

Should anyone be alarmed at this picture?

(Pastor Joe Fuiten, July 4, 2004)



For those listening by radio, we are looking at a picture of a cabinet meeting. From left to right we have Collin Powell, President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and a couple other cabinet members. Behind the President I recognize Karl Rove and Connie Rice. They are all praying. The president has his face buried in his hands.

These people are all praying on taxpayer time. I know that the President often leads the prayer himself in these kinds of meetings. Since he is a Christian, I know that he is praying to the heavenly father in Jesus' name.

I can tell you that a lot of people in this country are uncomfortable with this sight. If they could figure out a way to stop it, they would. I am surprised that the ACLU hasn't already sued to put an end to prayer in cabinet meetings. They are trying at every possible level to diminish the role of religion in American life. With a liberal judiciary, they are actually having some success.

This morning I would like to take a crack at answering the objections to Christian influence in government.

First, people say there should not be Christian influence in government because of separation of church and state. In their mind, the state should be forever free of religious influence in its decisions and practices.

That whole line of thinking is based on a misunderstanding of the First Amendment to the US Constitution which reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting **an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof**; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

In Webster's 1828 version of the dictionary, one of the definitions of "establishment" is "5. Fixed or stated allowance for subsistence; income; salary." Another notes that "establishment" relates to the Episcopal form of religion in England. As the term was used in those days, to establish religion meant to provide for the salaries of ministers and to

institutionalize religion as the Anglicans were in England. The reason the federal constitution forbid this was because this was a right to be reserved for the states who had their own established religions. States like Delaware didn't want the Feds messing with their state church by setting up a competing national church. At the time the first amendment to the Constitution was adopted at least three states had their own state establishment churches funded with taxpayer money. If I had been a Delaware Pastor in those days my paycheck would have come from the State of Delaware, not the local church.

Liberal judges have totally left all semblance of historical connection behind them when they determine that religious influence and establishment of religion are the same. It is quite clear that America was formed with Christian influence and intentions.

Congress formed the American Bible Society.¹ Immediately after creating the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress voted to purchase and import 20,000 copies of scripture for the people of this nation.

Patrick Henry, who is called the firebrand of the American Revolution, is still remembered for his words, "Give me liberty or give me death." But in current textbooks the context of these words is deleted. Here is what he actually said: "An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death."

These sentences have been erased from our textbooks. Was Patrick Henry a Christian? You be the judge. The following year, 1776, he wrote this: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here."

Consider these words that Thomas Jefferson wrote on the front of his well-worn Bible: "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator " He was also the chairman of the American Bible Society, which he considered his highest and most important role.

On July 4, 1821, President Adams said, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."

The establishment clause was meant to prevent one branch of Christianity from dominating other branches at public expense. They did not intend to disenfranchise Christianity generally.

The second objection is that a religious person is not to be trusted. They might be inclined to follow their religion in making public policy decisions. In this objection, it is better to trust a secular person who would not be likely to fall victim to religious persuasions.

If a person does not make their decision upon religious values, what option is left? Wouldn't that mean that they are only left with their own ideas? Where do those ideas come from? If they come only from themselves, aren't they subject to change without even a moments notice, or upon receipt of a new opinion poll? When John Kennedy was running for President, people worried that he would take his cues from the Vatican rather than making political judgments. John Kerry has made it clear that he believes in separation of church and state and

¹ I regret that I cannot attribute the following five paragraphs. I clipped them from an email and forget to identify the source. The facts accord with what I have read elsewhere.

that his values will not come from the church. The church will not influence his values on life, or marriage, or sexual issues. Is this actually comforting?

A third objection is that vague references to God are acceptable, if not made too frequently, so long as no effort is made to narrow it down to the Christian God. If it can be one of 400 million Hindu gods, or the Jewish God, or the Muslim god, then all is well. The moment someone mentions Jesus, instead of a vague "God", then we are getting too specific. Isn't that actually state-enforced religious ideas? Isn't the state saying that a vague sense of God is acceptable in public life, but actual belief in the Bible and its teaching about Jesus is not acceptable? Effete religion and state are ok but actual religion must be kept away.

A fourth objection is a practical one. If we accept a Christian view of God, and have politicians and citizens practicing such a religion, how do we guarantee that other religions can operate freely? Asked another way, how can we be a Christian nation and still give civil and religious rights to all? We have 200 years of history by way of answer. We have been a Christian nation AND other religions have freely operated. When FDR led the nation in prayer over the radio at the start of the D-Day invasion, the Muslims were not hindered in their religious practice. When Abraham Lincoln gave his second inaugural address showing that God was bringing about his own justice upon the nation in the Civil War, the Hindus were not diminished in their free exercise of religion.

We have freedom of religion precisely because we are a Christian nation. The founders believed that every person needed to decide for themselves what their relationship with God should be. No state or church had the right to tell them what to believe. They should read the Bible and come to their own conclusions. As a consequence, we developed the idea of personal freedom in matters of religion. Freedom, and the practice of religion by others, are not mutually exclusive.

Fifth, if we are a free people who enjoy liberty, then laws that have their basis in religion, and restrict some aspect of our personal behavior, are an infringement on that liberty.

This notion stems from a growing misunderstanding about liberty. What is being proposed today as liberty, or freedom, is actually opposite of liberty as it has been known. In the past four centuries, we have gone from John Donne's "no man is an island" to the radical idea that "every man is an island."

Our American ideas about liberty were primarily developed by John Locke in his treatise, On Civil Government:

"The natural Liberty of Man is to be free from any Superior Power on Earth, and not to be under the Will or Legislative Authority of Man, but to have only the Law of Nature for his Rule. The Liberty of Man, in Society, is to be under no other Legislative Power, but that established by consent in the Common-wealth, nor under the Dominion of any Will, or Restraint of any Law, but what the Legislative shall enact according to the trust put in it. Freedom is not what Sir R. F. tells us "A liberty for every one to do what he wants, to live as he pleases, and not to be tied to any Laws." But Freedom of Men under Government, is to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society, and made by the Legislative power erected in it. A liberty to follow my own will in all things, where the rule does not prescribe, and not to be subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man."

In Locke's vision, the natural liberty of man is to have only the "law of nature for his rule." The term "Law of Nature," had a precise meaning to Locke. God created the world, which Locke called Nature, and placed man in that world. As man worked, he came to own a piece of Nature, making it his own. The "Law of Nature" is that Law which has been established by Nature's God. Natural Law is the rule of God. In contrast to natural liberty, Locke posed the liberty of man in society.

Liberty in society meant that man would not be governed by the arbitrary authority of a monarch. Instead, the only restraint that could be put on natural liberty was that restraint placed there by the consent of the governed expressed in a lawful legislature. For Locke, if the people elected a legislature and the legislature passed laws according to the trust placed in them to govern, this was not a restriction upon liberty.

Locke absolutely denied the libertarian vision of things which was then being expressed by someone that he calls Sir R. F. Liberty is NOT the freedom from laws or authority. For Locke, liberty is not the absence of governmental laws or legislative rules.

Freedom, or liberty, had a very specific meaning. There were several components to freedom:

Freedom required **a standing rule**. It could not flow from a new decision of one person, namely the monarch, or from a new rule of the group. To be a standing rule, it had to be in place before it could be violated. The rule had to be established and published before it could take effect.

Freedom required that the laws **apply equally to every person**. There could not be one set of rules for the King and another for the commoner, or one for the rich and another for the poor.

The rule had to be written and have been **decided by the legislature**. It could not be arbitrary or decided by the King alone.

Where legislative rule did not specifically exist, there was no restraint on natural liberty. Only God governed. Otherwise, freedom was retained by the individual.

The people who are claiming an infringement upon their freedom when the Legislature passes a law against two people of the same gender marrying, do not understand our history or the meaning of liberty. What they are calling for is anarchy. They want to make the rules themselves.

Freedom is not the absence of laws on behavior. *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*² In the language of the Bible, to be free is to come under the rule of Christ. *"You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love."*³ The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" This biblical concept of freedom is acceptable to Locke as the definition of liberty. It has been the American definition of freedom. James Wilson, signer of the Declaration of Independence, signer of the Constitution, and Justice of the US Supreme Court said that God's law and the laws of the land were twin sisters. They are not opponents of each other but natural supplements and supports.

² Galatians 5:1

³ Galatians 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.