

Separation of Church and State: An Illusion

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Christian missionaries risked their lives to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people around the world. Typical of what these missionaries found in godless cultures was cannibalism, witchcraft, superstition, demonic activity, ancestral worship, fire walking, and tribal warfare (i.e., segregation). The inevitable fruit of this idolatry was disease, curses, and poverty.

Yes, idolatry has economic consequences. Just consider what happened to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. The Lord told them that if they obeyed Him they would be blessed, but if they did not obey Him, they would be cursed (Deut. 28). And indeed the Israelites failed to obey and were cursed economically by losing their assets—that is the land that God gave them—and were cursed politically by losing their freedom as a people.

It is tempting to dismiss what happened to Israel as a one-time event that doesn't really apply today. But remember the Apostle Paul's reminder to us: the things that happened to Israel were intended to be examples for us (see 1 Cor. 10:6, 11). Shouldn't we expect obedience to God to lead to blessings and disobedience to lead to curses, such as economic calamity?

As an example of this truth, consider a country impacted during the nineteenth century by Christian missionaries. Most of the indigenous people became Christians as a result of this mission work.

Soon after the missionaries arrived, foreigners came and setup businesses. Many of the business owners imported foreign workers, who would work for low wages, to perform menial jobs. These workers were mostly Hindus and Muslims.

Politically, the indigenous people maintained control since the foreigners were in the minority. Slowly over time, however, the foreigners gained increasing political clout. A slow shift toward social instability also came with this slow shift in political power.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, the minority population gained enough political influence to win the election for prime minister. Shock waves riveted through the country. For the first time, the largely Christian nation would be governed by a Hindu prime minister.

This situation was unacceptable to some people. Hence, there was a coup and the legitimately elected government was taken hostage, which meant that the government could not function. The military and police were divided, but largely backed the coup. Anarchy broke out in the streets. Looting, murder, and arson went unchecked. Much of the death and destruction was due to racial differences. Because of the lawlessness and uncertainty, the already struggling economy ceased to function—tourism stopped, food production stopped, and natural resources dried up. There were no jobs.

The government was held hostage for about two months. Finally the coup was suppressed, but the damage remained. A new interim government was formed, but the economy was in shambles.

The new political leaders, many of whom were Christians, sought to understand why the country was suffering. Arguably these were the darkest days in the country's history. As these leaders surveyed the possible explanations for the calamity, they realized that the root of this issue was the lack of favor with God.

For most of us, the idea of blaming God for economic problems is a cop-out. After all, does God care about the economy and business? These are worldly things destined to burn up, right? These leaders were not so persuaded. They believed that economic prosperity was directly correlated to the favor of God. They believed 2 Chronicles 7:14:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (NIV)

To these government leaders, the concept of “heal their land” was an economic concept. This verse clearly implies that the land (in other words, the tool of economic blessing) was impaired by the wickedness of the people, including the Christians. So what wickedness brought the judgment of God on this country?

I am sure that the political leaders considered many possibilities. Could the reason for the economic calamity simply be the political unrest? Or was it bad timing or bad luck? Perhaps it was competition or the weather or some unforeseen and unlikely event that we might label an “act of God.” But in the final analysis, all of these ideas were rejected. The political leaders focused on one issue—disunity in the Christian church.

The Christian community was very independent and fragmented. There was pride, division, jealousy, bickering, and backstabbing among the denominations and independent churches. The political leaders made an extraordinary, even counterintuitive, observation—whatever was going on in the Christian churches was going on in the society. In other words, the health of the society simply mirrored the health of the church. If this was true, then the solution to the economic and political ills of the society was to address the ills of the church.

This connection between the church and the culture is not widely accepted today, so is it valid? Is the level of health of the Christian community in a nation reflected in the culture, economy, and political stability of that nation?

In the United States, 2008 is an election year. Candidates are crisscrossing the country seeking votes. Many of them are seeking votes from the Christian community. At the same, the candidates are making it clear that their faith (i.e., their church) will not shape their policies and decisions. In essence, the candidates are visiting churches to ask for votes while telling the Christians that their worldview has no standing with them.

Furthermore, it is widely known that voters are inclined to vote based on their perceived economic well-being. The candidates understand this, but do not connect economic matters and spiritual matters (matters of the church). American politicians seem to universally assume that economic prosperity has no spiritual underpinnings. This is the same assumption that most scientists make, that is, that the universe is a closed system—everything in the universe can be explained by natural causes and there is never any appeal to divine intervention to explain any phenomenon.

The political leaders in the ravaged country we have been examining were not thinking like American politicians. They unabashedly believed that the principle of 2 Chronicles 7:14 applied to them. They believed that their land (i.e., the engine of economic blessing) needed to be healed. And this healing must start with the church. To these leaders, the root issue of the political and economic upheaval was the result of the country's divided and fragmented Christian church.

So what were these political leaders to do? They called a meeting with the leaders of the various churches in the country. At this meeting the political leaders called for the church leaders to put aside their petty differences and unify. The political leaders explained their belief that the culture and economy were simply reflections of the health of the church.

The pastors and church leaders were convicted and repented. They humbled themselves and put aside their differences. The churches drew together to pray and seek the Lord. Unity came through prayer. The churches formed the Association of Christian Churches (ACCF). Soon the prayer meetings began drawing Christians across the country including those in the business community and politicians. A nationwide revival broke out.

In July 2001, a three-week prayer and Bible study conference was held. Large numbers of people humbled themselves and repented for their sin. Christians all across the country rededicated their lives to Christ. Non-Christians repented and accepted Christ as their savior. The revival moved across socio-economic and racial boundaries touching everyone—including business and political leaders. Even the imprisoned leaders of the coup repented and turned to Christ.

The government leaders declared 2004 to be a year of prayer. There were to be special and specific prayer focuses throughout the year. For example, one week was devoted to prayer for the healing of broken relationships.

Spiritual transformation swept through the nearly one million people in this country. Virtually overnight, lives were changed. God validated His work with miracles. One Hindu girl who had a seemingly untreatable eye disease was healed. A middle-aged man with an alcohol addiction was tormented by a leg problem. He was scheduled for surgery but after he accepted Christ, God intervened and miraculously healed him. A farmer who grew marijuana was healed of chronic disease after he accepted Christ and stopped supporting the drug cartels.

As a further expression of repentance and reconciliation, Christians reached out to burned-out and looted businesses owned by non-Christians and helped them rebuild. Christians also came alongside farmers whose fields had been destroyed and helped them to recultivate their land.

As the revival swept across the country something else miraculous happened. The economy revitalized. Tourism returned. Barren fields and orchards began to produce crops and fruit in abundance. The fruit was larger and more lush than ever. Polluted streams became pure and teemed with fish. Dead reefs came back to life. Fish that had not been seen in years returned to the lagoons. Almost overnight, the economy was booming. Why?

The political leaders had no doubt as to why. They understood that the assertion of separation of church and state was an illusion. The reality is that God is the foundation of every society and God's appointed agent to equip people to do everything in society is the church. This truth is expressed in 1 Timothy 3:15 as follows:

If I [the Apostle Paul] am delayed, you [Timothy] will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is *the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.* (NIV, *italics added*)

Every jurisdiction of life—personal, family, business, and government—needs truth to function the way God designed it to function. God's designated agent to dispense and teach His truth is the church. So if the church is malfunctioning, it is logical that all the other jurisdictions will be malfunctioning as well. Society simply mirrors the church.

Therefore to correct a malfunctioning society, one must correct the church so that truth can be properly disseminated to the other jurisdictions, which will enable them to function according to God's design and intent.

The country that I am talking about is Fiji—the recipient of a modern-day miracle. United church leaders led a spiritual revival that enabled the devastated country to return to economic prosperity and political stability. Surely the psalmist was reflecting on this reality when he wrote Psalm 133:1:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
(KJV)

Advocates of the doctrine of separation of church and state would have a hard time explaining what happened in Fiji. The reality of God's universe is that there is no separation of church and state because the church is God's designated vehicle to disseminate the knowledge and wisdom that humans need to live in God's universe. From a biblical worldview, therefore, the concept of separation of church and state is an illusion.

If you want lasting personal, family, political, and economic prosperity, there is only one way to achieve it—God's way. And God's way is made known to us through His church's faithful and obedient teaching of the Bible under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

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