

God Squad Article for July, 2007
The Rev. Dr. Andrew D. Hagen
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A Far Better Way

Ever since Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to death by a Roman governor there has been an uneasy relationship between Christians and their rulers. For the first three hundred years the early followers of the Christ faced seasons of rampant persecution and indifferent tolerance from the secular authorities. Used as scapegoats by such rulers as Nero, Christians were leery of catching the eyes of authorities. During this time Christians had good reasons to keep the government at an arm's length.

A new dilemma arose when the Roman Empire declared Christianity to be the official religion. United as partners, the church and the state found many mutual benefits. Christians worshipped and proselytized freely and, in exchange, the rulers expected their loyalty and allegiance. But what to do when religious values come into conflict with the actions of the state? Christian leaders flush with the authority and power that was flowing from the royal scepter found it hard to be critical and all too easy to lend their approval. Believers who wanted the "pure faith" found it increasingly sullied by the polluted waters of the government. Christians began to wonder if the altar and the throne were simply too close together.

Fast forward to the "One Nation under God." Contrary to the opinions of some Christians, our founders did not intend to create a Christian nation. They feared the ravages of political wars and pogroms fueled by religion that were rending Europe. They hoped that by separating church and state they would preserve the freedom of faith and the integrity of democracy. They were right. Under our constitution religion and politics have flourished in ways other nations envy. Sure we have had times where Christians have gotten too cozy with the government and times where the government has intruded too much in religious affairs. Among Christians there are "moral majorities" who wrap themselves in the flag and other "left wing radicals" who gleefully burn it. But, praise God, over all this crazy détente has worked. As we celebrate our nation's independence those who believe in God are grateful for the freedom the government of this nation gives us to love it, leave it, challenge it, support it, criticize it and serve it. For that we say, "God bless America!"