

“IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN NATION?”

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Belgic Confession, Article 36

Scripture Text: Romans 13:1-7

Introduction

We live in trying and challenging times politically. We live in times of terrorism and anarchy; in times of abuses of power and authority; in times of undisciplined attacks on our constitution and freedoms. We are watching from the sidelines as our political and judicial systems systematically destroy Biblical morality.

With each passing generation it's getting harder and harder to discern our role as Christian citizens in a country that was once thought by many to be a Christian nation. What does the separation of church and state really mean? What kind of influence is the church in general and Christians in particular to have on our government?

Let's begin by addressing a question many Christians ask.

Is America a Christian Nation?

The simple answer is yes and no. It depends on what you mean by a Christian nation. Wayne Grudem in his book *Politics According to the Bible*, asks several questions that each give a different meaning of Christian nation. Let's see if we live in a Christian nation or not.

Was Christian teaching and principles the primary religious system influencing the founding of the United States? Yes.

Were the majority of the founding fathers Christians who looked to the Bible for guidance? Yes. Many may have been deists but it's safe to say a majority of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence were Christians.

Is Christianity in its various expressions the largest religion in the US? Yes.

Have Christian values influenced many of our cultural values? Yes.

Was there a Supreme Court decision at one time in history that affirmed that the US is a Christian nation? Yes, the Church of the Holy Trinity vs. the United States in 1892.

Five yeses so far.

Have there been Supreme Court decisions since that would negate the notion we are a Christian nation? Fifty years ago on June 25, 1962 in the case of Engel vs. Vitale, the U.S. Supreme

Court banned prayer from U.S. public schools on the principle that America has no state religion – and is not officially a Christian nation.

Are the majority of the Americans Bible-believing, evangelical, born again Christians? No.

Are Christian values the dominant perspective in government, the media, and the educational institutions in the US? No. If we judge by abortion, homosexuality, immorality, the destruction of marriage, the legalization of euthanasia and marijuana, we have to answer no.

Does our government promote Christianity as the national religion? No. Certainly not our President. In April 2010 President Obama stated that we Americans “do not consider ourselves a Christian nation, or a Muslim nation, but rather, a nation of citizens who are bound by a set of values.”

Does a person have to profess Christian faith to be or become a citizen? No.

Five yeses and five nos. Is America a Christian nation? It depends on what you mean by Christian nation, yes and no.

Our Constitution doesn't specifically say we are a Christian nation. It bars all laws “respecting an establishment of religion” and protects “the free exercise thereof.”

What is our government supposed to do and what are we supposed to do as Christian citizens? What does the Bible say about the role of governments and the relationship between government and Christians and the church?

It may surprise some people that one of our confessions would say something about our political life. Politics is not unspiritual. Life is not neatly divided between secular and spiritual.

God is over all, and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:6). “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things” (Romans 11:36).

God rules over all things in two different ways, in the spheres of two different kingdoms. He rules over all temporal and earthly life and He rules over all spiritual life.

Romans 13 and Belgic Confession, Article 36.

This is considered by some to be one of the most difficult and debated articles in the confession. Christians are all over the map and disagree widely on this topic.

This article affirms the teaching of Scripture and closely follows what is given by God in Romans 13 and I Timothy 2 and I Peter 2.

God created the two spheres of the government and the church. They are meant to exist side by side. The two cannot be mixed to any good effect. Just look at all the state churches in the world like Holland, Germany, Denmark and England and how quickly they become dead.

The government is not to govern the things that are God's.
The church is not to govern the things that are Caesar's.

This article makes four declarations based on Scripture:

First, God has established government, He has ordained kings and princes, presidents and governors.

Romans 13:1 There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

As Jesus said to Pilate: "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:11).

God is the source of all government, it's instituted and ordained by Him, just as He instituted and ordained the spiritual kingdom. The Confession and Scripture speak of this as part of God's grace and benevolent provision for us.

God has something to say about the necessity and nature of civil government and authority.

Proverbs 8:15-16 By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly.

Psalms 86:9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you.

Acts 17:24-27 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, ... he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. 26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.

God is sovereign over all nations. All rulers, all government leaders and officials, all politicians and judges are accountable to God. They will give an accounting to Him for all their decisions and judgments and actions.

Second, government has a two-fold duty to provide for the welfare of the state/citizens, by bearing the sword to restrain and punish evil; and to encourage good and protect the citizens, thus maintaining good order in society.

This ***first*** purpose and task of civil government is to bear the sword to restrain and punish evil.

Genesis 9:5-6 And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image.

Psalm 82:2-4 “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah
3 Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

Romans 13:4-5 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

The *second* purpose and task of civil government is to encourage good and protect the citizens. Government should seek to serve the people and not the rulers. And the government should protect religious freedoms. Since it must also be acknowledged that there can be no morality without religion, it's folly to remove religion from public life.

Good government depends on good laws and good laws must uphold a higher good, a true morality, an absolute standard of right and wrong, good and evil. The Ten Commandments are still the foundation of a good and moral life that should be upheld by all for the common good.

The article speaks to the role of the government with regard to the church, but not to the exclusion of others. With reference to the church civil authorities and laws should protect the churches freedom of religion and freedom of speech and freedom to assemble; to worship and preach the Word.

The First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or *prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*”

Third, citizens are to honor and obey their leaders in everything that is not contrary to the Word of God, and they are to pray for their leaders.

Article 36 list four duties for all citizens taken from Scripture .

To pay taxes making it possible for the government to do what God has given them to do.

We are to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, to pay our taxes. We are not to cheat on our taxes.

To show honor and respect for they are from God and for our good.

I fear that many of us do not do this. We should guard our lips and hearts and be more circumspect in how we talk about our elected officials. We should honor the office even when

we respectfully disagree with the policies or decisions. Freedom of speech is not freedom to be disrespectful.

To obey in all things that are not in conflict with the Word of God.

Christians are to obey the law and submit to those in authority over us. This shows our humility, our dying to pride and self. It shows our willingness to sacrifice our rights and desires for the greater good.

If it doesn't violate Scripture or our conscience then the Christian citizen must obey even when the laws may be unpleasant or unwise or even detrimental to the nation's future.

I Peter 2:13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

Where there is conflict we must obey God rather than man. No civil authority should ever require a citizen to violate the Word of God.

Acts 4:18-20 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

Acts 5:27-29 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

To pray for all in authority. We are all dependent on God and should regularly and frequently show it by our intercession. Only by God's power and grace can we be governed wisely and well.

I Timothy 2:1-4 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

Fourth, those who reject law and order are in serious error; such rejection often leads to anarchy. All who resist lawful authority resist God.

During the time of the Reformation particularly in the Netherlands, there were sects that resisted the government to the point of overthrowing certain authorities, robbing churches, and practicing immorality in the name of freedom under grace.

The earliest Anabaptists were more radical fringe in nature. They said Christ alone was king and that all earthly rulers belonged to the prince of darkness and must be resisted.

One of the reasons for this article is that the Roman Catholics lumped the Reformers in with the radical Anabaptists, and so it was necessary to show how that was not true, and how the Reformers regarded such matters according to Scripture.

The godly Reformers stood against such lawlessness, insisting that the Christian citizen should “live a peaceful and quiet life in all piety and decency” (Article 36).

Application and Conclusion.

Psalm 11:3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Remember and never forget. The Lord is righteous and He reigns on high.

God rules over all the earth, over all nations and over all rulers. God determines the destinies of all nations and of all men.

Psalm 75:7 It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

Ps. 103:19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

God will accomplish all His good purposes that He has for the earth, purposes He has had since before the foundations of the earth. He will accomplish all His good purposes for His church and for all Christian believers. God works through human actions to accomplish His good purposes.

Jesus Christ will return to establish His rule and reign over all the nations as Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Our motto “In God we trust” must be stamped on more than our coins and currency, it must be stamped on our hearts and consciences and actions.

If the future is to be a good one for America it will take a revival, a revival of repentance of sin and love for God, a revival of prayer, a revival of commitment to personal holiness, a revival of preaching and teaching of the Word of God, a revival of moral standards for how we conduct our lives.

A revival of Christians being salt in an unsavory world; light in a dark world; voices for truth in a world filled with falsehood; ambassadors of God and ambassadors of reconciliation in a world separated from God.

This world is not our home, we are sojourners passing through. What can the righteous do?

II Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.