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## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IN LAST GENERATION THEOLOGY FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper takes a contemporary look at the discussion and analysis of the concept of separation of church and state from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. The separation of church and state means that the government should not enforce any specific religion on the population, and should not prohibit the population to follow any specific religion. The separation of church and state can clearly be seen in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Philosophers like Locke strongly opposed the combination of church and state, and during the Dark Ages, where the church largely controlled the state, we can see how many people were killed by the Roman Catholic Church and its subsidiaries for following their consciences. History has shown us that in countries where religion and state has not been kept separate, there is persecution of the masses. The Bible, and Seventh-day Adventist Christian authors like Alonzo Jones and Ellen White, completely reject the idea of the state wanting to enforce religious rules on their people. These authors believed in the central idea of Last Generation Theology, which is that the last generation of Christians who are alive when Christ returns will live lives completely free from sin. In order to be encouraged

to be completely obedient to God in all areas that He requires, it is crucial to have the freedom to follow your conscience without the interference of the civil authority. The combination of church and state therefore seems to play a major role in the eschatology of Christianity as it relates to Last Generation Theology.

**Keywords:** Separation of Church and State; Last Generation Theology; Seventh Day Adventists

### **Introduction**

Governments are organised in different societies and provide socially beneficial services to those societies, mostly at a secular level. Primarily, if not exclusively, governments should protect the rights of people<sup>1</sup>. James Madison made it clear that a government adopting a Constitution is what makes it a nation<sup>2</sup>. This has to do with social contract theories. The church, on the other hand, was created for mission, for the gathering of God's people to worship freely according to their conscience<sup>3</sup>. From at least 1122, with the Concordat of Worms, there has been recorded legislature to restrict the influence of religion on the civil and legal affairs of a nation's people which was triggered from the debate whether religion and state should be united through giving the Roman Catholic Church legislative authority for civil laws, the enforcement of these laws and for enacting punishments for the disobeying of these laws<sup>4</sup>. Church and state are designed for completely different reasons and therefore many argue that they should not have influence over each other's affairs. For many centuries, and even more so now, this has been an interesting philosophical debating point. It is important to look at what religious texts say about this issue, what some popular philosophers have to say about it, and what some leading theologians can offer to help understand the topic. It is also necessary to understand the important connection between the separation of church and state, and Last Generation Theology.<sup>5</sup>

## **Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give to God what belongs to God**

The Bible as a whole, unlike many other religious guiding documentations, does not support the idea of combining church and state. Jesus himself was the one who said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”<sup>6</sup>. Christ did not teach people to give to Caesar that which is God’s. “Caesar” refers to civil government as Caesar constituted the civil government of that day, and thus Jesus taught that we owe civil duties to the civil government. The duties that we owe to God are moral duties as it deals with religious views. Religious duties pertain to God only, and thus civil government have no businesses with man’s personal faith and religion. The Bible scholar Alonzo Jones thus concluded that civil government can have nothing to do with morality<sup>7</sup>. This might seem a bit extreme, but with careful thought can be seen to be true. If morality also pertains to our thoughts and intentions, as many religions teach, by nature it is out of the reach of civil government. How can mortal man read the hearts and minds of man? No civil government seeks to punish covetousness, hate or even lusting after an underage child, as long as these things stay in the person’s mind. When a person’s hate leads him to kill someone, then the civil government will punish him. The civil government will punish him not for the hate he had in heart, but for the actions of killing someone else. The government is thus not punishing him for immorality, but rather for not being civil. This is the reason why our nations are called civil governments, and not moral governments. The religious government, or government of God, would be the moral government.

Political leaders are civil servants and civil governors, not moral servants or moral governors. The civil government should punish uncivility and the moral government should punish immorality. Unfortunately, many have made morality and civility to be the same thing. A good example of this is popular, conservative, political commentator Michael Knowles from *The Daily Wire*<sup>8</sup>. But it should be clear to all that civil law defines crime and punishes crime, but it doesn’t attempt to define sin and punish

sin. It is thus the government's responsibility to encourage and promote civility, while it is the religious institutions' responsibility to encourage and promote morality. This is why Christ told the church to spread the gospel, and not the government<sup>9</sup>. The government's duty is to preserve order in a nation and guard against uncivility.

During the Inquisition the church and state united to punish immorality<sup>10</sup>. It was thus necessary to discover the thoughts and intentions. The Papacy carried this principle to its logical consequence. Torture was said to bring out confessions of the thoughts and intentions. The idea that civil government should punish morality as it relates to thoughts and intentions will logically lead to the Inquisition.

Some, like Michael Knowles from The Daily Wire, argue that the government is in fact enforcing moral law by punishing those who steal and kill and lie, as these are forbidden by religious law, e.g. Ten Commandments<sup>11</sup>. But the civil government does not enforce them as the law of God. Jesus made it clear that he who hates is guilty of murder and he who lusts is guilty of adultery<sup>12</sup>, and the government does not punish for hate and lust. Regarding moral law, the one who repents can be forgiven and escape the punishment<sup>13 14</sup>, while this cannot be said of civil law. Applying forgiveness in such a sense to civil law would completely destroy the purpose of any civil government. A man who transgressed civil law needs to be punished whether he has been forgiven by God or not since that is a religious matter.

### **Examples from the Bible where church and state are united together**

Peter also said, "We must obey God rather than men"<sup>15</sup>, simply showing that conscience should be followed as it is informed by God. The Levitical priesthood of Judaism were not put into the position of king, nor of that of judge during the judges' period of Judaic history, even though they were always judges concerning spiritual matters and their influence over governance was limited to the declaration of those laws which God had made to form their government as a nation and which became enforceable only by conscience after the death of Jesus; for when Jesus

walked on earth during his, about three and a half years, ministry, his goal of saving people from their sins included not establishing an earthly government that would rule in religious affairs and enforce religious rules. Seventh-day Adventist co-founder, Ellen White, wrote, “The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses-- extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures”<sup>16</sup>. We have three main examples in the Bible that deal directly with the idea of church and state. All three of these stories paint a negative picture of church-state unity.

The first example is that of Elijah<sup>17</sup>. King Ahab, the civil leader of Israel, started a relationship with a prophetess of Baal. This prophetess, Jezebel, did not like Elijah’s religious views and therefore used her husband, as the civil leader, to persecute Elijah. The religious power called to the civil power to murder all the prophets and citizens who would not bend their knee to Baal, and God’s response to such activity was to change the climate and deny the region water, causing severe shortages of food, so severe that the people were eating each other’s children and paying luxury prices for the privilege of eating donkey heads. This was the punishment God enacted for the state-run religious ordinances of false worship which were in direct opposition to His Ten Commandments law.

The second example is that of John the Baptist<sup>18</sup>. Herodias did not like the morality that John was teaching, which was based on his religious views, and therefore she used civil power, through King Herod to murder John the Baptist by beheading, through manipulating her daughter to manipulate her husband, King Herod, via the medium of lewd and provocative entertainment. The Bible even tells us that the king did not really want to kill John but did so anyway because of his declaration to give his step daughter anything she wanted up to fifty percent of his

territory and he didn't want to look like an oath breaker in front of the delegates present with him at the time of this incident.

The third example, we find in Revelation 13. There are two beasts depicted: one representing a civil power and one a religious power. The civil power then makes an image of the religious power and enforces rules to force the conscience of individuals to obey every word that proceeds from the mouth of the beast. Disobedience is then eventually punished with death, just as it was in our previous example of John the Baptist. This exact same scenario is also depicted in Revelation 17 where a woman, often seen as a symbol of spiritual power, is riding a dragon, which can easily be identified as the political powers of the world.

### **Popular philosophers' views on church and state relations**

The Dark Ages are so called because there was a very strong link between church and state, and this unity was perverted to such an extent that experimental science, logic, philosophy, art, and culture were retarded by the murderous actions of the Roman Catholic Church and the monarchs who supported them, which culminated in the atrocities of the French revolution from the atheist response to the tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>19</sup>. The pope was seen as the direct leader of the church, and the indirect leader of the state. During this time the word *caesaropapism* was used to describe the combination of church and state<sup>20</sup>. Because of this combination, freedom of expression and beliefs basically became non-existent. Thousands were killed during this time for voicing ideas different to that of the church, which basically dictated what people had to profess to believe under pain of torture and execution. There are much less prominent philosophers during this time, than during other times when there were more freedoms concerning the expression of ideas. There was also a massive retardation in the growth and development of great technological advances during this time, due to the laws of physics being declared as heresy by the pope of the Roman Catholic Church for multiple successive generations of popery. Creativity was suppressed, except for some areas of art and music to a certain extent.

During the reformation, Martin Luther played a vital role in what is today known as the separation of church and state<sup>21</sup>. His idea on two kingdoms basically laid the foundation for the Anabaptists who became by far the most outspoken against the combination of church and state. They did not even allow their baptised members to vote or hold any public office<sup>22</sup>.

For about 500 years the monarchs of England have held the position as the head of the church of England, after breaking with the Roman Catholic Church through Henry VIII. This led some to flee from Great Britain, and is the primary reason why the United States made a first amendment to their constitution that is supposed to guarantee separation of church and state<sup>23</sup>. Thomas Jefferson is often seen as the one responsible for this.

It is English philosopher, John Locke, during the enlightenment period that is often credited with the concept of the separation between church and state in his writings<sup>24</sup>. His argument was that the government did not have the authority over individual conscience. More and more philosophers after him argued for a separation in faith and reason. There was still no unity amongst all. Voltaire defended some separation, but he also wanted the church to be subordinate to the state<sup>25</sup>, which is still a violation of the right of free-thinking individuals to dictate how they worship God. Denis Diderot said that the distance between the throne (politics) and the pulpit (religion) can never be too great.

In the world as we know it today, many countries with a majority Muslim population do not have separation of church and state, and there is more and more pressure to enforce religious rules as the law of the land and we see the very terrible results of such a system crystal clear when we look at persecution in these countries. There are also some Buddhist countries, like Thailand and Cambodia, where there is also not a separation between state and religion, although more freedoms are allowed than in some other countries where the state and religion are not separated.

The combination of church and state in the dark ages is largely what made it so dark. New and progressive ideas were rejected, and people

could not live according to their conscience.

It is also important to mention that philosophers who supported the idea that people should be allowed to follow their conscience did not mean to say that people have unlimited freedom to do whatever they wanted to do. If everyone believed that their God told them to kill other people, or take other people's possessions, and all were free to follow such ideas, then society would be in great danger and chaos. So where do they place the limit? As soon as the ideas infringe on the life, liberty or possessions of others, then the government has to step in to protect the basic rights of its citizens. Truth be told, there are very few religious ideas that actually ask their followers to infringe on the rights of others. It is a vast minority of the cases, and usually extreme interpretations that are even condemned by the mainstream of such religious bodies.

### **Alonzo Jones' and Ellen White's views on church and state relations**

Alonzo Jones is a well-known American Christian preacher and revivalist. He believed that the American Revolution “was the expression of two distinct ideas: First, that government is of the people; and, second, that government is of right entirely separate from religion”<sup>26</sup>. He argued that the idea of everyone being free to worship according to their conscience was “a natural, constitutional, and divine right”<sup>27</sup>. He argued that worship was a duty that man owed to God, or whoever/whatever that man believes in, and not a duty owed to the government. Even though Jones was a Christian, he opposed a government bill that would force everyone to worship on Sundays in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He also spoke out against teaching any specific religion in government schools, and that teaching religion was the duty of the parents or a private school. Jones especially appealed to the history of what happened when Constantine became a Christian and many Romans were forced into a new belief system. As the Roman Empire moved the capital to Constantinople, and the Roman Bishop took over in Rome, this principle of combining church and state continued in the Roman Catholic Church and eventually led to persecuting those who were declared to be heretics. Jones saw this as a recipe for

disaster and feared that America would become like what happened to Europe under the Papal power<sup>28</sup>. James Madison, the fourth president of the United States, proclaimed the same idea when he said “the purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries”<sup>29</sup>

Ellen White was a female author in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America. She is one of the most widely translated authors in the world. She believed that a union of church and state will lead to “national apostasy, which will end only in national ruin”<sup>30</sup>. She feared that Protestants would follow in the footsteps of the Roman Catholic Church and that “Protestant churches shall unite with the secular power to sustain a false religion”<sup>31</sup>. She even mentions that one of the main reasons for the rise of secularism in France where they rejected the seven-day week was because of the abuse of civil power by the church. She predicted that church-state relations will usher in the final events of this world according to Bible prophecy, “Although church and State will unite their power to compel “all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond,” to receive “the mark of the beast,” [Revelation 13:16.]”<sup>32</sup>. Just like Alonzo, she looked for the day when the same things will happen in America that happened in Europe, “Let the principle once be established in the United States, that the church may employ or control the power of the State; that religious observances may be enforced by secular laws; in short, that the authority of church and State is to dominate the conscience, and the triumph of Rome in this country is assured”<sup>33</sup>. The sour taste of the inquisitions and the depravity of the Roman Catholic Church as the dwelling of every unclean and hateful thing has been overshadowed by a desire for unity, but unity of church and state can only lead to a disaster the likes of which will make the atrocities of, leading up to and including, the French revolution appear to be nothing more than a fun dinner party for children.

### **The separation of church and state, and Last Generation Theology**

Last Generation Theology, a doctrine that is unique amongst some Seventh-day Adventist Christians, believes that the last generation

of believers who will be alive when Christ returns will live lives that are completely free from sin. God will do in the lives of those people what He did in the life of Christ – provide the power for total obedience to His commandments. In order to be obedient to God's commandments, it requires that His followers follow His Word in all aspects. They need to do what He asks them to do, and they need to stay away from what He prohibits them to do. When there is no separation of church and state, then it provides the opportunity to the civil authority to legally require people to do things that God says they should not do, or legally require them to stay away from things that God asks them to do. This can prevent total obedience to God and creates an environment where total obedience to God is not encouraged. For this reason, it is an essential part of Last Generation Theology that there must be a separation of church and state so that believers can give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar while at the same time giving to God what belongs to God.

It is also important to note that because obedience and morality is a matter of the heart, it is not possible for someone to force you to be disobedient in the strictest sense of the word. Civil power can prevent outward obedience, but they cannot change the condition and allegiance of the heart. The civil power enforcing moral rules therefore does not completely prevent Last Generation Theology from becoming a reality, but it strongly discourages it.

## **Conclusion**

History, especially during the Dark Ages, has shown us that combining civil power with religious power is dangerous and leads to persecution, suffering and a regression of society. It destroys freedom and leads to dry ceremonies and form in the place of true worship and a personal and loving relationship with God. The Bible shows us this evil and warns us about it. Even philosophers, like John Locke, who do not accept the Bible as truth, still believe that civil and religious powers should not be united. Active efforts should be made to warn world leaders and civil governments about the dangers of uniting in a global moral

enforcement plan by uniting civil and religious powers. The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches total obedience to all of God's commandments and therefore teaches the separation of church and state so that people have the freedom to follow their conscience in religious matters.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> International Service for Human Rights, "Who protects human rights?"
- <sup>2</sup> Gilpin, Elliott's Debates Volume 2, 526.
- <sup>3</sup> White, Acts of the Apostles, 9.
- <sup>4</sup> White, The Great Controversy, 153.
- <sup>5</sup> This article is based on Armin Kritzinger's 2022 dissertation entitled "The Doctrine of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists: A Defense". This article shows how the separation of church and state is an essential part of Last Generation Theology because those who strive to live lives free from sin must have the freedom to follow their conscience. Without the freedom to live out what they believe, they are not encouraged to experience complete obedience to God as is required by Last Generation Theology.
- <sup>6</sup> Mark 12:17 (ESV).
- <sup>7</sup> Jones, The Rights of the People, 21.
- <sup>8</sup> Newhook, "Free Speech Has Gone Mad".
- <sup>9</sup> Matthew 28 (KJV).
- <sup>10</sup> Hamilton, "Inquisition".
- <sup>11</sup> Newhook, "Free Speech Has Gone Mad".
- <sup>12</sup> Matthew 5 (KJV).
- <sup>13</sup> Proverbs 28:13 (KJV).
- <sup>14</sup> Acts 8:22 (KJV).
- <sup>15</sup> Acts 5:29.
- <sup>16</sup> White, The Desire of Ages, 509.
- <sup>17</sup> 1 King 19 (KJV).
- <sup>18</sup> Matthew 14 (KJV).
- <sup>19</sup> Mark, "The Medieval Church."
- <sup>20</sup> Marek, "Caesaropapism and the Reality of the 4th-5th Century Roman Empire."
- <sup>21</sup> Loconte, "Martin Luther and the Long March to Freedom of Conscience."
- <sup>22</sup> Bender, The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the Sixteenth Century, 83.
- <sup>23</sup> Cornell University Law School, "First Amendment".
- <sup>24</sup> Feldman, Divided by God, 86.
- <sup>25</sup> Masters, Treatise on tolerance, 33.

- <sup>26</sup> Jones, *The Union of Church and State in the United States*, 3.  
<sup>27</sup> Jones, *The Rights of the People*, 5.  
<sup>28</sup> Jones, *The Two Republics, Rome and the United States of America*, 483.  
<sup>29</sup> Cornell University Law School, “First Amendment”.  
<sup>30</sup> White, *Evangelism* , 235.  
<sup>31</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>32</sup> White, *The Great Controversy*, 188.  
<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 580.

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