

From Moses to Martin: Preachers Part Political Waters

From Moses to Martin, preachers have parted political waters and led the oppressed to the Promised Land. Either by summons to a pharaoh to “Let my people go,” parting the Red Sea with an outstretched shepherd’s rod, or accompanied by a soulful protest ballad, “We Shall Overcome” and a federal court order granting rights to march over the Alabama River on the Edmund Pettus Bridge—throughout millennia, preachers have led the advance of liberty and religious freedom through troubled waters, on dry ground or over them on segregated asphalt.

The birth of America’s freedom came no differently, as our forefathers crossed the Atlantic to escape Europe’s political and religious oppression. Has the time come for another Reformation? I believe so—an American Reformation! Where are the American clergy who will stem the tide of religious oppressions rising in our land by taking action against the political forces responsible? Maybe it’s time for a new breed of American clergy or just a restoration of the American preacher.

Sociologically, Europe’s Reformation gave the world two very unique individuals: the American clergy and the American statesman, the preacher and the politician. Their lead on the world stage changed forever history’s dialogue and governance’s role in the human saga.

Europe’s Reformation and America’s Revolution were unveiled by preachers. The politicians, in both instances, followed the preachers’ suit. Whether it was Luther nailing his 95 theses to Rome’s door or the Rev. Jonas Clarke answering King George from Lexington’s green with a “shot heard ’round the world,”

preachers blazed the trail to political change and religious freedom in the new world.

Of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, 29 were preachers or held degrees in theology. The Colonial pulpits were the ramparts of the American Revolution from which preachers of all denominations delivered the fiery barbs of freedom and self-determination.

It was America's clergy who lit the fires of freedom in the minds of the colonists, stirring our Founding Fathers to move against the crown. These were powerful men of God—preachers like George Whitefield—who risked their lives and fortunes for a political ideal. King George called this cadre of collared rebels “the Black Robe Regiment” and ordered they be shot on sight for their treasonous role of disseminating unrest among the colonies.

The American clergy and the American statesman—the preacher and the politician—were the two firm hands that first held Democracy's plow, gripping the reins of this fledgling republic and cutting deep that furrow of freedom in the hearts of men while earnestly sowing the seeds of life and liberty. They understood their role of maintaining the balance *between* church and state, not the separation thereof.

Democracy still needs two firm, callused hands. When either one, the preacher or the politician, takes his hand off that plow, it is no longer balanced—the furrows no longer straight, the seeds of freedom soon scattered on stony ground and thorny places, allowing the fowls of socialism and communism to snatch them from the minds and hearts of America's future generations. Two unbending hands are required to keep the balance between church and state: the preacher's and the politician's.

In his farewell address in 1796, President George Washington, a man of prayer, stressed the foundational roles that the

American preacher and politician played in maintaining good government” “Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.”

Pastors Educating Politicians and Equipping Parishioners

Paul Revere had one destination as he left Boston and pressed his steed toward Lexington, the home of Clarke, the most prominent and influential political leader of the area. Staying in Clarke’s home, as they often did to receive spiritual and political advice, were Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

When informed of the British advancing, both Adams and Hancock said to Clarke, “Reverend, are your people ready?” To which Clarke replied, “For this very hour I have trained them.”

That night, the bell rang in Christ’s Church tower as Clarke’s congregation assembled on the green. With the British advancing, about 165 of Clarke’s congregation met them head-on. When the smoke cleared from the initial British volley, 18 Christians lay on the lawn of Christ’s Church—eight dead, 10 wounded. The first casualties in the War of Independence were American Christians, members of Christ’s Church, led to battle by their pastor.

Where are America’s Jonas Clarkes? Where are the American preachers who will equip today’s parishioners to defend our religious liberties and lead them against the relentless political encroachments threatening our faith, families and churches?

Now is the time for all good pastors to come to the aid of their country. If the American pastor forgets his role in America’s history, he will have lost his purpose for America’s future. America’s current crises are not caused by separation of church and state, but that the church is in a state of separation. America’s preachers have taken their hands off

Democracy's plow.

May the words of Charles Finney, the voice of the Great Awakening, whose preaching epitomized the attitude of America's founding pastors, give us challenge. From his sermon "The Pulpit Is Responsible," given on Dec. 4, 1873, "If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible. If the world loses its interest in religion, the pulpit is responsible. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible."

Without moral influence upon our politics, America has become a nation of preference as opposed to principle. We are driven by the winds of our own carnal appetites upon a sea of moral relativism. Only as men of God arise and once again proclaim the truth by preaching the cross and repentance will our nation be restored, the balance between church and state upheld, preserving our religious freedoms. It's not the politician's fault; *the pulpit is responsible*.

America has a *separation* problem, all right. It is called *sin*. Sin not only separates Americans from God, but it is separating America from the blessings of God. The American economy, politics and culture are dying because of sin—sin that separates.

Fix the sin problem, and the investment banker and the stockbroker are no longer greedy. Fix the sin problem, and the politician can reach across the aisle. Fix the sin problem, and the media will report the truth. Fix the sin problem, and Hollywood will no longer produce the filth that fills the big screen, corrupting the minds of America's youth. Fix the sin problem, and preachers will start preaching from the Bible again.

If Christ is the answer to the economy, if He is the answer to

our political differences, if He is the answer to our culture wars, then Christ must become the catalytic agent in the solution's formula. We need Christ in the economy, Christ in Congress and Christ in the culture. But who is it that brings Christ to these arenas? It is Christ in you. The answer is *organic*, not *structural*. The solution is *spiritual*, not *political*. In order for salt to preserve and heal, it must come in contact with that which is decaying. The church must connect to the culture to change it.

America's present crisis is God's door of opportunity for the American clergy. Will we fail to take advantage by remaining reticent behind the whitewashed lie of separation of church and state? Let us once again take up Democracy's plow, till the fallow ground and lead this country out of crisis into calm. Will you take the challenge?

Where are America's shepherds who, like Moses and Martin, have an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying unto the churches: "He that overcomes, and keeps my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers" (Rev. 2:26, KJV)?

Herein lays the opportunity for separation of church and state: when "we the people" are no longer "if My people," and when "if My people" ever forget they are "we the people."

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