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### **Personal Convictions and Public Responsibility, or Theocracy versus Democracy: Part II**

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“Theocracy” is society under the will and rule of God; “democracy” is society under the will and rule of man. And, true democracy is the rule of man by established law and not by the whims of individuals or a group of individuals. At first glance, theocracy may seem to be preferable who would not want to live under the loving, benevolent, gracious rule of God. But, on careful consideration, there are problems with modern day theocracy. First, is the question, “The rule of who’s God?” and the second is, “Who interprets and applies the rules by which God will rule?” Only the One True God can found a theocracy. And, it is not man’s responsibility to establish God’s rule upon the earth. God’s rule is a function of His role as Creator, and in His Own time and in His Own way, He will exercise that rule without man’s assistance.

Man’s attempts to establish the rule of God upon earth have always resulted in despotism. And, man’s yearning for the rule of God upon earth must be satisfied by God’s rule in each man’s heart. Well-intentioned, but misguided people, may try to force others to obey God and to love Him, but the so-called theocracies produced by them are really the ultimate expression of humanism, where men exalt themselves to the throne of God, determining that any means justifies the end of their concept of the Law of God being imposed upon others. The Crusades and the Inquisitions were not expressions of faith, they were manifestations of the denial of faith. The horror of members of one faith murdering members of another is the result of one man’s misguided attempt to impose a religious belief upon another man. Furthermore, at the crux of the issues is that the leadership of a theocracy is not subject to the checks and balances of accountability as is the leadership of a democratic republic.

Nevertheless, some Christians propose the founding of a Christian theocracy in the USA. One radical expression of this proposal declares: “...we seek to erect a Christian constitutional republic...the state may not rule the Christian churches, though it must prohibit non-Christian public worship, if it is to maintain a just (i.e., Christian) society.” Sadly, every modern experiment with theocracy has been a disaster -- Jim Jones in Guyana, Joseph Smith in Utah, not to mention Constantine and the Byzantine Empire.

Christians have from time to time invested secular leaders with the role of being a defender of the faith, sometimes going so far as to identify a political party with the special interests of a particular expression of religious faith. But, it is dangerous for religious leaders to endorse secular leaders without holding them accountable for their behavior. Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, who is principally associated with ethnic cleansing, was honored by the Greek Orthodox church as a member of the 900-year-old Knights' Order of the First Rank of Saint Dionysius of Xanthe for his "contribution to the peace of the world." With this honor, the church encouraged him to wield the sword in a "holy war." Endorsed by religious convictions, without the controls of democracy, the passions and cruelty of men know no limits.

There is a theology rampant today called "kingdom theology." The proponents of this belief argue that the church is synonymous with the kingdom of God. These "reconstructionists" believe that they are to bring the kingdom of God to earth by political, social and ecclesiastical means. But, Christians who legitimately participate in the political process do so not to bring the kingdom of God to earth, but to hold back the tides of evil. Edmond Burke said, "All that is required for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing." In a secular statement, this is not an inaccurate understanding of the truth of II Thessalonians in the Bible.

And, yet the political activity of Christians is not analogous to the reign of terror of the fundamentalists in Iran and other countries. While every Christian yearns for the theocracy of Christ's coming kingdom, no Christian should believe that that kingdom will come through political activity. Certainly, there should be no idea of a wedding of conservative political parties with conservative Christians. While conservative Christians will participate in the political process, it will be as individuals and not as a monolithic influence, as such monoliths, ruled as they are by men, have always been corrupted into evil actions.

The principle difference between the fanatical agenda of the fundamentalists-terrorists in Iran and the political agenda of the conservative-fundamentalists in America is that the former wish to impose their beliefs on others, and to exclude from participation in the political process those who reject the "true" faith; while the latter desire to see their beliefs influence public affairs, and to include as participants in the political process those who share those beliefs, while not excluding those who reject them. The former is tyranny; the latter is democracy. The former is done in an attempt to gain salvation; the latter is the grateful act of those who have found salvation.

The Kingdom of God will come with or without man's knowledge or participation; it is a product of Christ's inheritance. The reign of terror predicted by II Thessalonians will come; but, men of faith in Christ, and men of good will, can hinder the full appearance of that day until God's sovereign will dictates that it come. But, men of faith must not initiate a "reign of terror" by attempting to impose their beliefs upon others by force, fiat, fear or federal law.

While it may appear that we would like for the law of the land to support, defend and reflect our religious belief, in reality that is not what we really want. The reason is obvious once we think about it. If the law of the land supports one belief or religious conviction, it would by its very nature violate another person's belief and/or religious conviction.

The power of our Constitution is that it gives us all the freedom and liberty to practice our faith without interference by the government. In order to do that effectively, the Constitution must defend and protect the rights of others to practice and preach their beliefs which may contradict our faith and practice. The only way to protect everyone's beliefs and practices is that the law cannot impose anyone's faith upon the whole. That is the origin of our freedoms of speech, press, lawful assembly and it is the origin of the prohibition by the Constitution of the imposing of any faith upon anyone.

The impact of faith upon modern society should promote love between all people. As Christians, we express our faith by religious activity, but we also express our faith by loving those of other faiths. WE express our faith by praise and worship, but we also express our faith by loving those who look and active differently than we do. We must ever forget that that our faith teaches us that "he who says he loves God and hates his brother is a liar and the truth is not in him." And, to the critical question of "who my brother or sister or father or mother is," the answer is that anyone and everyone is my brother and my sister and my father and my mother and my child.

Practicing the Christian faith in modern society and in professional activities can be complicated because very often that practice does not look like or feel like "real religion," while it is "real faith."