

**St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church  
2368 Eggert Road, Tonawanda 14150**

Pentecost 3; Proper 9-A

July 2-3, 2011

**“Did First Amendment State Separation?” Fr. Richard Molison**

There was a nation, an “island” in the midst of oceans, which shone brightly among the nations. It was not perfect, but had a heart for perfection, looking to win favor with God. It provided a home for the destitute, persecuted, and poor. This nation created the first government by the people and fought a civil war – citizen against citizen – to establish freedom and equality for all. It never stopped in its pursuit to improve justice and mercy for its entire people. It reached outside its boundaries to fight and defeat evil men and systems, which were threatening the existence of other nations.

God's values ruled the hearts and minds of this nation's people and guided their institutions. The nation's many churches taught of God's principles and His laws, keeping the people in constant awareness of His expectations. He blessed them because of their covenant with Him and their efforts to please Him. He built a hedge around them to protect them from evil nations and leaders who wanted to destroy His model of charity and goodness.

Now there was a day when angels came and presented themselves before God, and Satan also came before Him. God asked Satan where he had been. Satan answered, “I have been traveling to and fro across the earth and walking upon it.” God said to Satan, “Have you seen My nation, America? There is no nation like her. Her people honor My Name and follow My laws as their own. She fears Me and teaches her children to fear Me.” Satan answered, “I have seen Your beloved nation, America. Its people only serve You because You have blessed and protected them from tragedies and evil that inflict other nations. If you lowered Your hedge and let her encounter the evil thoughts, lusts, and lawlessness penetrating other nations, she would turn to me and become mine. If you allowed her hopes and innocence to be dashed, she would turn away from You. She would curse you.” The Lord answered Satan, “You may attack America's morals, her leaders, and her faith in Me, but you may not defeat her using the power of other nations. You will see that even though she stumbles, she will not fall. She belongs to Me.” Satan left God's presence and began his assault upon America.

Did you recognize that the above is an allegory to the Book of Job?

What was just read to you is the introduction to chapter six of the book entitled, “Winning the Culture War” by Linda Rae Herman. One year ago, on this very same weekend, an attempt was made to share with you the basic fundamental Christian principles upon which this great nation was founded.

For the past few months, the Holy Spirit led me to research and share with you today how one of those fundamental principles is now denied and violated.

The following listed examples ought to reveal to which basic fundamental principle of our freedom our reference is made:

- Removal of a 74 year old cross on the Mojave National Reserve
- Attempted removal of crosses on military graves
- Removal of the Ten Commandments in a Public Park
- Politicians not able to speak at religious sponsored conferences.
- Removal of "Under God" in the pledge of Allegiance
- Removal of "In God We Trust" from our currency
- Recent attempt to prevent a High school valedictorian from mentioning God her graduation address.

In addition to the above, the following addresses changes made to a most important Christian holiday resulting in time honored traditions being lost:

- Christmas pageants prohibited from schools and community halls
- Nativity scenes ordered removed from town squares, and even criticized as being offensive when placed on church lawns
- Office Christmas parties are now considered taboo
- "Merry Christmas" is now considered a hostile greeting
- Even non-Christmas decorations such as holly, missal toe, and snowmen are called into question
- Firehouses are prohibited from Christmas displays
- And the latest I heard just this past week, "God" is prohibited from all military funerals. And the list goes on and on.

Last year, we reviewed sources of Christian principles contained in the founding documents of this nation, i.e.: the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Our forefathers believed these principles to be so valuable that they fought an extremely costly war of independence in that it, percentagewise, produced the highest population percentage of war dead than any other American fought war, including WWII. Freedom is not free...

It is vitally important to note that no colonial state constitution stated any religion other than Christianity or a denomination of it. Whatever their individual faith professed, the nation's founders believed God and Liberty were inseparable, George Washington among them.

George Washington's faith as a Christian, now, more so than ever before, is under critical and severe attack. Critics are claiming that if he was a Christian, his faith was a nominal faith at best. The following is a portion of a prayer George Washington wrote, dated April 21, 1752. You tell me if he had a shallow or deep faith:

"O Most Glorious God, in Jesus Christ, my merciful and loving Father, I acknowledge and confess my guilt in the weak and imperfect performance of

the duties of this day.... I humbly beseech Thee to be merciful to me in the free pardon of my sins for the sake of Thy dear Son and only Savior Jesus Christ who came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Thou gavest Thy Son to die for me.” George Washington’s prayer reflects a person whose *deep* faith was centered upon the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, not a shallow faith by any means.

By now, you ought to have identified the “ten thousand pound elephant” in the room: The First Amendment to the U.S. 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.”

There is much that is packed into this all important amendment. For our purposes this morning, concentration will be on what is now labeled as “The Establishment Clause,” which reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; ...”

An invitation was extended to me when I was a senior at Bexley Hall Seminary in Rochester to attend an all expense paid conference held in Washington, D.C. This conference was totally financed by “Americans United for (Can you guess?) Separation of Church and State.” Bexley Hall Seminary is as liberal a seminary as they come. For me to be chosen to attend this conference was at best, a bit humorously puzzling. This invitation was accepted, for as scripture states, it is wise to know your enemy.

The bottom line of this conference: Christians were beginning to discover there was a loophole in the “Establishment Clause” that would allow prayer back into the schools and this organization now focused its energies on other means of protecting the so called rule of “Separation of Church and State.”

It was during my second year of teaching, 1962, the U.S. Supreme court made the decision that supposedly stated the prohibition of prayer in the Public schools. All teachers in that school district were required to sign a statement of compliance.

What did this 1962 Supreme Court decision actually state? In 1951, the New York State Board of Regents approved a 22-word nondenominational prayer for recitation each morning in the public schools. Participation in this prayer exercise was to be voluntary. This prayer was challenged and the Supreme Court ruled that the New York State’s prayer to be unconstitutional. Justice Hugo Black pointed out that the court’s decision was not anti-religious, but rather to affirm the separation of church and state. By the way, did you hear me read the phrase “separation of church and state” when I read to you the complete First Amendment? No you did not. Why? Because it isn’t there!

Then where did this often repeated phrase come from? A personal letter written by Thomas Jefferson. So, how does a phrase written in a non-legal document suddenly become legalese and assumed to be a part of the First Amendment?

Justice Black wrote, "It (the Supreme Court's decision) is neither sacrilegious nor anti religious to say that each separate government in this country should stay out of the business of writing or sanctioning official prayers." In other words, one cannot be compelled to pray a government created and sanctioned prayer. And I personally agree with this. I do not want government to tell me or anyone else what to pray or when to pray it!

Did the Supreme Court state that government could not participate in religious activities? NO! Congress still begins its session with prayer; the military still has chaplains, although severely hog-tied in what can be said; and up until this current President, United States Presidents proclaimed a day of national prayer and thanksgiving.

And did the Supreme Court say that there was to be *no* prayer in the public schools? No! Only that schools cannot dictate what or when to pray! Today, students can now not only pray but also have bible study in school during non-instruction times... But, what was the nation's knee-jerk reaction to the 1962 ruling? To take prayer totally and completely out of the schools. A tragedy of humongous proportions. This knee-jerk reaction did not need to occur. Why did it? Remember the 60's? A decade of rebellion. It is believed that Satan's assault on America began in the '60's.

Satan saw a generation willing to turn its back on traditional values and principles. It took 40 years, but what started with love drugs and anger at the establishment culminate with the secular humanistic culture we now experience.

Since 1962, divorces have doubled; teen-age suicides have increase more than 300%; teen-age pregnancy up 200%; violent crime up 500%; abortion up 1,000%. Since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973, more than 48 million babies were aborted – an entire generation of citizens has been eliminated.

Conservative and orthodox believers of the 60's and 70's were scoffed at and humiliated for accepting God's Word as written, being called 'simple-minded and unsophisticated.' We use to kiddingly say to one another, "Want to be mocked? Openly carry a Bible with you." To say that Christian doctrine was watered down to a "feel-good, social gospel" faith is a massive understatement.

History and our founding fathers knew that morality cannot be taught without religion. There can be no moral law without a belief in Creator God. French historian Alexis Tocqueville wrote some 50 years after the French Revolution,

“In the United States, the sovereign authority is religious.” Can this statement be made today?

The greatest problem this country faces today is not one of economics, not one of finances, but one of spirituality evidenced by the turning away from God. Since 1962, apathy, pacifism, set in big time, and continues to be a cultural factor, even to today, even to some extent, in this parish of St. Bartholomew's. Apathy takes the middle road, the “whatever” attitude. When apathy sets in, vision is lost; a meaningful purpose in life is lost. Apathy results in the giving up of spiritual values. Apathy results in convictions and things long-held true to be whittled away. Apathy results in having destructive basic foundational spiritual decisions made for us, and around us, without a fight, not even a whimper. Last Week's vote in Albany is a good example. Not even a winy whimper from the Christian majority was heard.

President Ronald Reagan stated in August 23, 1984, “Without God, there is not virtue, because there is no prompting of the conscience. Without God, there is a coarsening of the society; without God, democracy will not and cannot endure... If we ever forget that we are “One Nation Under God,” then we will be a nation gone under.”

The Declaration of Independence affirms that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are inalienable (never to be surrendered) rights guaranteed by God. Therefore, we American Christians have a responsibility to preserve and fight for the preservation of these rights. A government cannot take away rights guaranteed by God. Oh? But, isn't that exactly what is occurring when the unborn and the very old are put to death because their lives do not matter?

The Christian churches in the '60's and '70's did little to stem Satan's attack. And what condition is this nation now in? If we truly believe that our inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are to be assured and preserved, then is it expected that we Christians ought to fight to restore and preserve our Judeo-Christian principles. Jesus expects His followers to proclaim, testify and witness to His word and the promise of salvation through Him.

Larry Schweikart, author of “48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)” wrote, “The Founders never dreamed that subsequent generations would seek to take crosses off federal lands, or ban “In God We Trust” from our money, or above all, ban prayer in public schools. Such a perversion of the “freedom of religion” clauses to oppress Christianity would have been abhorrent and fought to the death.”

I end with a quote, again from President Ronald Reagan given when he addressed the Republican National Convention in 1984, “Politics and morality are inseparable. Religion and politics are necessarily related. Government

needs the church (*I love that phrase*) because only those humble enough to admit they are sinners can bring to democracy the tolerance it requires.”

To that the Founding Fathers would have said, “Amen.” In looking ahead, we need to go back to the fundamental Christian principles upon which this great nation was founded. Pray that we do. And pray in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.