



James Madison

"In the event of a statute for the support of the Christian religion, are the courts of law to decide what is Christianity? And as a consequence, to decide what is orthodoxy and what is heresy? The enforced support of the Christian religion dishonors Christianity."

Circulated in 1785 in remonstrance of a bill establishing a provision for teachers of the Christian religion. James Bancroft's "History of the Constitution," Vol. 1"

Howard Fineman - MSNBC contributor, April 6, 2005

"Looking ahead, it's pretty clear what the 2008 election, at heart, will be about: the role of religious belief in what theologians quaintly call "the public square". Faith, law and American life - How Congress and the Conclave of Cardinals will shape the next great debate"

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Liberty Lookout

"No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of public trust under the United States." Art. VI. of the Constitution

From the Immorality of Sodom to Religious Tyranny

By the Editor

As I have witnessed the events transpiring in our world in the last few years and especially in the last few months, I have felt an urgency to speak out. We have recently witnessed the utter disregard for human life and the injustice of the courts in the Schiavo case. She was condemned to die like a common criminal, ignoring her parents' wishes to keep her alive, and people were even arrested trying to give her water if per-chance some miracle were to happen and she would be able to swallow it.

Every day we witness the corruption of morals and re-interpretation of black and white.

Even the sanctity of marriage between a husband and wife is exchanged for the licentiousness and humanistic ideas of Sodom. I want to shout STOP! Where will this end?

But there something even more frightening than this. It is something much more subtle and much, much more dangerous. It is what, has been the cause of the worst terrorism in the history of the world, the greatest wars, and the cause for hundreds of millions, and maybe billions of men, women, and children being put to death. Many of these were inhumanely tortured. What am I talking about? Legislating morality. That is right. In fact I will go so far as to say, using the civil power to

enforce the morals of the church is the greatest terrorist threat this world is facing. If you don't believe me, just look at the history of any country that has been united with the church and see what unimaginable misery, suffering, and death it was responsible for.

Is it not usually religious zeal that prompts suicide bombing? Was it not religious zeal that prompted the actions on 9-11? It was religious zeal that fomented hatred between groups for decades in former Yugoslavia, leading to the blood bath we witnessed there. The current "war on terrorism" involving the Muslims is, in their words a "holy war." And it was the same religious zeal that created and perpetuated the dark ages for centuries.

I will repeat, with even greater emphasis and even stronger

language what I said before. The greatest threat to our liberty, life, and pursuit of happiness; the greatest threat to this great freedom loving country; in fact the greatest terrorist threat our world is facing; is the church that seeks to control the consciences of the people by civil legislation. It is because the church has become so backslidden that the word of God has become powerless in their mouths to turn sinners to repentance, and rather than seeking a reformation in their own lives, they seek to legislate morality. Woe, Woe, Woe to the world when that happens.

Legislating Morality is the greatest terrorist threat this world is facing.

Civil Government and Religion

By A.T. Jones

Christianity and the Roman Empire



Jesus Christ came into the world to set men free, and to plant in their souls the genuine principle of liberty, -- liberty actuated by love, -- liberty too honorable to

allow itself to be used as an occasion to the flesh, or for a cloak of maliciousness, -- liberty led by a conscience enlightened by the Spirit of God, -- liberty in which man may be free from all men, yet made so gentle by love that he would willingly become the servant of all, in order to bring them to the enjoyment of this same liberty. This is freedom indeed. This is the freedom which Christ gave to man; for whom the Son makes free, is free indeed. In giving to men this freedom, such an infinite gift could have no other result than that which Christ intended; namely, to bind them in everlasting, unquestioning, unswerving allegiance to him as the royal benefactor of the race. He thus reveals himself to men as the highest good, and brings them to himself as the manifestation of that highest good, and to obedience to his will as the perfection of conduct. Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh. Thus God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, that they might know him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent. He gathered to himself disciples, instructed them in his heavenly doctrine, endued them with power from on high, sent them forth into all the world to preach this gospel of freedom to every creature, and to teach them to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them.

The Roman empire then filled the world, -- "the sublimest incarnation of power, and a monument the mightiest of

greatness built by human hands, which has upon this planet been suffered to appear." That empire, proud of its conquests, and exceedingly jealous of its claims, asserted its right to rule in all things, human and divine. As in those times all gods were viewed as national gods, and as Rome had conquered all nations, it was demonstrated by this to the Romans that their gods were superior to all others. And although Rome allowed conquered nations to maintain the worship of their national gods, these, as well as the conquered people, were yet considered only as servants of the Roman States. Every religion, therefore, was held subordinate to the religion of Rome, and though "all forms of religion might come to Rome and take their places in its Pantheon, they must come as the servants of the State." The Roman religion itself was but the servant of the State; and of all the gods of Rome there were none so great as the genius of Rome itself. The chief distinction of the Roman gods was that they belonged to the Roman State. Instead of the State deriving any honor from the Roman gods, the gods derived their principle dignity from the fact that they were the gods of Rome. This being so with Rome's own gods, it was counted by Rome an act of exceeding condescension to recognize legally any foreign god, or the right of any Roman subject to worship any other gods than those of Rome. Neander quotes Cicero as laying down a fundamental maxim of legislation as follows: --

"No man shall have for himself particular gods of his own; no man shall worship by himself any new or foreign gods, unless they are recognized by the public laws." -- Neander's Church History, vol. 1, pp. 86, 87. Torrey's translation, Boston, 1852.

Thus it is seen that in the Roman view, the State took precedence of everything. The State was the highest idea of good. As expressed by Neander: -- "The idea of the State was the highest idea of ethics; and within that was included all actual realization of the highest good; hence the

development of all other goods pertaining to humanity, was made dependent on this." -- Id. p. 86.

Man with all that he had was subordinated to the State; he must have no higher aim; he must seek no higher good. Thus every Roman citizen was a subject, and every Roman subject was a slave. Says Mommsen: --

"The more distinguished a Roman became, the less was he a free man. The omnipotence of the law, the despotism of the rule, drove him into a narrow circle of thought and action, and his credit and influence depended on the sad austerity of his life. The whole duty of man, with the humblest and greatest of the Romans, was to keep his house in order, and be the obedient servant of the State."

It will be seen at once that for any man to profess the principles and the name of Christ, was virtually to set himself against the Roman empire; for him to recognize God as revealed in Jesus Christ as the highest good, was but treason against the Roman State. It would not be looked upon by Rome as anything else than high treason, because the Roman State representing to the Roman the highest idea of good, for any man to assert that there was a higher good, and thus make Rome itself subordinate, would not be looked upon in any other light by Roman pride than that such an assertion was a direct blow at the dignity of Rome, and subversive of the Roman State. Consequently the Christians were not only called "atheists," because they denied the gods, but the accusation against them before the tribunals was for the crime of "high treason," because they denied the right of the State to interfere with men's relations to God. The accusation was that they were "irreverent to the Caesars, and enemies of the Caesars and of the Roman people." To the Christian, the word of God asserted with absolute authority: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." Eccl. 12:13. To him, obedience to this word

through faith in Christ, was eternal life. This to him was the conduct which showed his allegiance to God as the highest good, -- a good as much higher than that of the Roman State as the government of God is greater than was the government of Rome, as God is greater than man, as heaven is higher than earth, as eternity is more than time, and as eternal interests are of more value than temporal.

The Romans considered themselves not only the greatest of all nations and the one to whom belonged power over all, but they prided themselves upon being the most religious of all nations. Cicero commended the Romans as the most religious of all nations, because they carried their religion into all the details of life.

"The Roman ceremonial worship was very elaborate and minute, applying to every part of daily life. It consisted in sacrifices, prayers, festivals, and the investigations, by auguries and haruspices, of the will of the gods and the course of future events. The Romans accounted themselves an exceedingly religious people, because their religion was so intimately connected with the affairs of home and State. . . . Thus religion everywhere met the public life of the Roman by its festivals, and laid an equal yoke on his private life by its requisition of sacrifices, prayers, and auguries. All pursuits must be conducted according to a system carefully laid down by the College of Pontiffs. . . . If a man went out to walk, there was a form to be recited; if he mounted his chariot, another." -- Ten Great Religions, chap. 8.

The following extract from Gibbon will give a clear view of the all-pervading character of the Roman religious rites and ceremonies, and it also shows how absolutely the profession of the Christian religion made a separation between the one who professed it and all things pertaining to the affairs of Rome: --

"The religion of the nations was not merely a speculative doctrine professed in the schools or preached in the temples. The innumerable deities and rites of Polytheism were closely interwoven with every circumstance of business or pleasure, of public or of private life; and it seemed impossible to escape the observance of them, without, at the same time, renouncing the commerce of mankind and all the offices and amusements of society. . . . The public spectacles were an essential part of the cheerful devotion of the pagans, and the gods were supposed to accept, as the most grateful offering, the games that the prince and people celebrated in honor of their peculiar customs. The Christian, who with pious horror avoided the abomination of the circus or the theater, found himself encompassed with infernal snares in every convivial entertainment, as often as his friends, invoking the

"...high treason", because they denied the right of the state to interfere with men's relations to God."

hospitable deities, poured out libations to each others' happiness. When the bride, struggling with well-affected reluctance, was forced in hymeneal pomp over the threshold of her new habitation, or when the sad procession of the dead slowly moved toward the funeral pile, the Christian, on these interesting occasions, was compelled to desert the persons who were dearest to him, rather than contract the guilt inherent to those impious ceremonies. Every art and every trade that was in the least concerned in the framing or adorning of idols, was polluted by the stain of idolatry.

"The dangerous temptations which on every side lurked in ambush to surprise the unguarded believer, assailed him with redoubled violence on the day of solemn festivals. So artfully were they framed and disposed throughout the year, that superstition always wore the appearance of pleasure, and often of virtue. . . . On the days of general festivity, it was the

custom of the ancients to adorn their doors with lamps and with branches of laurel, and to crown their heads with garlands of flowers

This innocent and elegant practice might have been tolerated as a mere civil institution. But it most unluckily happened that the doors were under the protection of the household gods, that the laurel was sacred to the lover of Daphne, and that garlands of flowers, though frequently worn as a symbol either of joy or mourning, had been dedicated in their first origin to the service of superstition. The trembling Christians who were persuaded in this instance to comply with the fashions of their country and the commands of the magistrates, labored under the most gloomy apprehensions from the reproaches of their own conscience, the censures of the church, and the denunciations of divine vengeance."

All this clearly shows that to profess the name of Christ, a person was compelled to renounce every other relationship in life. He could not attend a wedding or a funeral of his nearest relatives, because every ceremony was performed with reference to the gods. He could not attend the public festival, for the same reason. More than this, he could not escape by not attending the public festival; because on days of public festivity, the doors of the houses, and the lamps about them, and the heads of the dwellers therein, must all be adorned with laurel and garlands of flowers, in honor of the licentious gods and goddesses of Rome. If the Christian took part in these services, he paid honor to the gods as did the other heathen. If he refused to do so, which he must do if he would obey God and honor Christ, he made himself conspicuous before the eyes of all the people, all of whom were intensely jealous of the respect they thought due to the gods; and also in so doing, the Christian disobeyed the Roman law, which commanded these things to be done. He thus became

subject to persecution, and that meant death, because the law said: --

"Worship the gods in all respects according to the laws of your country, and compel all others to do the same. But hate and punish those who would introduce anything whatever alien to our customs in this particular." And further: -- "Whoever introduces new religions, the tendency and character of which are unknown, whereby the minds of men may be disturbed, shall, if belonging to the higher rank, be banished; if to the lower, punished with death."

This was the Roman law. Every Christian, merely by the profession of Christianity, severed himself from all the gods of Rome, and from everything that was done in their honor. And everything was done in their honor. The great mass of the first Christians were from the lower ranks of the people. The law said that if any of the lower ranks introduced new religions, they should be punished with death. The Christians, introducing a new religion, and being from the lower ranks, made themselves subject to death whenever they adopted the religion of Christ. This is why Paul and Peter, and multitudes of other Christians, suffered death for the name of Christ. Such was the Roman law, and when Rome put the Christians to death, it was not counted by Rome to be persecution. It would not for an instant be admitted that such was persecution. It was only enforcing the law. The State of Rome was supreme. The State ruled in religious things. Whoever presumed to disobey the law must suffer the penalty; all that Rome did, all that it professed to do, was simply to enforce the law.

If the principle be admitted that the State has the right to legislate in regard to religion, and to enforce religious observances, then no blame can ever be attached to the Roman empire for putting the Christians to death. Nor can it be admitted that such dealings with the Christians was persecution. The enforcement of right laws can never be

persecution, however severely the law may deal with the offender. To hang a murderer is not persecution. To hunt him down, even with blood-hounds, to bring him to justice, is not persecution. We repeat, therefore, that the enforcement of right laws never can be persecution. If, therefore, religion or religious observances be a proper subject of legislation by civil government, then there never has been and there never can be any such thing as religious persecution. Because civil governments are ruled by majorities, the religion of the majority must of necessity be the adopted religion; and if civil legislation in religious things be right, the majority may legislate in regard to their own religion. Such laws made in such a case must be right laws, and the enforcement of them therefore can never be persecution.

But all this, with the authority and all the claims of the Roman empire, is swept away by the principle of Christ, which every one then asserted who named the name of Christ, -- that civil government can never of right have anything to do with religion or religious observances, -- that religion is not a subject of legislation by any civil government, -- that religion, religious profession, and religious observances must be left entirely between the individual and his God, to worship as his own conscience shall dictate, -- that to God only is to be rendered that which is God's, while to Caesar is to be rendered only that which is Caesar's. This is the principle that Christ established, and which, by his disciples, he sent into all the world, and which they asserted wherever they went; in behalf of which they forfeited every earthly consideration, endured untold torments, and for which they freely gave their lives. It was, moreover, because of the establishment of this principle by Jesus Christ, and the assertion of it by his true disciples, that we have to-day the rights and liberties which we enjoy. The following extract from Lecky is worthy to be recorded in letters of gold, and held

in sorrowful, but ever grateful, remembrance: --

"Among the authentic records of pagan persecutions, there are histories which display, perhaps more vividly than any other, both the depth of cruelty to which human nature may sink, and the heroism of resistance it may attain. . . . The most horrible recorded instances of torture were usually inflicted, either by the populace, or in their presence in the arena. We read of Christians bound in chairs of red-hot iron, while the stench of their half-consumed flesh rose in a suffocating cloud to heaven; of others who were torn to the very bone by shells or hooks of iron; of holy virgins given over to the lusts of the gladiator, or to the mercies of the pander; of two hundred and twenty-seven converts sent on one occasion to the mines, each with the sinews of one leg severed with a red-hot iron, and with an eye scooped from the socket; of fires so slow that the victims writhed for hours in their agonies; of bodies torn limb from limb, or sprinkled with burning lead; of mingled salt and vinegar poured over the flesh that was bleeding from the rack; of tortures prolonged and varied through entire days. For the love of their divine Master, for the cause they believed to be true, men, and even weak girls, endured these things without flinching, when one word would have freed them from their suffering. No opinion we may form of the proceedings of priests in a later age, should impair the reverence with which we bend before the martyr's tomb." -- History of European Morals, end of chapter 3.

All this was endured by men and women and even weak girls, that people in future ages might be free. All this was endured in support of the principle, that with religion, civil government cannot of right have anything to do. All this was endured that men might be free, and that all future ages might know it to be the inalienable right of every soul to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.