



"I am old-fashioned enough to believe, with George Washington, that religion and morality are indispensable supports to the national welfare."

—John Tracy Ellis

08-Feb-02

A Christian Nation? Reprise

Several weeks ago, this column commented on the state of American "Christianity" ("A Christian Nation?"). More evidence surfaced this week in response to an editorial by Joel Miller on WorldNetDaily.com. A Southern lady evaluates her local church:

Joel Miller is so right about the Church being anemic. My own church, a Southern Baptist church, decided to remove the 10 Commandments from the banners that hung around the church. Reason: Some of the new and wealthier members were offended by them!

This church also asked my son, an Army Reservist, to not wear his uniform to church because it would [offend](#) the same people—some who dodged the draft in Vietnam or who were war protesters. My son cannot wear his uniform to church or anywhere else when he is not on duty because of security concerns. This was long before the attack on [the World](#) Trade Center. This little Baptist church does not support President Bush in this war because it is inconvenient.

The whole of this area's churches are involved in hiding illegal aliens, helping them obtain welfare and, yet, they will not help their [own] people. Two elderly ladies who have cancer, are losing their homes because they cannot afford the taxes. Their church will not help because some of the people are developers and are [waiting](#) to buy their homes and land at the tax auction. Christian? Not hardly.

The Church has become an institution of greed. The minister's daughter who had an abortion was excused because she is an honor-roll student and a child would hinder her future. Another minister's son is a drug addict and dealer—his father's position allows him to get away with it. The police take him home and not to jail.

Scandal is rampant throughout the churches here in the Bible Belt. It is no wonder no one wants to attend church or respect them. How can you listen to people who are only in the ministry for the money? How can anyone attend a church that allows all the laws of the Bible to be broken in the name of money?

This concerned lady's report echoes Amos' indictment of Israel forty years before its fall. At the time, Israel had regained some of its former glory under the able, though idolatrous, leadership of Jeroboam II, who had regained some of its lost territory and reinvigorated its economy. Amos' warning, however, is that material prosperity cloaks the ugly and rotten inner core, which was the true state of Israel's relationship with [God](#). Thus, he concludes that the nation is doomed to fall to its enemies, and its people will die or shuffle off to foreign lands as slaves—and soon.

Notice some of his accusations:

Thus says the LORD: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to

defile My holy name. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god." ([Amos 2:6-8](#))

Amos concentrates on social injustices like exploiting the poor and weak, perverting justice, abusing sexuality, encouraging addictions, and trampling the sacred. This indicates that such societal ills reveal the "heart of darkness" hidden by a façade of religiosity and prosperity, much as exists today in modern America. A society that reaches the point of adorning the façade rather than changing the heart is taking its last gasp.

This is the punishment Amos foresees for the corrupt in Israel:

Your wife shall be a harlot in the city; your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; your land shall be divided by survey line; you shall die in a defiled land; and Israel shall surely be led away captive from his own land ([Amos 7:17](#)).

What a horrible end—but a just one in the eyes of God. It cannot be far off.

For us Christians who are spiritually counter-culture, we need to realize the rapidity of the decline and the probability that persecution will increase. People who know their hypocrisy will strike out at those who expose it by their very presence. To face the bleak future of this nation, we need to remain "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" ([Ephesians 6:10](#)), because our "might" will not suffice. This requires us to renew our relationship with God day by day ([II Corinthians 4:16](#)) and strengthen it by growth ([John 15:8](#); [II Peter 3:18](#)). As Paul says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" ([II Corinthians 4:17](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Forms vs. Spirituality (Part 1)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God esteems certain spiritual qualities above other spiritual qualities. To elevate a minor regulation above a major regulation is to spiritually lose one's sense of proportion. The attribute of love (I Corinthians 13:13) supersedes (but not negates) all other spiritual gifts or qualities. There are degrees of missing the mark (sin) as well as priorities of spiritual importance. Love, justice, mercy, and fidelity (the weightier matters of the law) God desires more than meticulous, mechanical religiosity. The greatest or the first commandments (loving God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves) precedes all the other ordinances in importance (Matthew 22:37-40).

From the Archives: Featured Article

Prepare to Meet Your God! (The Book of Amos) (Part One)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The book of Amos is an astounding prophecy, closely paralleling the conditions in modern Israel today. This first part deals with introductory materials, Israel's covenant responsibilities, God's judgment and how unrighteousness affects society.

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