 1634.

The Virginia Company of London brought Anglicans to Virginia in 1607, and they became the established church, whereas in Massachusetts, a generation later, Congregationalists became the established church. The New England Experiment, which included the Congregational Church in Massachusetts and

the Baptist Church in Rhode Island, was embodied by John Cotton and Roger Williams, respectively, both graduates of Cambridge University, and pastors who fled from persecution in England.

The Puritan movement began in England in the 1560s and 1570s. Fifty years later, in 1620, the Mayflower took 66 days to cross the Atlantic with 102 passengers and 25 to 30 crew packed into cramped quarters. Although all wanted to improve their financial prospects, perhaps half of them wanted to improve their church experience, which they hoped possible with 3,000 miles between them and the English king and the Anglican Church.

Pilgrims who escaped to the new world included Puritans, who remained loyal to the Anglican Church and to England, wanting to purify the church from within, thus forwarding the Reformation. Others were separatists, like Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson, and John Lothrop, who separated from the Anglican Church and England in order to create a separate and thus a reformed church in the new world. Both sides were reformers and likened their mission to a new exodus, leaving behind slavery (state church persecution) to cross the Red Sea (Atlantic Ocean) to arrive in Canaan or the New Jerusalem (New World), an analogy applied at other times in history.

The Puritans were Calvinists with “a theology of Divine sovereignty rather than Divine love.” They wanted to establish a theocracy in the new world as Calvin had in Geneva, and this included a number of rigid rules. The English Calvinists brought the doctrine of persecution with them, and they persecuted other religions much as the Anglican Church did in England.

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The Massachusetts Bay Colony organized like a new state with one religion (Anglican) following its charter from England. Among many others, they banished Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams. Hutchinson claimed direct revelation from God, thus making Scripture secondary; Roger Williams argued that the state church in Massachusetts meant that a civil magistrate was placed over the clergy to enforce religious matters. Furthermore, he averred that the use

of the civil sword to enforce religious compliance was not the way to reform the church. Rather, it was the way to produce hypocrites, persons who merely complied outwardly to escape persecution. So the exercise was counter-productive and made the church in even greater need of reform.

Williams rejected persecuting persons for differing religious beliefs, believing that freedom of conscience was far more important. In the 1650s, Puritans executed three Quakers and in 1692 hanged 19 for witchcraft. And membership in the church was required for citizenship in Massachusetts.

Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson comment: “There was almost always an element of narrowness, harshness, and literal-mindedness associated with Puritanism, enough to justify some of the criticisms of the bishops and some of the condemnations that have been made on the Puritan spirit in recent times.”¹⁷

Roger Williams was a graduate of Cambridge University who arrived in Boston in 1631, two years before John Cotton. Though a Calvinist, Williams was so different from Cotton and the Puritans that they banished him from Massachusetts in 1635 because he respected those who differed with him in matters of religion. He fled south during the winter (1635-1636).

David Hull notes that 17th-century Puritans portrayed “God as indeed a stern disciplinarian and one not to be trifled with,” yet with a caveat that God is not savage enough to place His “helpless captives” in “protracted writhings.”¹⁸ Calvin’s theology of God’s eternal hell for those He doesn’t choose to save calls this statement into question, for eternal burning of those God doesn’t love is as severe a view of God as one could imagine.

John Cotton, who was trained at Cambridge University but repulsed by Calvin’s theocracy and his part in the death of Servetus, had a large impact on Massachusetts. He arrived in 1633. Six years later he became a Congregationalist, and the union of church and state was illustrated by the civil magistrate excommunicating a church member. Cotton opposed democracy, promoting government by governors, not by the people. “The theory that America, at least the northeastern portion of it,

was a haven for the persecuted had never been accepted by John Cotton.”¹⁹ A law passed in 1644 forbade the existence of a Baptist church in the colony of Massachusetts.

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Believing in “soul liberty,” his greatest work was *The Bloudy Tenet of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience* (1644), which notes how church and state union since Constantine (Geneva and Massachusetts) has harmed the church, for the church is not Christian if it persecutes, for Jesus used no secular weapons, only love. (Cotton and Williams debated these issues.)

Williams recognized that churches can excommunicate members for spiritual matters, but considered persecution for matters of conscience as wrong. Nearly all of Williams's opponents relied upon Old Testament views of dealing with religious offenders.

Williams showed respect for Indians, including their religion and language. He learned their language and traveled with the Algonquins, and wrote *A Key Into the Language of America* (1643). "Williams was perhaps the only educated colonist willing and able to cross the cultural barrier between English and Native Americans in early New England."²⁰

The early history of America should be remembered in reading Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address (November 19, 1863): "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Lincoln was speaking of 1776, not about the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was not referring to those who followed a rigid union of church and state, so different from Roger Williams and Rhode Island.

Roger Williams used the metaphor of a hedge or wall of separation of church and state long before Thomas Jefferson did. Rhode Island was the last of the 13 original colonies to approve the U.S. Consti-

tution (May 29, 1790), delaying until the Bill of Rights was added. Rhode Islanders were the earlier colonists who grasped the understanding of liberty of which Lincoln spoke, and were the first Americans to accept all humans as equal, whatever their differences—racial or religious.

Williams *lived* as a Christian (unlike other nominal Christians). He was troubled that in the name of Christianity, Indians were deprived of their land without due compensation. Rhode Island became "the safest refuge for liberty of conscience."²¹ Williams invited persecuted Baptists and Seventh Day Baptists to Rhode Island and became a Baptist. He said: "I believe their practice comes nearer the practice of our great founder Jesus Christ than other practices of religion do."²²

Nearly 200 years after the Pilgrims landed in the new world, the New England Baptists had a minority status compared to the Congregationalists. This is why the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut wrote to President Thomas Jefferson (October 1801) and months later (January 1, 1802) received his famous reply about the separation of church and state. "No Baptist organizations made separation their demand. Instead, Baptists focused on other, more traditional, claims of religious liberty."²³

New England church establishments collapsed in the 1820s and

1830s. One could argue that in its place, a growing fear of the Catholic Church in America developed. In 1832, Pope Gregory XVI issued his encyclical *Mirari Vos* condemning the separation of church and state.

For Americans, the crisis of slavery eclipsed worry about Catholicism, but by 1870, Elisha P. Hurlbut, former judge of the New York Supreme Court, “argued that there was an irreconcilable conflict between ‘Democracy and Theocracy’—a conflict ‘stronger and fiercer’ than between ‘freedom and slavery.’” He argued that “the theocracy of Rome and the democracy of America, being utterly antagonistic, have no other way to peace, but by an entire separation.”²⁴ With respect to Calvin’s Geneva, Schaff says: “The union of Church and State rests on the false assumption that all citizens are members of the Church and subject to its discipline.”²⁵ This applies to all the experiments considered above.

The Augsburg Confession could be considered the founding manifesto of Protestantism. It was issued in 1530 after Martin Luther, on October 31, 1517, nailed the 95 Theses, or arguments, against the practice of indulgences on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany.

Article 28, “Of Ecclesiastical Power,” includes the following: “Therefore, since the power of the Church grants eternal things, and is exercised only by the ministry of the

Word, it does not interfere with civil government; no more than the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace. Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the Church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth. As Christ says, John 18, 33: My kingdom is not of this world; also Luke 12, 14: Who made Me a judge or a divider over you? Paul also says, Phil. 3, 20: Our citizenship is in heaven; 2 Cor. 10, 4: The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the casting down of imaginations.”²⁶

Contemporary Arguments

J. Budziszewski writes: “Evangelical Christians have been conspicuous in the American public square since colonial days.” He notes that

There is an important distinction between (1) using the state to push one's religious agenda, which has happened often in history, and (2) allowing religious values to inform politicians in making decisions for the good of all citizens. The first method overrides the religious freedom of those whose beliefs differ from those held by the state-enforced religious ideas. The second method takes into consideration the broader context (beyond the merely secular) for addressing moral issues like abortion and euthanasia.

conventional wisdom says their re-entry into public affairs began with “the spectacular rise of the fundamentalist Religious Right in the 1970s,”²⁷ but he suggests that “the founding in 1941 of the National Association of Evangelicals” is a better re-entry date.²⁸

Ronald Reagan's presidential victory in 1980 heartened conservative Christians. It appeared that faith and politics could form a positive partnership. Later, when the Moral Majority petered out, the Christian Coalition took over and became the new evangelical presence in political activism. Conservative evangelicals become a force in politics. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson's book *Blinded by Might* (1999) shows that both movements failed in their mission to stop abortion and pornography and to restore the American family in order to bring about a new

world built on “traditional values.” They tried to build the kingdom of God through their own works (political means), which is just as impossible as earning salvation through one's own works.

The failure of these movements resulted from mixing two kingdoms, human and divine. They were repeating what had failed at the time of Christ. “Many of the religious leaders,” said Cal Thomas, “and even his disciples were looking for a political deliverer to break the grip of Roman rule. They wanted a Messiah who would give them heaven on earth, end their oppression, and put them in charge. But Jesus would have none of it. His kingdom, he said, ‘is not of this world’ (John 18:36).”²⁹

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In a secular postmodern world, where relativism does not contribute to life in a pragmatic or practical way, persons with religious values need a place at the table to bring to the debate values that benefit human life. This means that politicians informed by the simpler religious values can better contribute to society. Their values enable them to rise above meaningless relativism and speak from a broader context that evaluates the liability of relativism and points to a better way forward.

allowing religious values to inform politicians in making decisions for the good of all citizens. The first method overrides the religious freedom of those whose beliefs differ from those held by the state-enforced religious ideas. The second method takes into consideration the broader context (beyond the merely secular) for addressing moral issues like abortion and euthanasia.

Philosopher Brendan Sweetman considers secular and religious ideas that are brought to the political table. He argues that secularism and religion are both worldviews.³⁰ Furthermore, he argues that secularism is a religion.

Study of evolutionary theory proves this true. It takes faith to believe foundational premises of evolution, and once secularism has been accepted, its believers become as ardent as any believer who has

faith in the existence of God. In fact, evidence for God is found in nature (intelligent design or ID) whereas evolutionists credit ID to the blind forces of the survival of the fittest and natural selection over deep-time. This takes great faith, given the complexity of the cell—thought simple in Darwin’s day but now proven to be a veritable factory of interconnected precision machines discovered by biochemists using sophisticated electron microscopy.

It is no longer acceptable to label secular beliefs as reasonable and religious beliefs as unreasonable. Secular worldviews cannot claim ownership of the rational realm. It is as appropriate to apply reason to a religious worldview as it is to a secular worldview. Faith-based reason qualifies as a religion, and this must include secularism. Supernaturalism and naturalism both qualify as religions. Sweet-

man points out that the ideas of both are based on (1) a written source, such as “the Bible, the Qur’an, John Stuart Mills’ *On Liberty*, Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*, [or] John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*”; (2) an authority like Billy Graham or Richard Dawkins; (3) “a profound personal experience of some kind (e.g., the experience that God is near, the experience that people are fundamentally equal”); (4) on tradition; and (5) on an “appeal to faith.”³¹ Nevertheless, Sweetman concludes: “I am prepared to agree that one should not introduce into the public square religious beliefs based on the above five sources.” He suggests the same policy for the secularist.³²

“We must also note that all positions that are made the basis of law—whether secularist or religious—restrict human conduct. This is true even if an activity is made legal (and not just illegal). If abortion is legalized it also restricts the conduct of religious believers in the sense that although they want to live in a world where abortion is illegal, they are forced to live in a society where it is legal. Almost everyone who contributes to public debates wants some aspect of their views imposed (usually by law) on those who disagree with them.”³³

Sweetman argues a difference between higher-order and lower-order religious beliefs. The distinction is made between the moral

rights of workers, or treatment of the homeless (lower-order) compared to the Eucharist (higher-order). Only lower-order religious beliefs can be brought to the debate in the public square. So for Sweetman, the phrase “separation of church and state” now means that higher-order beliefs only must be excluded from the public square.

We live in a postmodern world where absolutes are dismissed. Rampant relativism is not conducive to true living. With this in mind, Sweetman is right to state: “The secularist often approaches many of the topics in dispute in U.S. society mainly from a relativistic perspective, while proponents of the religious worldview approach them from a more objective moral perspective. Most important, secularists often appeal in U.S. society to what I like to call ‘the rhetoric of relativism.’ This rhetoric is used in an attempt to keep traditional religious beliefs and values out of public arguments and debates, while at the same time avoiding a substantive debate about these beliefs and values.”³⁴

Moral relativism has problems: logical and practical. First the logical problems: Relativists oppose objectivists for imposing moral values on all persons, but by stating that this is wrong, relativists make an absolute moral statement, the very thing they oppose. Now for the practical problem: A true relativist (1) could not

criticize someone for stealing his car, (2) could not complain about a bank overcharging him, (3) could not condemn racism, or (4) could not condemn murder, to name some examples.

In a secular postmodern world, where relativism does not contribute to life in a pragmatic or practical way, persons with religious values need a place at the table to bring to the debate values that benefit human life. This means that politicians informed by the simpler religious values can better contribute to society. Their values enable them to rise above meaningless relativism and speak from a broader context that evaluates the liability of relativism and points to a better way forward. But this in no way allows any religion to legislate the more complex religious doctrines or to impose its understanding of biblical insights on others, whether religious or secular. Whatever help religious values bring to the state must never violate the religious freedom of all citizens.

This is why Roy Moore, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, was wrong to place a large monument of the Ten Commandments in the central rotunda of the Alabama State Judicial Building, unveiled on August 1, 2001. The monument suggested that the state of Alabama endorses the Christian religion, which is only one of many religions among its citizens. There-

fore, by August 21, the Alabama Supreme Court unanimously voted to remove the monument.

“As Christians we affirm the separation of church and state. We denounce every effort to establish the Christian religion as the law of the land. The role of the state is to protect religious freedom, not to ensure Christian truth. Thus, the widespread effort to enshrine the Ten Commandments in the public sphere—however well intended—does not spring from the confessing church but from a misguided conservative ideology.”³⁵

Writing in *The Christian Statesman*, Gordon Keddie calls for a “restoration of the so-called blue laws” (Sunday laws), for the state to uphold the law of God. He argues that it is proper for the state to protect Sunday, irrespective of what the majority might say to the contrary, because such legislation upholds God’s unchangeable law. He evidently overlooks that God’s unchangeable law singles out Saturday as the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11), as a memorial of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3). This is why Christ said “the sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27, KJV)—for the human race, and not just for the Jewish race. That’s why Christ urged that the same Sabbath law be kept nearly 40 years after His resurrection at the time of Jerusalem’s destruction (Matt. 24:20), which refutes any change of God’s immutable law in honor of the

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resurrection. Keddie says God's law is immutable, yet he has not understood the biblical meaning of God's unchanging law.

Scripture has predicted that a power would "try to change the set times and the laws" (Dan. 7:25, NIV).³⁶ This needs to be understood in its original Aramaic. Two words are used for time in Daniel 7:25: (1) *iddan*, meaning a span of time ("a time, times and half a time"), and *zeman*, plural of *zimmin*, meaning a point in time in the singular and in the plural meaning repeated points in time. Law is singular in the original, so the text speaks of changing repeated points of time in the Law, which can refer only to the weekly seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath. This is why Christ urged His followers: "When you see standing in the holy place "the abomination that causes desolation," spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand" (Matt. 24:15). William Shea insightfully says: "The setting up of the abomination of desolation of

Daniel 12:11 can be seen as the union of church and state and what the church set out to accomplish through the power of the state."³⁷

Churches are uniting on common points of doctrine. "Christian Churches Together" (CCT) began in the United States in September 2001, and 34 churches adopted the by-laws and officially organized in Atlanta in 2006. Among other purposes, the corporation is formed "to speak to society with a common voice whenever possible" and to "promote the common good of society" (Article Three, Nos. 6 and 7).³⁸

The Biblical Contribution

1. "God is love" (1 John 4:8, KJV) means the Trinity experience an inner history of eternal reciprocal love and created Adam and Eve to image that love. The Trinity are three Persons in an eternal freedom of equality, where each one loves the other two more than Himself. The intent of the Trinity was that humans reflect this love in the finite

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sphere, through the indwelling of God’s love within them.

Selfless love was not new to Christ in becoming the God-man. It was the overflow of the Trinitarian love outward that had always existed inward, as the very essence of God. Here is the profound eternal depth of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, who didn’t enter the world as a conquering King, but as a helpless babe. He left the royal throne of glory where He was praised, adored, and loved and began a long, lonely journey as the Man of sorrows, acquainted with human grief and struggle, often misunderstood, hated, betrayed. He came to His own, and His own received Him not.

2. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:44-48).

Christian love reveals a citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, and makes Christians and the church the salt and light to the world (Matt. 5:13, 14), for it springs from union with the King of kings, rather than from union with state and rulers. Unbelievers need to see the gospel in the lives of Christians, particularly because “the god of this age” has done so much to keep the gospel from them (2 Cor. 4:4).

3. In Christ’s day, Israel hated the oppressive Romans and thought more of their temporal freedom than of telling their captors how to gain eternal freedom. They were bent on restoring the theocracy for selfish reasons. At the same time, Christ gave up His freedom in heaven

to tell the good news to Israel and others of how to gain eternal freedom—in Him. Christ said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews” (John 18:36). He rebuked Peter for using the sword in response to His capture (vs. 11).

The union of church and state (Jews and Romans), although temporary, put Christ through terrible torture, staggering injustice, inhuman humiliation, and the worst death possible: crucifixion. All hell broke loose through that uniting of church and state, yet Jesus did not retaliate in kind, bearing it all with longsuffering and dignity because He was filled with the “fruit of the Spirit,” which is “love” with its attributes of “joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

4. Calvinistic predestination must be evaluated by Calvary, and not the other way round. Jesus “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Atonement is unlimited, but is it universalism? Jesus answers: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:16, 17).

Christ’s mission is global, but belief or disbelief in Him causes one to “perish” or receive “eternal life.”

What did Jesus mean by “perish”? The Greek means “destroy.” This is why “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). God said it first in Eden: “you will surely die” (Gen. 2:17) if disobedient, but Satan countered, “You will not surely die” (3:4). Who was right?

Think of it this way. Jesus believes in religious liberty, for salvation is given to those who choose to believe in the Giver and His gift. Jesus respects human freedom to respond to His love. Jesus draws people to Him without coercion. Those who accept His death in their place will live eternally. Those who refuse to come to Christ and accept His gift “perish.”

Jesus died to redeem humankind and to destroy the devil (Heb. 2:14, 1 John 3:8), and if the devil perishes, why not his followers? Hell fire is biblical, but needs to be understood in the context of Christ’s word *perish*, for fire consumes, so the result (not process) is everlasting. If we believe that God tortures forever, what is wrong with church and state torturing for a fraction of that time? Doesn’t one’s view of God cause one to want to be like Him, and is this why there has been so much torture of others in the name of Christ by Christians?

How can the unselfish eternal

reciprocal love in the Trinity ever have anything to do with torturing the reprobate whom They have allegedly never loved? If destiny is based on an arbitrary choice of God in eternal history, why did the Trinity send Christ to tell the world that destiny is based on human choice? And why have a future judgment if the Trinity have already judged in eternity? And why take the gospel to the whole world when it cannot change God's predestination?

On the cross Jesus pled, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34, KJV). His love was unconditional. He loved His enemies just as He taught His church to do. This was His response to the worst religious persecution ever committed by a union of church and state. He died loving everyone—even His persecutors. Scripture says: "If I . . . surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Can God ever forget those who turned Him down? Can His love for them ever be less than eternal, though hating their sins? Eternal suffering in the heart of God, missing His children who rejected Him, is a view of God compatible with His Calvary love.

This eternal love may illumine a text about the Cross: "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Has this ever been fulfilled? Few were drawn to Him among the rabble at Calvary. Christians have been drawn

to Him through two millennia, but when have *all* been drawn to Him? Not yet. Not until the final judgment, when all bow before Him (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10, 11; Rev. 5:13). Although rebels don't change, they will realize Jesus died for them and wanted to save them.

5. Jesus said entrance to His kingdom is based on the way we relate to others, for this reveals our relationship to Him. We can only love as He loves when filled with His love. In the end Christ will say: "'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'" (Matt. 25:40), just as He said to Saul, the persecutor of Christians: "'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'" (Acts 9:4). Christ changed Saul the persecutor to Paul the proclaimer. Paul declared: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14), and he also said, quoting Proverbs 25:21, "'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink'" (Rom. 12:20). Saul could never forget the words of Stephen about those stoning him to death: "'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" (Acts 7:60), which echoed Christ's "'Father, forgive them.'" Stephen was "full of the Holy Spirit" (vs. 55).

Spirit-filled Christians love their enemies, for such is Calvary love. Those devoid of Calvary love cannot enter the kingdom (Matt. 25:41-46).

Sadly, Christ says, “Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”” (7:22, 23).

Works done in the name of Christianity devoid of Calvary love are evil, for they fail to reflect Christ’s love, and so fail to reveal the gospel to the world in order to win unbelievers to Christ, just as Christ won Saul.

This is the foundational problem with the experiments studied above. Calvary love extends the gospel through revealing it in acts as well as words. Calvary love is foreign to secular kingdoms, even if they are a union of church and state, for loving everyone as Christ does cannot galvanize armies to kill enemies. But God’s lavish love for His world, revealed through Christian lives and acts, is the mission Christ gave to His church (28:19, 20), and not through alliances or acts unsupported by Jesus in the New Testament.

The lives of great Christians and the death of martyrs has done more to extend the gospel than all the crusades, inquisitions, “Christian” theocracies, and religious legislation by states combined. The greatest life and death is that of Jesus Christ. No other life and death has done more to advance the gospel through

revealing to hearts and minds that God is love (1 John 4:7-16).

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), and “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (13:34, 35).

Christ calls Christians to unite with Him, rather than calling for the church to unite with the state. God calls Christians to extend the kingdom of heaven, rather than to extend any kingdom on earth. God “sets up kings and deposes them” (Dan. 2:21) and calls individuals to be as salt and light to the world (Matt. 5:13, 14) and hence to kings and kingdoms as He did through Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Esther in Medo-Persia. But Christ does not call His church to rule any state or any state to rule His church, but to follow Him in servant-leadership to convince the citizens and leaders of states to become citizens of the kingdom of Heaven.

In a post 9/11 world, where terrorism has caused the loss of some freedom to gain an elusive security, we need to be reminded of what happened in 68 B.C. In the *New York Times*,³⁹ Robert Harris refers to pagan Rome as the world’s only superpower of its time, and it was dealt a profound psychological blow when Mediterranean pirates at-

tacked Rome's port at Ostia in a terrorist attack that destroyed their fleet, resulting in decisions that set them on a path to the destruction of their constitution, democracy, and liberty. Is history being repeated? Will the separation of church and state be a casualty in the response to terrorism? □

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MORE TO THE POINT

“The modern habit of saying, ‘this is my opinion, but I may be wrong,’ is entirely irrational. If I say that it may be wrong I say that it is not my opinion. The modern habit of saying, ‘Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and it suits me’: the habit of saying this is mere weakmindedness. A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon” (G. K. Chesterton).

“‘Knowledge is power’ is a familiar slogan . . . , but I doubt if there is much truth in it as a generalization. In reality, our greater knowledge of events is as likely to increase our frustration as to increase our power. . . . The world is not any more of our making just because we know more about it. Indeed, the very fact that we know more may bring us to a greater realization of how little control we have” (Gordon Graham, *The Internet: A Philosophical Inquiry*).

“The two most easily recognizable hallmarks of secularization in America are the exaltation of numbers and of technique. . . . Numbers—or what the Southern Baptists call ‘nickels and noses’—have little to do with truth, excellence, or character. As one sociologist says, ‘Big Mac,’ even with billions and billions of hamburgers served, need not mean ‘Good Mac.’ . . . Church growth viewed in measurable terms, such as numbers, is trivial compared with growth in less measurable but more important terms, such as faith, character, and godliness” (Os Guinness, *Dining With the Devil*).

“When the world was created, it might have seemed to be enough to have it *work*. To include beauty seems unnecessary for a mechanistic universe. We have been given a sense of the beautiful which can be regarded as gratuitous. Which it is—a gift of pure grace” (Luci Shaw).