

One Nation Under God?

In the early years of the 21st century, *9-11-2001* stands as a chilling, three-digit descriptor of the nightmare of religiously motivated hatred and the outrageous mass murders that continue around the world. The barbaric and cowardly act of terrorism remembered as 9-11 stands as a defining moment—and inspires many interpretations.

Immediately following 9-11, two well-known American religious professionals alleged that God allowed the attacks to happen because, while they presumed God had once protected the United States, now they believed God was so angered by our growing acceptance of abortion and gay rights that he had removed our so-called “hedge of protection.” Their grim pronouncement was that 9-11 stood as a proof that our nation is not “under God” anymore.

They were, of course, brazenly misrepresenting God. In an outrageous, blasphemous and bizarre judgment on their part, they were guilty of idolatry, remaking God into their own religious image. I refer to these preachers as “religious professionals”—but not because I believe they knew what they were talking about. I call them religious professionals because unfortunately, they made a living from religion—and by all accounts, a lucrative one.

Along with millions of others who share their superstitious and off-the-wall ideas of who God is, these so-called “evangelists” seemed to believe that God sits on his heavenly throne, peering down on all our

corruption and evil, getting more and more livid. Then sooner or later, our heavenly mad dad just loses it—he goes ballistic and rains down what many describe as his holy, perfect and entirely justifiable wrath.

A Nationalistic God of Wrath?

I don’t believe in a God of wrath—not as religionists typically understand and define wrath. I don’t believe he goes ballistic. The God I believe in never loses his temper. I don’t worship a God who favors the United States or any other nation with any so-called “hedge of protection” that he does not provide for other nations. ***Why should God respect citizens who hold passports from the United States more than any other nation?***

Even more to the point, do we as Christ-followers worship our nation? Or do we worship Jesus, our supreme and sovereign king, our one Lord and only Savior? Since the time of Christ, this question has been a classic dilemma. And beyond Christianity, it poses a classic problem for religion at large: does the nation in which a person lives—and the culture and religion that pervades that nation—dictate who God is and how he is worshipped?

The real and present danger is that when human beings substitute their faith in God for faith in their religion or their nation, then God, country and religion are co-mingled.

When God, country and religion become one and the same thing, the lesson of history is that horrific

suffering and bloodshed inevitably follow. Violence is directed at the minority who think or believe differently than the majority.

How can Christ-followers think God loves them more than anyone else? How can Christ-followers perceive their nation to be worthy of special blessings from God while citizens of other nations are not?

Our Pledge of Allegiance to the King of the Kingdom of Heaven

The New Testament teaches Christ-followers to be good citizens of the countries in which they live—as long as the

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government doesn't try to force them to do things that violate their conscience.

That said, I absolutely respect and support those who feel their faith in God forbids them to salute the flag or recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Yet some who protest the flag or the Pledge of Allegiance have used a bully platform for their own agendas, acting out in irreverent and scandalous ways.

Again, the New Testament is clear: Christ-followers should seek to be productive and supportive citizens, never as destructive anarchists bent on violent revolution.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America is often interpreted as a religious vow—a sacred ritual—even a sign of righteousness. And some who see it that way believe God is more pleased with those who say the pledge than with those who do not.

Really?

Here's the current version of the Pledge of Allegiance—a

version which has been authorized for use since 1954:

*"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, **one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.**"*

Really?

"One nation under God...?"

Really?

"Liberty and justice for all"?

How can we say that our entire nation is under God? That's an impossible belief. That's absolutely ludicrous. Americans are not one nation under God—nor have we ever been one nation under God.

Is it a fair and true assumption that the more religious, more "Christian" a nation is, the more peace-loving and nonviolent that nation turns out to be?

The most recent data I've seen shows that the Democratic Republic of the Congo boasts one of the highest per capita allegiances to Christianity—95.7% "Christian." However, the

Congo is also near the top of the list of the most dangerous places to live on earth.

Mexico supposedly has a 95% Christian population, but the drug wars and cartels maintain one of the highest murder rates of any country on earth.

Some of the most destructive wars in human history have been waged by "Christian nations"—World War 1, World War 2, the Napoleonic Wars, the American Civil War and the Thirty Years War were all waged by armies in which the majority of combatants on both sides claimed to be Christians.

Back to the Pledge of Allegiance. Can we seriously claim that our nation affords "liberty and justice for all"?

In our freedom-for-me-but-not-for-you society, it seems to be a requirement that everyone tolerates "our side" while refusing to tolerate others.

Thus, our so-called "freedom" becomes entirely self-serving—tolerance becomes one-sided and not extended to those who disagree. The same tolerance one group demands and feels entitled to is often despised and denied to the other.

Is mandated, intimidating conformity really "liberty and justice for all"?

Our pledge as Christ-followers is not to any nation or state. While the Bible calls us to be good citizens of our earthly countries, our true and eternal citizenship is in heaven.

Our primary pledge as Christ-followers is to Jesus Christ. He alone is our Lord and our Savior—the one and only King of the kingdom of heaven.

As Christ-followers, our pledge to Jesus as Lord stands on the

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WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MAN



WILL IT BE
Ana Puncochar
(10 years old)

Shall it always be
in this world
Injust
Ignorance
To woman kind
Overpower
To male kind
Understatement
To child kind

How can our pledge talk of
justice for all
When this may never be a
reality

If no being has will
to step up to this
We will
Underestimated
Child

You may be brave
But only the bravest step up
for what is right
Only the strongest admit that
they too have weaknesses
These bravest
Are small
These strongest
Are short
But
These bravest
Are smart
These strongest
Are brave
Smart enough not to pretend
to be another
Brave enough
To not try to be anything
But themselves

If nobody stands up
We will
And we're not afraid to
So shall it be
That you stand
Or we stand
For liberty and equal rights
for all
Man
woman
child

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When God, country and religion become one and the same thing, the lesson of history is that horrific suffering and bloodshed inevitably follow.

two "great commandments": to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength—and to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we are committed to that pledge, we will be good citizens of virtually every free nation on earth.

If we pledge allegiance to Jesus, we will stand up for the rights, privileges and humanity of others—even those who are not like us at all. And because we are free in Christ, we will not allow others to bully us down the slippery path of political or religious conformity—even under banners of one-sided "freedom" or "tolerance."

Our spiritual pledge of allegiance follows Peter's response to religious authorities, "We must obey God rather than

men!" (Acts 5:29). We obey God rather than nationalism. We obey the God revealed in the person of Jesus, rather than the God that religious professionals fabricate to achieve their own goals. We obey the King of the kingdom of heaven.

In Christ's own words, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things [the true liberty, justice and security you seek] will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

In today's vernacular, the sense Peter conveyed was just this:

"When push comes to shove—if it comes to a conflict between God and country or God and religion—we must obey God." □

Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries.