



# The Clarion\* Call

\* THE CLEAR CALL OF A BATTLE TRUMPET

JESUS SAID, "MY SHEEP RECOGNIZE MY VOICE. I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME." (JOHN 10:27)

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## Freedom of Religion ...

## Not Freedom from Religion

Religious freedom and diversity is a hallmark of the American experiment. It is not a gift from the state as the English Parliament understood when, in their 1689 *Act of Tolerance* it assumed authority to establish one religion, tolerate a few others, and persecute the rest. Rather, it is an inalienable right that precedes the government itself. Religious liberty is natural law conferred by the Creator God, and not by human authorities; an inheritance that each generation must steward. Defining the content of religious freedom requires an understanding of context.

Well before our nation's birth, a biblical basis for freedom of religion came from the words of Jesus who said, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" (Matthew 22:21) In this statement, Jesus established the principle of a distinct realm of "things that belong to God" that should not be regulated or constrained by the government (or "Caesar"). Although Jesus did not specify what things belong to this realm that is outside of Caesar's control, certainly "the things that belong to God" must include decisions and actions regarding faith and practice. This means that people's *religious convictions* and *activities* should clearly be an area in which government gives citizens uninhibited freedom.

The primary legal source that protects religious freedom for all American citizens is the 1st Amendment of the *U.S. Constitution* which reads – "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These "free exercise" and "establishment" clauses forbid governmental entanglement with matters of religion. This means government may not favor one religion over another; may not target one religion for particular benefits and burden another; may not entangle itself in core ecclesiastical subjects; may not set itself up as the arbiter of religious truth and enforce its determinations as law ... just to name a few. With this simple statement, the *U.S. Constitution* rightly established the proper boundaries for religions and for the state. The two clauses protect the same central liberty ... from two slightly different directions: the "establishment" clause forbids government *prescription* of religious exercise, and the "free exercise" clause forbids government *proscription* of religious practices. The government should not try to force compliance with any particular religious belief or practice, or compel people to support any particular religion – because religious belief ... if it is to be genuine ... cannot be forced on people against their will.

Another incident in Jesus' life shows how He opposed the "compel religion" view. (read Luke 9:52-55) He rebuked His disciples when they wanted instant punishment to come to the people who rejected Him. Jesus rightly rebuffed any attempt to try to force people to believe in Him or follow Him. The underlying reason is that true faith in God must be voluntary. If faith is to be genuine, it can never be compelled by force.

By the same token, the opposite of the "compel religion" view is in error ... that we should completely exclude religion from civil government and politics. According to this view, religious beliefs should never be mentioned in governmental functions or on government property; and should never play a role in the decision-making process of politics or government. This is the opinion effectively promoted by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Center for American Progress, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, and the American Humanist Association. Accordingly, religious belief should be kept at home and limited to places of worship. There should be no influence from religious groups in the public square. Examples of this interpretation are

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seen when people object to prayers being given at the beginning of a city council meeting or a legislative session; demanding that the Ten Commandments be removed from any public places, and crosses be removed from government seals and veterans' memorials; opposing the nativity crèche being displayed in neighborhoods and towns during the Christmas season; or petitioning that student Bible studies, prayers before a sports event, a prayer at a graduation ceremony, or a valedictorian talking about his/her faith at commencement should be prohibited from public schools. This "exclude religion" view has had a strong influence in recent campaigns to persuade the courts and public opinion in legalizing same-sex "marriage." If these "exclude religion from government" arguments succeed, they could well be applied against evangelicals and Catholics who make "religious" arguments in light of their moral values against the likes of abortion, euthanasia, and mandated costs of reproductive health by employers. By such reasoning, all votes of religious citizens and civil officials for almost any issue could be found invalid. This would be the direct opposite of the kind of country the Founding Fathers established and contrary to what they meant by "free exercise" of religion in the 1st Amendment. This changes freedom *of* religion into freedom *from* religion.

The 1st Amendment was never intended to guarantee that government should be free *from* religion or religious influence. The only freedom *of* religion that was envisioned by the Founders was freedom from government sponsorship of one particular religion or denomination. In fact, the "exclude religion from politics" view would invalidate the very reasoning of the *Declaration of Independence*. The first two sentences mentioned God twice in order to say that God's laws authorize this independence from Great Britain in 1776, and that

God is the One who gives human beings the rights that governments seek to protect. In other words, the 56-signers of the *Declaration of Independence* proclaimed that both the "laws of nature and of nature's God" and the "Creator" Himself gave our country the right to become an independent nation. They are claiming *divine authorization* for the very existence of the United States of America, and conclude by pledging their lives, fortunes, and "sacred honor."

The Bible says that a government official is "*God's servant for your good.*" (Romans 13:4) But how can government officials effectively serve God if no one is allowed to witness to what they believe God expects of them? Furthermore, the Bible says that government officials are sent "*to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.*" (1 Peter 2:14) But how can they do that if no spokesman from any of the world's religions are allowed to give them counsel on what is "good" and what is "evil?"

It should not be hard for Christians to discern a deep spiritual basis underlying the "exclude religion" view whose goal is to make the government completely secular and then (by extension) to make society worldly. This view would remove from government any sense of accountability to God for its actions. And since government has such a huge influence on all people's lives, it would tend to remove from the nation (in general) any sense of liability to God ... especially as all religious viewpoints are removed from the public forum. Moreover, since all absolute moral standards are in some way based on religious convictions and a sense of ethical responsibility before God, this view would tend to remove from the entire nation any sense of unconditional moral values or any sense that there is a clear way of knowing right from wrong. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this viewpoint is not only to exclude religious influence on society, but also the complete

moral disintegration of that culture. For Christians who believe the Bible, it should not be hard to discern the ultimate spiritual force behind this viewpoint.

Certainly, by now the ill-informed reader of religious freedom is quick to dispute these assertions citing the phrase "separation of church and state." Those claiming such an argument often use that phrase when what they are really referring to the "establishment" clause of the 1st Amendment. In truth, the phrase "separation of church and state" is nowhere to be found in the *U.S. Constitution*. Instead, that phrase comes from a letter written in 1802 by Pres. Thomas Jefferson to members of a Baptist association in Danbury, Connecticut. Hence, rather than trying to determine the meaning of a phrase that does not exist in the *U.S. Constitution*, time is better spent determining the original intent for the drafters of the 1st Amendment.

Of course, provisions for religious liberty make no sense except on the supposition that God exists ... that such a thing as religious truth exists and that commands of true religious faith are *real* and *superior* to the commands of civil society. The framers of the *U.S. Constitution* generally shared the belief that God exists and shared this understanding of what religious liberty is for. They disagreed, widely and not always cheerfully, about the nature and character of God, the manner and content of His revelation, and resulting human obligations and right conduct; but that is part of why that generation came to agree on the idea of religious freedom. The Founding Fathers were primarily men of faith; and therefore, it is inconceivable that they who had religious dispositions would establish laws and policies to limit expressions of faith. Yet, despite the abundance of documentation concerning the Founder's purpose for the 1st

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Amendment, many have ignored the clear historical records. Instead, these revisionists of American history have promoted their own view of the alleged anti- or non-religious beliefs of our Founders in attempts to bolster their arguments for the current separation doctrine. The result is that this nation's policies concerning religion and government have been turned upside-down. In fact, not only does much of the nation not realize that the current "separation of church and state" is not constitutionally mandated, many are not even aware that "the free exercise" of religion is. Our Founders never envisioned that the 1st Amendment would become a weapon to excise Christian or traditional religious expressions from the public arena. Today's judicial activism has absurdly interpreted civic free exercise of religion as an unconstitutional establishment of religion ... thus causing the 1st Amendment to violate itself. Clearly, in its numerous rulings on religious issues since the 1947 decision *Everson v. Board of Education*, whether ruling for or against religious expressions, the Court now selectively relies on historical records and almost exclusively upon its own recent case-law precedents – the very precedents under which it has essentially rewritten the 1st Amendment. And as a result of this misconception of the original intent of the 1st Amendment, we have violations of religious freedom.

The 1st Amendment was never intended to remove the people's right to religious speech or writing in public places, at government functions, or even on government buildings. But in 1971, in the decision *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that a government action "must not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion." This meant that government could now do nothing that would give support to religious viewpoints or religious

beliefs (in general). Far from prohibiting the favoring of one particular religion, the Supreme Court decided that government could no longer favor religion at all; and in this and similar decisions, the Supreme Court has thus excluded religious speech from more and more areas of life ... whether public monuments, displays of the Ten Commandments, prayer at school events, or even a "moment of silence" for students in public schools.

No matter what one thinks about these individual issues, the important point is the process by which they were decided. None of these restrictions had first been passed by state or local representatives who are accountable to the people whom they serve. The decision should be made by officials of the local school district, who are elected and most accountable to the citizens of that community. The exclusion of religious statements from the public square also means that schools are now prohibited from teaching the most fundamental fact in the universe, namely, that God created it. They are barred from teaching that God exists, even though that belief is held by more than 90% of the people in the nation. And in some places they are prevented from teaching intelligent design as an alternative to evolution, or teaching abstinence as part of the sexual-education curriculum. Even though these views may be held by an overwhelming majority it doesn't matter to the members of the Supreme Court, for it has issued its decrees and has excluded these viewpoints from public schools – all on the basis of a modern myth of "separation of church and state" that was no part of the meaning of the 1st Amendment when it was adopted. Moreover, even if 90% or 100% of the people in a local school district believe that children should be taught the moral values in the Ten Commandments, that viewpoint means nothing to the Supreme Court, for it has ruled that

such teaching must be excluded from public schools. No longer are parents or citizens allowed to decide what teaching about divine moral standards is best for their children, for that decision has been made for them by the Supreme Court.

Today's courts are operating by the misguided opinion that "nobody should be offended" by any religious public expression, which results in *freedom of religion* and *freedom of speech* being severely curtailed. The government is actually violating the original intent of the *U.S. Constitution* because it is "prohibiting" the "free exercise" of religion. In this way, the will of the minority (sometimes as small as one person), can be used to frustrate and nullify the wishes of the larger majority. And this is done, not in the way of preserving a fundamental human right, but only under the principle that no one should have to feel "offended." There is no constitutional or moral "right" not to feel offended. This is a clearly wrong standard and should be overturned by the courts or outlawed by legislatures and Congress.

Once we base our reasoning on the more sure grounds of biblical teaching and the original meaning of the 1st Amendment, a proper conclusion is that today's government in the United States should allow much more space in the public square for a wide variety of religious expression. All religions should have the same opportunities or "equal access."

Among the hoodwinked about the true meaning of the 1st Amendment, are those who think it somehow unconstitutional to address the public square from within the four walls of the church. Many of these misinformed are the clergy and laity of today's America. These are they who believe that "political" matters have no place in the pulpit and would seek to effectively muzzle preachers. Others are

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concerned that the Internal Revenue Service will launch an expensive and time-consuming investigation if they even come close to committing what the IRS has loosely defined as “political activity.”

The silence of clergy today is entirely at odds with American history. The Rev. John Witherspoon signed the *Declaration of Independence* and, as president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton College), influenced a generation of American statesman, including James Madison. Witherspoon told his students, “It is in the man of piety and inward principle, that we may expect to find the uncorrupted patriot, the useful citizen, and the invincible soldier. God grant that in America true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable.”

Witherspoon did not remain silent; nor did the Rev. Jonas Clark. A pastor in Lexington, Massachusetts, Clark was the most influential churchmen and politician in the Lexington-Concord region at the time of the Revolutionary War. On April 18, 1775, he entertained John Hancock and Samuel Adams at his home. These two great patriots asked him, “If war came, would the people of Lexington fight?” He is said to have replied, “I have trained them for this very hour.” The next day the “shot heard around the world” was fired on his church lawn as the British drew first blood in the opening battle of the Revolutionary War. Eight men were killed, all members of Clark’s congregation. As he looked down, in great anguish, at the bodies of those who had fallen, he said, “From this day will be dated the liberty of the world.” It began in a church. It began with a parson who was not afraid to speak out on the great issues of freedom, liberty, oppression, and tyranny. Rev. Clark was a part of the “Black Regiment” – Revolutionary patriot preachers who, in their black robes, preached fiery sermons about the evils of tyranny and set the stage for liberty

in America ... a liberty which, as Clark predicted, has spread to many other nations across the world. Leading up to the mid-1800s, though there were vocal defenders of slavery among Christians in the South, they were vastly outnumbered by the many Christians who were ardent abolitionists – speaking, writing, and agitating constantly for the abolition of slavery in the United States. It is noted that two-thirds of the American antislavery crusaders in the mid-1830s were Christian clergymen. In the 20th century, the convictions of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. – a Christian pastor, supported by many Christian churches, clergy and groups – had a significant influence in the outlawing of racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. However, today, too few preachers are willing to exercise their “free speech” rights and raise their voice on contemporary moral issues (present company excluded). It is time to restore true “freedom of speech” to America’s clergy – not confining them to houses of worship, and certainly not denying their platform in the public square to speak to the moral depravity of the nation and of its only hope of restoration.

Of course, a misunderstanding of federal tax law contributes (in some cases) to this silence ... along with threatening tactics rendered at election time by those who wish to mute preachers. The fact is: A pastor can speak on any moral and social issues he/she deems appropriate – including sermons, bulletins, e-mails or other communications – without threatening any tax-exempt status of the local church ... because it is considered issue advocacy. Furthermore, that pastor can encourage the civic involvement of his parishioners in the voting process. The pastor must avoid promoting or endorsing any one candidate or particular party ... on behalf of the church. The 1954 U.S. Congress amended (without debate) the IRS Code for

501 (c)(3) to restrict the speech of nonprofit tax-exempt entities and requiring that they refrain from any advocacy of or opposition to any specific political candidate(s) by name. Aside from the penalty of violating this code – a revocation of the tax-exempt status of the local church – it would be unwise for a church to support or oppose a particular candidate. Specific political positions are not required for people to join a church. Every church probably has members who would support different candidates in any given election. Therefore, when churches refrain from endorsing individual candidates, they also avoid offending their members who have different political convictions.

All this is to say: Decisions about what is preached from the pulpit of a church should not belong to the government, but to the individual pastor and the church itself. Any government control of what is said from the pulpit constitutes a wrongful violation of “religious freedom” and “freedom of speech.” It is the government – the realm of “what is Caesar’s” – attempting to intrude into a realm where it does not belong – the realm of “what is God’s.”

History has rightly been very unkind toward the clergy in Germany under Hitler. The majority of pastors were either co-opted or silenced by the Nazi government. Only a few had the moral clarity to oppose Hitler. The Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a few of his fellow pastors were driven underground during World War II because they refused to cooperate with Hitler’s murderous regime. Bonhoeffer himself was murdered near the end of the war, when it was found out that he was part of a plot to assassinate Hitler. Yet today, we consider Bonhoeffer a hero and the other pastors cowards.

In our culture, which sometimes seems on moral life support, the voice of preachers ... proclaiming the biblical worldview ... must not be silenced – but shouted from the rooftops!