

Will Christians Be Persecuted In America¹

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It was March of 1775 when a young attorney rode horseback into the small town of Culpepper, Virginia. He was totally shocked by what he saw!

There, in the middle of the town square, a man was tied to a whipping post, his back laid bare and bloody with the bones of his ribs showing through the flesh. He had just been whipped. He had been, like Jesus, scourged mercilessly with whips having been laced with pieces of metal.

The attorney is quoted as saying, ‘When they stopped beating him, I could see the bones of his rib cage. I turned to someone and asked what the man had done to deserve such a beating as this.’

The reply given was that the man being scourged was *a minister who refused to take a license*. He was one of the twelve men who were locked in jail because they refused to take a license.

This minister said: ‘I will never submit to taking your license. I am controlled by the Holy Spirit and authorized by God Almighty and will not allow you to control me by a license, no matter what you may do to me!’

With that statement, those who were trying to control these ministers and their ministries by requiring them to be ‘licensed,’ took this minister and scourged him to death three days later.²

Shortly afterward, this young attorney arose to address his fellow delegates in the Virginia House of Burgesses. He concluded his famous speech with these words.

Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace! - but there is no peace. The war has actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the North will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”³

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²Donald Sills. “Leaders Should Learn from Heritage,” *Religious Freedom Alert*, Vol. II, No. 1, February, 1986, 2, quoting a tract published by Christian Religious Freedom Council.

³ Same source as above. The complete speech of Patrick Henry may be found in A. Craig Baird, *American Public Addresses*. (NY: McGraw Hill, 1956), 29-36.

You probably recognize the last sentence of that address and therefore know that the young attorney in this story was none other than Patrick Henry. Most of us recall that Patrick Henry made a fiery speech that lent support to, and helped bring about, the American Revolution. What most of us do not recall, or perhaps never knew, is that Patrick Henry's speech was motivated by his experience in seeing men denied their religious freedom by their civil authorities.

Patrick Henry went on to defend preachers who wanted freedom to conduct their ministries free of government interference. And then, with the ratification of the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights in 1791, religious freedom was guaranteed for all American citizens by the First Amendment.

This was not the first time, however, that Christians have faced persecution because they would not take a license from civil authorities. The Apostle John wrote of it in the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation. This chapter discusses two beasts - a beast rising up out of the sea - which probably symbolized the Roman empire, personified by the reigning Caesar, and a beast coming up out of the earth - which probably symbolized the imperial priesthood which promoted Caesar worship.

Caesar worship was an outgrowth of patriotism to the Roman Empire. As Rome conquered the ancient world, she established trade routes, stopped robbers and pirates, set up a common postal system, established law and order, and brought peace, safety, and prosperity to conquered territories. The people were grateful.

Caesar worship developed gradually. As early as 195 BC the city of Smyrna had erected an altar to "the goddess of Rome." In time, something akin to divinity came to be attributed toward the city of Rome. Then in 44 BC, the day after his death, Julius Caesar was deified by the Roman Senate. After that, the people wanted to deify the living Caesars. The Roman Caesars were at first reluctant. Caesar Augustus, however, did permit a temple to be erected jointly in his own name and that of Rome. The cities of Asia Minor had already begun to compete with each other for the favor of erecting a temple to the worship of Caesar.

Rome wanted to unite all its people. It built the Pantheon in the city of Rome. The idea behind that was to make the capitol city the religious capitol of all peoples Rome had conquered. However, this was not as effective as had been hoped. When Caesar worship grew from the populace, Rome saw in it a way to unite all its people. Thereafter, Caesar worship was encouraged. The surest route to political power in the provinces of Rome was through the imperial priesthood.

This is what John referred to in the last part of the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation. Regarding the imperial priesthood - the beast coming up out of the earth - John said that

. . . he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads; and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom, Let

him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred three score and six (Revelation 13:16-18.).

The mark in the right hand or on the forehead constituted a license. If you had it, you could buy or sell. If you did not have it, you could neither buy nor sell. To get that license, you were required to worship Caesar. However, Christians could not do that because to worship Caesar - to say that Caesar is Lord - meant that they had to reject Jesus as Lord. The result was Christian persecution. The beast coming up out of the earth had power to “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (Revelation 13:15). So great and terrible was the persecution that Rome is said to have been “drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:6).

Religious persecution is something we read about. It is a part of church history. Or it happens in other countries. It is not supposed to happen in America! However, for Christians, religious freedom may be quickly vanishing in America! In the last two decades we’ve seen too many denials of religious freedom to assume that in the future we will have religious freedom as we once had.

For those unfamiliar with recent denials of religious freedom in America, it may prove helpful to list some cases where religious freedoms were denied. Religious freedoms may be denied in many ways. Especially significant are those religious freedoms denied in occupational employment, education, and in government regulations of churches and their ministries through bureaucratic licensing and zoning ordinances.

Believers in Christ are beginning to realize that in the workplace their religious freedoms may be denied to them almost anytime. Kathy Pierce, a hospital receptionist at the University of Alabama hospital in Birmingham told supervisors when she started working in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department that she had religious based objections to admitting women for therapeutic abortions. Later, however, when another employee had to be out of the office, she was ordered to process the admission of abortion patients. When she refused, she was suspended without pay for two days and placed on probation for four months – a penalty which later was amended to 90 days.⁴

In Chico, California, Mrs. Evelyn Smith, a widow, had a vacant duplex for rent. An unmarried couple wanted to rent it, but Mrs. Smith refused. Her Biblical convictions that sexual cohabitation is for marriage would not allow her to live with a clean conscience if she rented to unmarried couples. Shortly after her refusal the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing contacted Mrs. Smith. They told her they would file charges against her for “marital status” discrimination. An attorney for the state said Mrs. Smith was trying to force her beliefs on others.⁵

Believers in creation are especially discriminated against in the academic workplaces. Jerry Bergman, himself discriminated against because of his creationists beliefs, wrote a book

⁴Eric Johnston, Chapter Update - Alabama, *The Rutherford Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1. Spring, 1988, 23.

⁵Litigation Status Report, “CWA Defends Widow Who Won’t Rent to Unmarried Couples,” *Concerned Women For America*, February, 1988, p. 6; also June, 1988, 9-10.

entitled, *The Criterion: Religious Discrimination in America* in which he declares that belief in creation will hinder a Ph.D. candidate in biology from obtaining a degree in most public colleges and universities; that if one already has his Ph.D. and is looking for a teaching position – if it is known he’s a creationist – he’ll likely not be hired; that if one is already teaching without tenure – and it is discovered that he is a creationist – he’ll likely not obtain tenure.⁶

In the educational arenas, religious freedoms are frequently denied at all levels. Eleven-year-old Rebecca Higgins gave an oral book report to her sixth grade classmates at Venice Area Middle School in Florida. She gave her book report on the Bible because she believed it was “a very important book which can serve as a guide for daily living.” Afterward, she gave copies to nearly 30 students who wanted copies. During the next class period, however, a teacher barged into the classroom, confiscated all copies of the Bibles, and then escorted the girl to the principal’s office where she was interrogated by school administrators and denied the right to call her mother.⁷

In Anniston, Alabama, first grade students were told to bring their favorite books to school for “Show and Tell.” But when six-year-old Eric Pearson brought in his favorite book, *Jesus Loves Me*, he was told to take it home because it was against the law⁸. In Moss Bluff, Louisiana, Valedictorian Angela Kay Guidry was denied the right to give her graduation address at Sam Houston High School because she refused to remove from her speech some carefully chosen remarks about how meaningful Jesus had been in her life.⁹ In Lakewood, Colorado, Ken Roberts, a public school teacher, was directed to remove from his classroom library two Bible related books, and to not leave his Bible on top of his desk because these might give an appearance of religion.¹⁰

Churches have also had many of their religious freedoms challenged. In Lewisville, Nebraska, the Faith Baptist church preacher defied a ruling by the state Department of Education that required all church school teachers be certified by the state. In response, a Nebraska court ordered the church school closed. When the preacher and his congregation refused, the Sheriff and his deputies carried people bodily from the church building one evening as they were holding a prayer vigil. They then padlocked the doors of the church building. They allowed entrance into the building only for worship assemblies. The fathers of the pupils were jailed, and the preacher was imprisoned for criminal contempt.¹¹

⁶Jerry Bergman. *The Criterion: Religious Discrimination in America*, (Richfield, MN: Onesimus Publishing, 1984), xi-xv.

⁷“School Board Erred In Seeking Bibles,” *The Rutherford Institute Newsletter*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September/October, 1986, 17; also Vol. 4, No. 2, March-June, 1987.

⁸Linda McMillan, “Alabama School Discovers First Amendment,” *Religious Freedom Alert*, Vol. III, No. 4, July, 1987, 11.

⁹Mike Yorkey, “Angie’s Graduation Speech Censored,” *Focus On The Family*, June, 1988, 2-4.

¹⁰Beverly LaHaye letter to Concerned Women of America (September, 1988), with copy of memo from Ken Roberts to Kathy Madigan, dated 9/18/87.

¹¹George Hansen, *To Harass Our People: The IRS and Government Abuse of Power*. (Washington, DC: Positive Publications, 1984) special section, “Assault on Religion,” SS12-SS20.

In Painesville, Ohio, a Nazarene church faced the possible loss of property tax exemption when it used its facilities for five days a week as a day care for children.¹² A U.S. District judge in Virginia declared that church day care centers are *not* ministries of the church and are therefore subject to state regulations.¹³ A federal district judge in Virginia said in 1976 that it was unlawful for a man to conduct a Bible study in his own home, even if the only participants were members of his own family!¹⁴

These are but a few of the many denials of religious freedoms faced by all who profess Christianity in America. Moreover, the number of cases appears to be accelerating. It has been reported that in 1976 there were no more than 45 cases of litigation in the courts involving conflicts between church and state. A decade later, the estimate was up to eight thousand.¹⁵ The Freedom Council of Virginia Beach, Virginia indicated that in the first six months of 1984 over 200 cases of religious discrimination were reported to them.¹⁶

The question that naturally comes to mind is “why?” Why are Christians today being denied their religious freedoms? Why must Christians face discrimination in the workplace? Why are Bible reading and prayers now prohibited in public schools? Why has there been a general change in cultural attitudes toward God, Christ, the Bible, the church, and Christians generally? Why do public policies of government agencies now frequently discriminate against Christians?

The answer is that a new religion – a religion totally opposed to Christians – has arisen, quietly and almost unnoticeably, to positions of great influence and power. It began to rear its ugly head during the Renaissance. For a while it was suppressed by the Reformation movement. However, it reasserted itself and produced the so-called period of the Enlightenment. Slowly, but with increasing rapidity, it grew. It is now the primary religious threat to Christians in America. This religion is “secular” humanism.

We will not understand why religious freedoms are denied to Christians until we realize that we’re in the middle of a religious war. Humanists also want religious freedoms. Humanists want freedom to peddle hard core pornography without opposition from Christians. Humanists want freedom to abort their unwanted, unborn babies. Humanists want freedom from public recognition of God. Humanists want freedom from Christian morality and ethics. Because humanists want freedom from lifetime marriage commitments, they have fought for and obtained no-fault divorce laws in many states and obtained very lax divorce laws in most other states. Because humanists want acceptance of homosexuality, they now fight for legislative enactments against all sexual discriminations. They want to legalize homosexual marriages. Then

¹²Robert Melnick. Chapter Update - Ohio. *The Rutherford Institute Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 3, July-September, 1987, 21.

¹³Steven Graber. Chapter Update - Virginia. *The Rutherford Institute Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October-December, 1987, 21.

¹⁴John W. Whitehead, *The Separation Illusion*. (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1977), pp. 150-151, citing *Independent Record*, Thermopolis, WY, January 22, 1976.

¹⁵Donald Sills, “Understanding Freedom Threats Vital Key,” *Religious Freedom Alert*, Vol. 1, No. 4, February, 1985, 15.

¹⁶*War on Religious Freedom: The Mask of Neutrality*, Virginia Beech, VA: The Freedom Council, 5.

homosexual and lesbian poor families can receive government welfare from taxes paid by Christians.

The religious freedoms desired by humanists are obviously not compatible with religious freedoms desired by Christians. Freedom of religion for one group means denials of religious freedoms for the other. Either Christian values dominate our society and give freedom of religion to Christians but deny it to humanists, or humanistic values dominate our society and give freedom of religion to humanists but deny it to Christians. Either one or the other will prevail and thereby suppress the other. Religious freedoms for both groups cannot co-exist.

The humanistic worldview is the basis for many current public policies that produce religious discrimination against Christians. As Christians begin to perceive what is happening, Christians are usually startled to observe that humanists now occupy the high ground. They are firmly entrenched and well fortified in the principalities and powers of this world.

Christians can understand better why their religious freedoms are often denied to them when Christians learn how basic concepts within humanism are transformed into public policies. A brief look at two of these concepts should be sufficient. The first concept is that of the theory of evolution.¹⁷ The second is rejection of the supernatural.¹⁸ These two may be considered together inasmuch as one is but the flip side of the other.

The theory of evolution has to do with much more than biology. Those who accept the theory as fact generally reject the existence of God, creation, the spiritual nature of man, the deity of Christ, salvation from sin, and life after death. The theory is presumed to be the key of all knowledge. Humanists contend that the universe is self-existing, that all things evolve by chance, that humanity is but part of nature, and that only through nature can man know anything. Notice what all this implies regarding the formation of public policies.

¹⁷“Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process” (*Humanist Manifesto I*, Second). “Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method” (*Humanist Manifesto I*, Fifth). “Science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, Second). “Although the theory of evolution cannot be said to have reached its final formulation, or to be an infallible principle of science, it is nonetheless supported impressively by the findings of science” (*A Secular Humanist Declaration*, 9).

¹⁸“It is only by assuming responsibility for the human condition and in marshaling the arts of intelligence that humankind can hope to deal with the emerging problems of the twenty-first century and beyond. If we are to succeed in this venture, must we not abandon the archaic dogmas and ideologies that inhibit creative explorations and solutions?” (Paul Kurtz, Preface to *Humanist Manifestos I and II*, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1973, 4) “We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. . . . Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, First). “But we reject those features of traditional religious morality that deny humans a full appreciation of their own potentialities and responsibilities. Traditional religions...inhibit humans from helping themselves or experiencing their full potentialities” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, First). “Secular humanism...is opposed to all varieties of belief that seek supernatural sanction for their values or espouse rule by dictatorship” (*A Secular Humanist Declaration*, 1st paragraph). “We are doubtful of traditional views of God and divinity” (*A Secular Humanist Declaration*, 6).

First, if it is true that all things evolve, as declared by the theory of evolution, *the Bible must also have evolved*. Within thirty years after Charles Darwin set forth his theory of evolution in *Origin of Species* in 1859, the evolution of the Bible was popularized in colleges and universities. Although it had been universally believed for over 3000 years that by the inspiration of God, Moses had penned, 1400 years before Christ, the first five books of the Old Testament, it now became fashionable to believe that the Pentateuch had evolved from sources referred to as J, E, P, and D (and by combinations of those letters) and that the Pentateuch came to be in its present form only a hundred years or so before the Jews were taken into Babylonian captivity. In like manner, other Old and New Testament documents were also said to result from evolutionary developments. These notions deny the inspiration of the Bible. They reject divine authority. They make biblical messages no more significant than any other great piece of human literature.

Second, if it is true that all things evolve, as declared by the theory of evolution, then *there are no fixed legal standards*. All things, including law, must be relative. Slightly more than a decade after Darwin wrote *Origin of Species*, the evolution of law began to be taught by Christopher Langdell, Dean of Harvard Law School. This revolutionized the study of law in the United States.¹⁹ By applying the theory of evolution to law, legal statutes need no longer be absolute. Legal statutes no longer mean necessarily what they say. They can only mean what the courts say they mean. When the humanistic theory of evolution is applied to law, it is then impossible to have rule by law. It is only possible to have rule by men.

Third, if it is true that all things evolve, as declared by the theory of evolution, then, since mankind is the highest form of known natural intelligence, people assume they must decide what is best for themselves and other natural creatures in their changing natural circumstances. In essence, *man becomes his own god!* Moreover, since some people are considered more intelligent than others, then it is assumed that the more knowledgeable must decide what is best for everyone. This elite group of knowledgeable people, dominated by the legal profession, must govern everyone. This they try to do through civil governments, directing all economic and other human and natural resources according to their own wills.

Now it must be admitted that a majority of Americans today do not believe in the theory of evolution. However, a very large number of the designers and makers of public policies in government bureaucracies today do believe the theory is true and therefore act accordingly. Moreover, many theists who work in government bureaucracies fail to translate their Christian beliefs into public policy declarations. By that failure, many theists may act like they believe the theory of evolution. Public policy is often made, therefore, without the fear of God, with little appreciation of biblical truths, with no understanding of man's spiritual nature and needs, with no consideration of judgment to come, and with little thought for life after death. It is believed that man is basically good, and therefore, according to humanistic theory, human authority is valid and sufficient.

Public policies would be vastly different, however, if theist made policies based on their beliefs. Imagine what public policy would be if made in accordance with concepts of the existence, relevancy, and providence of God; the authority of scripture; the doctrine of creation;

¹⁹John W. Whitehead, *The Second American Revolution*. Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1982), 46-47.

the spiritual nature of man; the reality of sin in all accountable humans; redemption through Christ; judgment to come; and the eternal destiny of the soul. Under these conditions, public policy should be based upon absolute standards, recognize a rule of law rather than a rule of men, and seek consistency with the word of God.

While humanists may momentarily be passively tolerant of politicians who publicly invoke the name of God, they are highly displeased if public policies are made in keeping with Divine principles. Humanists insist on rejection of traditional religious beliefs as unscientific and inappropriate for human guidance.²⁰ They want government policies to be altogether “secular.” They imply that the First Amendment requires the total separation of religion from all civil government. However, the First Amendment was originally intended to restrict only the federal Congress, not congressional bodies of the various states, nor religious practices of the people.

Moreover, the founding fathers of this nation realized the necessity of religion for good government. George Washington said, “[o]f all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. . . . Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles.”²¹

The U. S. Congress, in 1787, declared with the passage of the Northwest Ordinance that “religion, morality, and knowledge” are “necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind.”²² John Adams observed that “[o]ur Constitution was made for a religious and a moral people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”²³ Moreover, Thomas Jefferson was president of the school board in the District of Columbia when the books used to teach reading in the schools were the Bible and Isaac Watts’ hymnal.

Notwithstanding this intent of our founding fathers, humanists want to neutralize the influence of Christianity in civil governments. *Humanist Manifesto II* declares that “[t]he separation of church and state and the separation of ideology and state are imperative.”²⁴ However, all governments must operate by religious or ideological principles. If governments do not operate by principles of the Christian religion, then they will operate by principles of some other religion. Some humanists think humanism is a religion. Others say it is not. But no one can deny that humanism is an ideology. What humanists really want is to substitute humanism in place of Christian influence upon civil governments. To do this they must neutralize Christianity.

²⁰ “Traditional moral codes and newer irrational cults both fail to meet the pressing needs of today and tomorrow. False ‘theologies of hope’ and messianic ideologies, substituting new dogmas for old, cannot cope with existing world realities. They separate rather than unite peoples” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, Preface). “Secular humanism places trust in human intelligence rather than in divine guidance” (*A Secular Humanist Declaration*, Conclusion).

²¹ Farewell Address (19 Sept., 1796), in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. *The Writings of George Washington*. 39 vols. (Washington, DC: The United States Government Printing Office, 1931-44) 35:229.

²² Article III of Northwest Ordinance of 1787, in Mortimer J. Adler *et. al.*, eds. *The Annals of America*, 20 vols., by 1977 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968-), 3:194-195.

²³ Address to the Militia of Massachusetts, 1798, via “Some People Think God Has No Place In Our Government,” Virginia Beach, VA: The Freedom Council.

²⁴ *Humanist Manifesto II*, Ninth.

Although the process of secularization was already neutralizing Christian influence in America, the neutralization process has quickened since 1947 by a series of legal decisions by the Supreme Court. Some statements by the Court will demonstrate that the Court now differs from our founding fathers regarding the role of religion in government and in society.

In the 1947 case of *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*,²⁵ the Supreme Court said that “[t]he ‘establishment of religion’ clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the federal government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another.”²⁶] However, our founding fathers would have disagreed because when the First Amendment was ratified, nine of the thirteen original states had their own established churches.

Regarding a specific school prayer, the Court declared in 1962 in the case of *Engel v. Vitale*²⁷ that it was improper to place the “power, prestige, and financial support of government...behind a particular religious belief.”²⁸ Since the prayer was of no specific denomination but reflective of Christianity generally, what the court did was to establish disbelief in God as the national religion in America. An even stronger statement was made by the Court in 1968 in the case of *Board of Education v. Allen*.²⁹ The Court said that “to withstand the strictures of the Establishment Clause there must be a secular legislative purpose and primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion.”³⁰ In 1985 the Court was even more explicit. It declared in *Thorton v. Caldor, Inc.*³¹ that “to pass constitutional muster...a statute must not only have a secular purpose and not foster excessive entanglement of government with religion, its primary effect must not advance or inhibit religion.”³²

These Court declarations regarding the First Amendment have had the effect of exchanging a citizen’s right to freedom of religion for society’s freedom *from* religion. Moreover, because of these Court declarations, every agency of civil government considers it now proper to remove the Christian religion from all public practices. In essence, the theory of evolution is now replacing the Bible as the foundation of civil governments in America. That’s the major reason Christians now face religious discrimination in America.

What about the future? Will current trends in religions discrimination lead ultimately to Christians being physically and violently persecuted in America? Perhaps! Historically, there have been two stages in the attack on the church. First, the state and its agencies are secularized. Second, the state attacks every prerogative or privilege of the church in an indirect manner so that, in disguised fashion, its right to exist is denied.³³ For the most part, the Supreme Court has already secularized the state. Various prerogatives of the church are now being attacked. Religion is being removed from the schools and other public domains.

²⁵330 U.S. 1 (1947)

²⁶330 U.S. at 15

²⁷370 U.S. 421 (1962)

²⁸370 U.S. at 431

²⁹392 U.S. 236 (1968)

³⁰392 U.S. 243

³¹53 Law Week 4853 (1985)

³²53 Law Week at 4853

³³John W. Whitehead. *The Stealing of America*. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1983), 100.

It is possible that churches in America may someday face restrictions that have been imposed in communistic countries – since communism is but a political form of humanism. These restrictions are: first, churches and their members must be registered; second, only in registered church buildings are Christians permitted to worship collectively and to talk about the Lord; third, Christians are forbidden to teach religion to their children; and fourth, Christians are given the least desirable menial jobs.³⁴

To some degree, these restrictions are already being imposed in America. For example, churches have to be registered with the IRS regarding tax laws. Sometimes the federal government seeks to bring a church under control through IRS audits. Zoning ordinances also restrict Christians from gathering within certain designated areas for worship. The state, through its various bureaucratic agencies, is asserting itself and making demands that Christians often seem too willing to concede to the state.

Civil legislation leading toward the persecution of Christians, if it comes, will likely be in the form of restricting freedoms of religion to whatever the state perceives as necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morality. On the surface, this sounds good, but such laws would give the state authority to determine the nature of morality. It would probably contain wording which would prohibit intolerance or discrimination based upon religious belief. It would probably not allow for any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on religious belief.

Such a law would prohibit a Christian employer from preferring a Christian job applicant. It would prohibit a job applicant from preferring a Christian employer. It would make parents subservient to civil authorities in teaching religion to their own children. Many other implications might also be derived from such a law. Do not think that such a law might not be passed. Such a law has already been passed in the Australian Commonwealth.³⁵

Unhappily, some Christians have little recognition of the issues at stake. Their attitude seems to be that Christians should not seek to influence laws and regulations passed by civil governments, saying that we cannot advance the Christian religion in government and politics because these must be religiously neutral! Don't you believe it. Our religion must direct us in everything we do. Paul said, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord" (Colossians 3:17). Neutrality in politics, or in any other area of life, is rebellion against God!

Christians today are finding themselves often in situations like that faced by Peter and the apostles. The Sanhedrin council had called them to task, asking, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?" The council had presumed, like many civil governments now presume, that they could license the preaching of the apostles. But Peter and the other apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:28-29). That should be our resolution also.

³⁴Jan Pit, *Persecution: It Will Never Happen Here?* (Orange, CA: Open Doors, 1981), 42-43, cited by John W. Whitehouse, above.

³⁵Ian Hodge, "The End of Religious Liberty 'Down Under'," *Chalcedon Report*, No. 342, January, 1994, 31-36.

However, just as the apostles were persecuted for their refusal to obey those Jewish authorities, so also Christians today must expect to be persecuted. When persecutions come - and they will - then may our attitudes be as was theirs. May we rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name (Acts 5:41).

To what extent will persecution come? Will we be beaten, as were the apostles? Will some of us be killed, as was Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and James (Acts 12:2)? Already some, like the Baptist preacher in Lewisville, Nebraska, have gone to prison because they refused to yield their Christian convictions.

Christians should keep two things in mind. First, persecution seldom occurs everywhere at the same time. Second, the enemy attacks weak places first – where he can expect to achieve an easy victory. That victory, however, may establish a legal precedent by which the enemy is enabled to attack and win stronger positions.

Because you may not be persecuted when others are, and because you may think yourself strongly fortified, you may think you need not fight alongside other Christians in the battle for religious freedoms. That's what the enemy wants you to think. That kind of thinking leads to defeat for Christians. Martin Niemoeller well describes that kind of thinking – and its futility. He said,

In Germany they came first for the communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.
Then they came for me,
and by that time no one was left to speak up.³⁶

When Patrick Henry saw religious persecution, he spoke up. What will we do?

³⁶William J. Federer, *America's God and Country: Encyclopedia of Quotations*. Coppell, TX: FAME Publishing Inc., 1994, 480, cited from John Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980. 824.