

# One Nation Under God

*by: Ronald L. Dart*

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Can we talk? Once in a while, someone takes me to task for meddling in politics. Christians, they think should stay out of politics. I have had some emails in the past chiding me for not sticking to salvation and personal piety. Politics and religion, they thought, shouldn't be mixed. Some cite things like separation of church and state. Now I agree that separation of church and state is a wise thing. I am not so sure that separation of religious faith and state is quite so smart. Nor am I so sure that the state should be immune from criticism from Christian commentators.

## **The Constitution**

Now the Constitution is quite specific on this issue, narrowly defining a restriction, not on religion, not on the church, not on Christians, not on Jews, a restriction upon government.

Here's what it says, "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 of the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

My word, I take that to mean that religious people who have a grievance about the government or some government policy and the immorality that we keep seeing in politics have a right to petition the government for redress of it. How do you do that unless you talk about it? I don't know if many people notice this, but the First Amendment is entirely pointed at Congress and by implication at the Courts.

There is nothing in the Constitution that should in anyway inhibit Christians from criticizing the government on the basis of Christian morality. PERIOD. So from the government's side of the equation, they have no basis for inhibiting criticism from a Christian point of view. They can take it or leave it, but they can't shut it up. They can't in fact even inhibit it, but what about the other side of the equation, should a Christian involve himself in politics? Should he engage in criticism or support of the government on biblical principles?

## **What Is Politics?**

Well, let's start off with getting clear what we are talking about. What exactly is politics? You can look in the dictionary and you will see, 'a' "The art or science of government." 'b' "The art or science concerned with guiding or influencing government policy."

## **Governmental Policy**

Do we have no interest at all in influencing or guiding government policy, just because you are Christian? Should we shut up? Why should anyone assume that religious faith is somehow barred from guiding or influencing governmental policy. Why should the influencing of governmental policy be relegated only to the godless?

## **Interpreting the World**

Nancy Pearcey in her remarkable book, "Total Truth," had some important words on this. She cited a historian of religion named Martin Marty who once said, "Every religion serves two functions. First, it is a message of personal salvation, telling us how to get right with God, and second, it is a lens for interpreting the world. Historically, evangelicals have been very good at the first function at saving souls. But they have not been nearly as good at helping people interpret the world around them, as providing a set of interrelated concepts that function as a lens to give a biblical view of the areas like science, politics, economics, or bioethics."

And you know, I have to agree with him, I think that's true. I think in many ways we have not been good at helping people interpret the world. We say "Come out of the world, don't have anything to do with the world, live over here in your little corner." I don't know about that.

Nancy Pearcey went on to cite Marty by saying, "Evangelicals have typically 'accented personal piety and individual salvation, leaving them to their own devices to interpret the world around them.'" In fact, "Many no longer think it's even the function of Christianity to provide an interpretation of the world," She said. Marty calls this, "The modern schism" and he says, "We are living in the first time in history where Christianity has been boxed into the private sphere and has largely stopped speaking to the public sphere."

That statement is so important, I want to read it to you again, Martin Marty said, "We are living in the first time in history where Christianity has been boxed into the private sphere and has largely stopped speaking to the public sphere." Is that true? Is this maybe how we have found ourselves with over 50 million missing American citizens, who were aborted before they had a chance to make their mark on the world? Is it because too many Christians felt somehow it wasn't their job to speak on the morality of the issues? Mind you, this is not just about Christian preachers, it is not about me, it's about all of us!

## **When America Met Christianity**

Nancy Pearcey has a chapter in her book titled, 'When America met Christianity, Guess who Won?' What she concluded was, that the new national ethos had more effect on Christianity than Christianity had on the nation. An example, well coming down to the present day, what about one of the large old mainstream denominations, ordaining a practicing homosexual as a bishop, it happened a few years ago.

Now this is the social norm, not the Christian norm. I mean, we are into a time of diversity, we are supposed to be accepting of people and so the social norms says that you should have a homosexual as a bishop. Mind you this is a man who left his wife and children to live with another man. Had he left his wife and children to live with another woman, could he have been ordained? Well, maybe nowadays, he would have, but only because society wants it in the name of diversity.

Now here's my question. People who say they want to live their life by biblical standards and by biblical norms, why on earth should we worry our heads over what society wants? Society is decadent! Society is wrong! Society is sinful! Why should our churches be governed by their standards?

Biologically, it makes no sense at all, that we who follow Jesus, should stay silent and out of the public square. The Constitution, not only does not require it, it demands that we be allowed to speak.

### **John the Baptist**

But maybe there's a biblical reason why we should shut up about such things. Well, perhaps you have heard of a man named John the Baptist. As Jesus' ministry was beginning to take off, John had been arrested, and they slammed him in jail. Why?

Well as Matthew told the story beginning in Matthew 14 verse 3, "Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife, for John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her!" Now what business did John have in criticizing Herod's private life? Note, he wasn't criticizing Herod's governing policy, but his personal life. What was the basis for that?

### **Morals, Character, and Leadership**

Well, after all, your morals are an indication of your character, your example and leadership. Surely these are matters of qualification for public office. How long ago has it been when there was a big argument going on about whether or not we could take character into consideration in whether we voted for a man for president. Seriously, people were asking the question about that. They thought ability, and all these other qualities of leadership were important, but they didn't think "The character issue needed to be brought in that way."

Well, frankly, the character, example, and the leadership of any man are part of his qualification for public office, and we have every right as citizens to demand that he measure up to them, and if he doesn't, we have every right to throw him out.

## **John the Baptist**

John flew in the face of convention. He spoke truth to power and went to jail for it. The stories has long been told. Finally, his head was delivered on a platter {Matthew 14:8} to Herod's stepdaughter, who really amused him with a dance that she did.

Note well. John engaged in no violence, he just used words to criticize Herod's conduct!

Jesus said, "Among those born of women, there has not risen a greater than John" {Matthew 11:11}. I consider this an endorsement of John's actions and his policy. He had done nothing wrong. He had done his duty.

## **Governance of Judea**

The governance of Judea in the days of John the Baptist was somewhat layered. Judea was occupied by Roman forces, but the Jews still governed locally. It is plain enough in the arrest and condemnation of Jesus, if you don't see it anywhere else. It's plain enough right there.

The Romans were not much of an issue. Their sole concern was maintaining order, according to Roman law and collecting taxes. The world was enjoying what is sometimes called the "Pax Romana," the Roman peace. You could travel all over the Empire, most of the time without having to worry about bands of marauders,

Paul describes the relationship of a Christian to Rome in his letter to the Roman Christians. You can read Romans chapter 13 for more information.

But Jesus was often at odds, and was quite critical of the establishment in Judea, the indigenous governors of the Jewish people in Judea.

## **A Theocracy**

So we really can't turn to the New Testament for an excuse, for not publicly and vigorously opposing immorality in our own government. Jesus did so, and endorsed John, who did so. Now there are those in the opposition who make a pretense at being concerned that some Christians want to establish a theocracy here. I said a pretense, because they know better.

In point of fact, the world has only known a theocracy once in all of its history, as far as I can see. There have been religious hierarchies headed by men, and those were to be feared. A true theocracy is one where God is ruler, not this or that priest.

The one theocracy the world has known was in the period of the judges in Israelite history. The time between the conquest of the land of Israel, and the establishing of the monarchy is described in the book of Judges. The Israelites in that period enjoyed the freest society man has ever known. It's a fact not generally noticed. God was King, but under God the people were self governing. Let me make myself clear here. God was King. It was a theocracy, but, "Under God," that phrase we hope to keep in our Pledge of Allegiance, the people were self-governing. Tribal elders, judges and magistrates handled the limited roles of governing. They had a constitution based on the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. It was utterly simple,

completely fair and totally just. It left the people maximum freedom to grow crops, to grow families, to build a just society.

### **Israel Wanted a Human King**

Now why did Israel decide to forsake all this freedom and ask for a human king? It was nothing complicated. In two words. It was fear and laziness. When they asked for a king, Samuel resisted at first, but God said, "No, give them what they want, but I want you to tell them first, what life will be like for them under a king." Now if you want to read the story and you want to hear what Samuel told them they were getting into, just start reading in first Samuel chapter 8 and read forward. It's all there, and it's kind of uncanny, almost eerie in fact, that a lot of the things we have since experienced in our own government are described right there on the page, because we have decided we would go the same way they went.

The history of Israel up to this time was a sequence of prosperity, then they forgot God, then they were oppressed by their enemies, then they called out to God and then they were delivered by a judge that God sent. They began to rebuild prosperity and they then started the cycle all over again. They forgot God and went right on through the same thing. It didn't happen once or twice, it happened again and again and again in the years that followed.

### **Period of the Monarchy**

In this period of time, going into the monarchy, Israel was governed by a series of kings, some good, some bad, some worse than bad. There also followed a series of prophets, whose job it was to criticize the government and the morals of the people. Why anyone would expect it to be otherwise, is beyond me. The archetype of all prophets was a hairy man named Elijah, who customarily wore leather. In fact, Ahab and Israel probably thought of him in some similar terms with what we would apply to the Hell's Angels. Elijah didn't say a lot but he punctuated what he said with a 3 1/2 year drought which really got people's attention. Did he criticize the government? Oh yes! He had a long-running verbal battle with a king named Ahab.

### **King Ahab and a Vineyard**

Ahab had the misfortune of being caught in a bind between his wife Jezebel on one side and Elijah on the other. He was afraid of both of them and he found himself in an unenviable situation. In the course of time, he wanted a vineyard, and it was right by the wall of his palace. It was a beautiful thing and he wanted it. This story is found in 1 Kings 21. Ahab tried to buy it from a man named Naboth. He went out and offered money for it. Naboth said, "No, I am not going to sell my vineyard. This has been in my family for years and generations. I am not about to let that out of the family," And he turned Ahab down. Ahab went to bed in a pout, a fury, a real snit, a royal snit, I guess you can call it. So his wife Jezebel decided to give Ahab a Valentine. He had gone to bed and wouldn't eat. The Valentine was the accusation of blasphemy on Naboth and having him stoned to death. She then told Ahab, "Get up and go take that

vineyard you wanted." About this time, the word of the LORD came to Elijah, and said, "Go down and meet Ahab, the King of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard where he has gone to take possession of it. Say to him, "This is what the LORD says, "Have you not murdered a man and seized his property," then say to him, "This is what the LORD says, "In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood. Yes yours."" So Elijah went, not with a message of salvation for a wicked sinner, not with the message of personal piety, but with a clear denunciation of what Ahab and Jezebel had done. Although Jezebel arranged the murder, he was responsible. As Elijah walked up toward Ahab to deliver this message, Ahab said, "So, have you found me my enemy?" "I have found you," Elijah answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, I'm going to bring disaster on you. I will consume your descendants and cut off from Ahab, every last male in Israel, slave or free."

So Old Testament, New Testament, men of God criticized governors freely. It was their duty, even though it made a lot of people very uncomfortable.

### **In The Early Years Of Christianity**

The governors of Judea, in the early years of Christianity, did their best to silence the Christians. There is a sequence of events in the book of Acts chapter five that illustrates the problem. The apostles performed all kinds of miracles and signs among the people and all the believers used to meet in Solomon's colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people, but more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number, they were growing like weeds. As a result, people even brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Its astonishing the amount of the healings that were going on. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem and brought their sick, people who were tormented by evil spirits and all of them were healed.

Now it's really easy to see what's going on here because the crowds are going to become bigger and bigger and worrisome to the establishment.

### **Apostles Jailed**

Then the high priest and all his associates who were members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy. A political party by the way. It was religious but it was political. They arrested the apostles and they put them in the public jail. It didn't work. During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the Temple court and tell the people the message of this new life," and at daybreak, they went right into the Temple like they had been told and began to teach the people as they had. Now later in the day, they didn't get up quite as early as the angel got the apostle up, but when the full assembly of elders had assembled, they sent word to the jail to have the apostles brought in before them, but on arriving at the jail, the officers didn't find them there, so they went back and said, "We don't know how to tell you this, but we found the jail securely locked. The guards

were standing at the doors. We opened the doors and there was no one in there." On hearing this report, the captain of the Temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of it. Then someone came running in and said, "Look, the men you put in jail are standing in the Temple courts teaching the people." At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles back again. They did not use force because they feared that the people would stone them.

Do you begin to see something of a pattern here? The people who are teaching things contrary to what the government wants them to do and the people are believing them and the government leadership is beginning to be afraid of them. Having brought the apostles to them, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest, who said, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." "Well", Peter replied, "We have to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him to his right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit of God that is given to those who obey Him." Well when they heard this, they were furious and they wanted to put Peter to death. They would like to have taken Peter out and hanged him.

### **Christians Must Respect Authority BUT ...**

Now, it's only right that we respect authority, but we have to speak the word, we have to stand on what God says and let the chips fall where they may, in fact, there is nothing new in history for Christians to wind up in jail or worse. There's nothing new in history with Christians being stripped of their property and paraded in the public square. This sort of thing has happened again and again and again. Why? Because government becomes uncomfortable with the Christian message. As I said, it's only right that we respect authority, but we still have to speak the word. Why would anyone argue that Christians, teachers or preachers or even those who are not teachers or preachers should stay out of guiding or influencing governmental philosophy.

Perhaps as we have allowed ourselves to be boxed out, we share some of the blame for the moral landslide taking place around us because we have been pretty docile in this boxing out procedure. We haven't fought it, we have not stood up against it. We have not insisted on our right of free speech.

### **Government Of the People, By the People and For the People**

Now I'm not trying to start a movement. I just want to help Christian folk realize that we are people and this is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Therefore, as follows, God is going to hold Christian people responsible for the failures of this country, of this generation, and of this government, because we the people put them there. You may want to

have a bumper sticker on your car that says, "Don't blame me, I voted for somebody else." I don't think that's going to help. We have a responsibility here.

Any attempt to shut Christians up or to inhibit our expression is a violation of our First Amendment rights, and we should not stand for it. There is one important, but overlooked right that all Americans have, it is the right not to listen, and it is that right not to listen that supports the right of freedom of speech. Everybody can say what they want. Everybody doesn't have to listen if they don't want to. That's the way it ought to be.

### **Evangelism and the Gospel**

Nancy Pearcey argues that in evangelism our task is to bring people face-to-face with the contradiction between what a person says he believes and what his whole life is telling him. The gospel then becomes 'good news' indeed. The doctrine that we are created in the image of God {Genesis 1:27} gives a solid foundation for human freedom and moral significance. She said and I Quote, "We have to insist on presenting Christianity as a comprehensive unified world view that addresses all of life and reality. It is not just religious truth, but Total Truth." Close quotation.

### **Do Your Duty**

You know, I could say, that I'm sorry to make some listeners uncomfortable by criticizing our government, but that would be dishonest. I am not sorry in the least. Sometimes we have to be made uncomfortable before we will actually see the truth. We don't need a new version of the moral majority of years past. In fact, whenever we create a coalition to make ourselves public that way, we make ourselves vulnerable. It needs to be something that's going on at the grass-roots level all over the place, all of the time.

We just need all Christians everywhere to live and proclaim the truth in every facet of life, especially including, the way we are governed, because in truth, it is the Christian faith that stands as the last bulwark of freedom in our country and world.

Now go out there and do your duty. Until the next time, I'm Ronald Dart.

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Hear more on his "Born to Win" radio program and at [borntowin.net](http://borntowin.net).

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