



How Should Christians Relate to Culture and Society?
Part 2 – Avoiding Civic Religion



LAST WEEK:

Some of the functions of the Church:

- ☐ Proclaiming the gospel
- ☐ Caring for the needs of the community
- ☐ Educating people about God and the Bible
- ☐ Interceding in prayer for others locally and globally
- ☐ Inviting people into worship and communion



LAST WEEK:

Should the Church (and/or Christians individually) be involved in:

- ☐ protests over the building of a mosque?
- ☐ political battles regarding same-sex marriage?

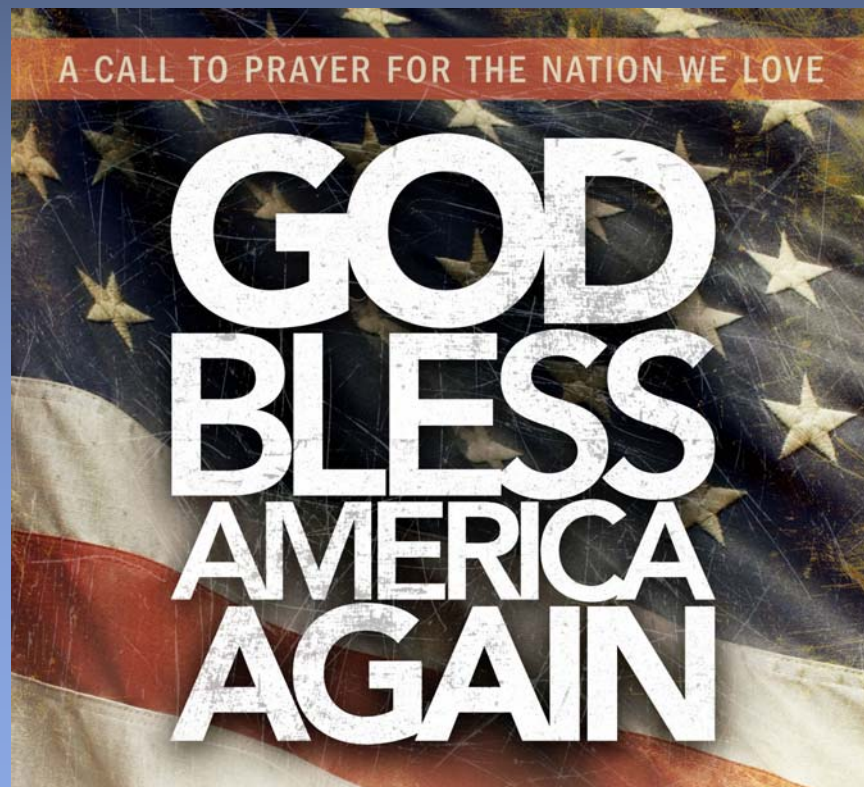
Two issues:

- ☐ whether the Church should be involved; and, if so
- ☐ how the Church should be involved.



What is the Role of Church in Society?

What should the relationship of the church be to our country?





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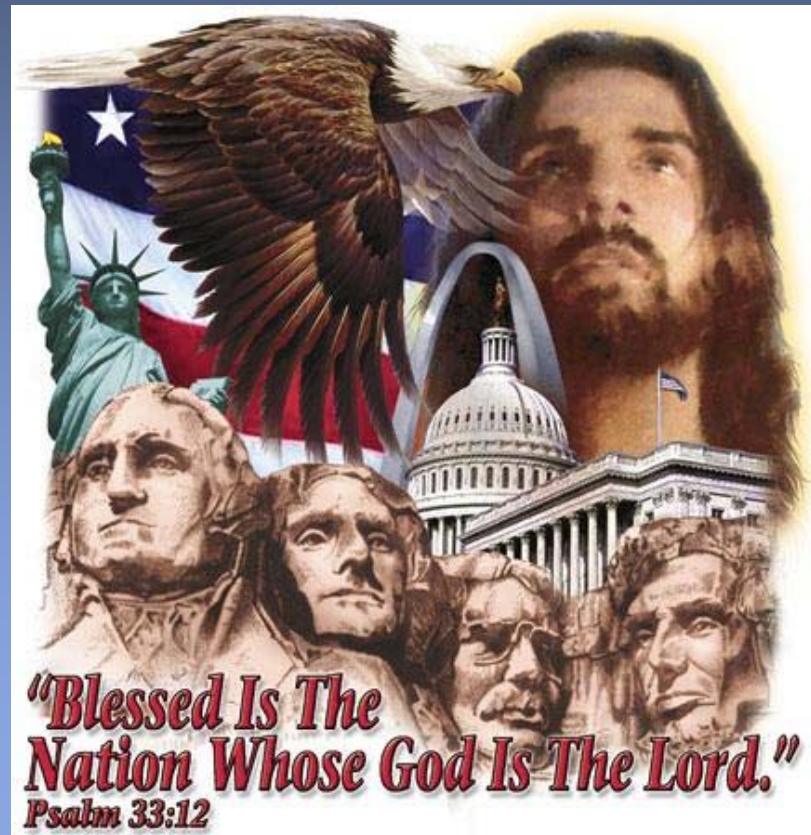
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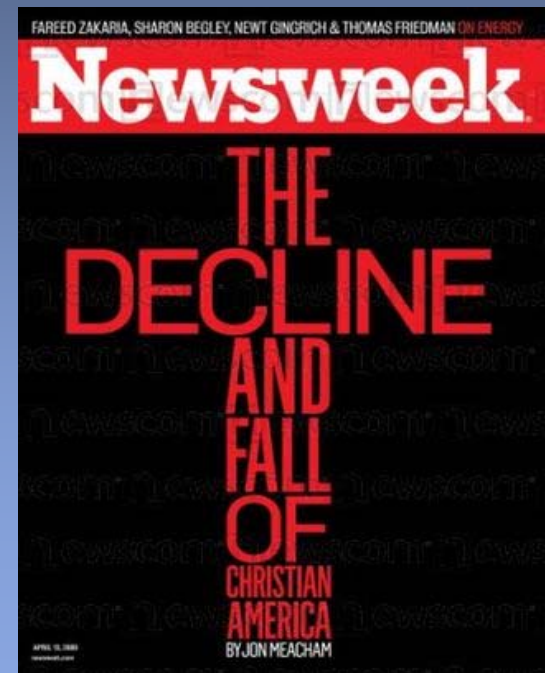
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Does it violate the First Commandment to join in national, patriotic or civic events where prayers are offered to God on behalf of the nation?



What is the Role of Church in Society?

What should the relationship of the church be to our country?

The First Commandment:

"You shall have no other gods before me."

Exodus 20:3



What is the Role of Church in Society?

Civil Religion in America:

Luther: “One should not mix or confuse the two authorities, the spiritual and the secular. For spiritual power has its command to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments. It should not invade an alien office. It should not set up and depose kings. It should not annul or disrupt secular law and obedience to political authority. It should not make or prescribe laws for the secular power concern secular affairs. For Christ himself said, ‘My kingdom is not from this world.’ And St. Paul in Philippians 3: “Our citizenship is in heaven.”

Calvin: “Let no one be surprised that I now attribute the task of constituting religion aright to human polity. . . . [N]o polity can be successfully established unless piety be its first care, and that those laws are absurd which disregard the rights of God, and consult only from men.”



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Civil Religion in America:

1630:

- John Winthrop, Massachusetts Bay Colony
- “City on a Hill”
- The New Jerusalem
- As God guided Israel to the Promised Land, Winthrop guided the Puritans to America.

1600s/1700s

- Colonial societies routinely comingle religious observance and governance.
- Town meetings were both civil and ecclesiastical.
- Civil punishment for blasphemy, heresy and swearing the name of the Lord.



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Civil Religion in America:

Rousseau:

Four requirements (aims) of civil religion:

- The existence of a powerful, wise and benevolent deity, who foresees and provides for the life to come;
- Happiness of the just;
- Punishment of the wicked;
- Sanctity of the social contract and the laws of the land.

Deism:

Belief in a supreme being who created the universe, and can be observed in nature, but who does not intervene in the affairs of men, nor demand faith.



What is the Role of Church in Society?

Civil Religion in America:

Washington: Twenty volumes of letters, one mention of Jesus. All other references were to an anonymous god, or to one heavily influenced by Deism.

Similar views by Adams, Franklin and Jefferson.

Founding Fathers: Heavily influenced by Rousseau, other Enlightenment thinkers, Deism and Freemasonry

Favored religious expression that supported the new republic and its ethics.



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Civil Religion in America:

- Tocqueville:** “In France, I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. But in America, they were intimately united and they reigned in common over the same country.”
- Manifest Destiny:** America had an inherent destiny to expand across the entire North American continent, with a mission that later came to involve promoting and defending democracy throughout the world.
- Mid-1800s:** Immigration from predominantly Catholic countries begins to further expand religious expressions; focus is on “integration,” “assimilation” and a shared view of the God of America.



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Civil Religion in America:

20th Century: The American Century
Emergence of United States after WWII
American Economic Power
The Missionary Movement
The Cold War
Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism
Christians and Conservative Politics

Integration and Assimilation gives way to Diversity

Sept. 23, 2001: “A Prayer for America”
Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu leaders
lead prayer for the victims of 9-11 and the nation.



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"You shall have no other gods before me."

Exodus 20:3



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"You shall have no other gods ~~before me.~~ *in my presence.*"

Exodus 20:3



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The Second Commandment:

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain."

Exodus 20:7a



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"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God ~~in vain.~~ *like the empty thing.*"

Exodus 20:7a



INTERACTIVE



Participate, ask questions, talk back...

What if we listened to what everyone had to say — and discovered that God can speak through us all? After all, we all learn better when we talk things out, hear different points of view, and give room for the Spirit to speak through our deliberation.

[Read more](#)

THOUGHTFUL



Test everything, hold on to what is good...

Many hours of research are dedicated to prepare each one of our series. We explore the scriptures, the breadth of Christian scholarship, contemporary authors, and consider a wide range of sources outside of our faith.

[Read more](#)

FAITHFUL



Set apart Christ as Lord...

We all have questions. But we learn together in a way that tackles the deepest part of our doubts while making sure that our purpose is clear: to always know the reason for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, and to be prepared to share that answer with everyone who asks us about that hope.

[Read more](#)

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